

The Alevi Identity and Alevis' Human Rights Conditions in the Republic of Turkey

De Alevitische identiteit en de mensenrechtensituatie van de Alevieten in de
Republiek Turkije

Thesis

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In memory of my father Prof. Cengiz Erol...

Babam Prof. Cengiz Erol'un anısına...

Acknowledgments

The Republic of Turkey is founded on several principles. The second article of the Turkish Constitution declares the foundations of the Republic to be democracy, secularism, the social state, the rule of law, loyalty to the nationalism of Atatürk, and respect for human rights. Observance of human rights is thus one of the most important issues for Turkey. Controversies over Turkey's human rights and freedoms and its relations with the European Union (EU) increased after 2000, especially after 2004, when Turkey became a candidate EU nation. The EU requires Turkey to have a functioning democracy, ensuring the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities. However, the statistics of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) show that Turkey has an unimpressive human rights record. In 2021, at least one violation was found in 76 of the 78 judgments brought before the ECtHR (see ECtHR, n.d.).

Turkey and the EU made some progress on their relations while I was in Sweden learning about international human rights law. With this education, I was able to look more closely at human rights issues in Turkey. In the civil and political rights lectures, the principle of non-discrimination and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion raised many questions. In my following studies, the right to education deepened my concerns about human rights and Turkey. My education in the human rights law field and, in the following years, in EU law, further expanded my interest in this area. Human rights law and the EU have been areas of interest throughout my career, and my interest has never ceased.

In Turkey, several religious groups are claiming to be victims of human rights violations. Alevi and some other religious groups, such as Assyrians and Protestants, claim that they face human rights violations. When I examined Alevism, I found that the Alevi have a unique belief system, and were claiming to face human rights violations due to their beliefs. For decades, Alevi families avoided revealing their identities. This secrecy made me ask the question, was it a threatening or egregious situation to be an Alevi? This question brought back memories of my childhood and the elders in our village, where Alevi and Sunni lived side by side. Some people held ceremonies during the feast of the sacrifice, congregating at the house of the eldest villager. We, the children, were not allowed to attend, but I now understand what I saw from the doorway. Behind closed doors, they were performing rituals of the *cem* ceremony, the name given to Alevi worship, which the forthcoming chapters detail. After the rituals of the *cem* ceremony ended, everyone had dinner in the garden of the house. The Alevi in the village did not hold Sunni rituals. Later, when I started my secondary education in Ankara, the first thing I was confronted with was the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. Some friends were demonstrating how to perform namaz, the method of praying in Sunni Islam. We were asked to remember Arabic verses from the Qur'an and given oral examinations on these, which most of us could barely understand or remember. On July 2, 1993, the Sivas massacre occurred, in which 33 Alevi intellectuals attending the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Festival and two hotel employees were killed after a mob of extremist Islamists set fire to the Madımak Hotel¹. I remember my family being horrified while watching the story unfold. The Sivas massacre was a disastrous turning point for Alevi. The word Alevi was to be heard more than ever. After the Sivas massacre, Alevi abandoned their passive resistance and began to make demands for their rights and freedoms. It was now easier to organize the community. The Sivas massacre was an event that will always be remembered with horror.

The aftereffects of the Sivas massacre had by now made me think more about the Alevi and wonder about their identity. When I linked my childhood memories to current events, I started

¹ The building that was set on fire during the Sivas massacre.

to become aware of the nature of Alevism and Alevis, and that these people had demands. Several years after my university education, I was reflecting on what happened in Sivas, why compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons were an issue, and on the meaning of the *cem* ceremony that the villagers were holding. With many questions racing through my mind, I began to plan my research and investigations into Alevism and the Alevi identity. Knowing that some Alevi families and intellectuals were condemning state interventions raised some questions in my mind. It seemed that the Sunni Islamic religious rituals presented challenges for Alevis. Sunni Islamic religious rituals and traditions were unfamiliar to the Alevi community. Their distinctiveness from the majority made me notice their human rights, specifically concerning the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right not to be discriminated against, and the right to education. Some groups claimed that the state did not respect or recognize the Alevis as a religious community, alleging discrimination and assimilation. I saw the connection between my human rights law and EU studies and the claims of the Alevis. The Alevis were allegedly facing human rights violations, and I felt the desire to understand how exactly human rights matters in Turkey affected the Alevis.

As my awareness of human rights law and Alevis grew, I saw that Alevis were using democratic processes for seeking legal remedies in courts, organizing demonstrations, and establishing associations. Alevis' increasing protests and their human rights violation allegations in Turkey attracted my attention more than ever. This research was inspired by the questions in my head, the problems I observed, and my education in human rights law and the EU. The motivation for this research can be found in Alevis' allegations of being victims of human rights law violations and the distinct and unique identity of Alevis. Reading about Alevis from the books on their cultures and beliefs was not sufficient to frame these people's human rights situation. My interest in clarifying Alevis' human rights conditions in Turkey, enlightening their problems, understanding how Alevis feel about human rights violations, and being a member of this community became the motivations for this thesis, through a legal and ethnographic approach to research and drawing on other multidisciplinary areas and subjects.

My aim in this research is not to criticise or explore if there are any human rights violations toward Alevis in Turkey, as a judge would. The question that I am trying to answer is not, "Are Alevis facing human rights violations?" Certainly, the ECtHR decided in certain cases that Alevis experienced human rights violations, and the EU, through its progress reports, emphasised concerns about Alevis' human rights conditions in Turkey. Human rights law is the main issue that guided this research. Therefore, a doctrinal-legal chapter is included; however, the emphasis of this thesis is not only on positive law but on different perspectives. After I conducted the field studies, I encountered situations and processes that could be better understood within disciplines and with concepts other than the legal ones. One of these issues is the Alevi community and the Alevi identity. First, I explore how we can define Alevis as a community, even though millions of Alevis are distributed all around the world and do not know each other. Therefore, how the concept of community may be used for Alevis was the first issue I addressed. This research also examines the ambiguous character of the Alevi identity. Understanding the Alevi identity and Alevism is one of the main issues that I face in this research. In this direction, trying to understand the changing and dynamic Alevi identity together with the literature study is the other subject of this research. Moreover, this research shows that the majority of the Alevis in this research see themselves as being discriminated against, neglected, and treated as second-class citizens and use the language of international human rights law in their civil movements as well as in explaining their local conditions. I explore how Alevis evaluate their circumstances in terms of discrimination and citizenship. I also explore how Alevis use human rights language in their local situations. Beside all these findings, this research addresses the issue of Alevis' loyalty to the Republic of Turkey with constitutional patriotism, despite human rights violations and second-class citizenship claims.

So, Alevis' experiences and reactions to international human rights and freedoms, understanding Alevis as a community, and the Alevi identity are the focuses of this thesis.

On this long journey, I must thank some people. First, this study could not have been written without the thorough work of associate professor Wibo van Rossum, who sadly passed away while my research. I want to thank my other advisors, professor Wibren van der Burg and professor Richard Staring, for making this research possible. I must thank my family, especially my father, professor Cengiz Erol, who sadly passed away during the course of my research, the interviewees, those who cooperated with the field studies, and everyone else who never ceased in providing me with their support.

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List of Used Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Turkey)
ANAP	Anavatan Partisi (Turkey)
AP	Adalet Partisi (Turkey)
BP	Birlik Partisi (Turkey)
CRC	Convention on Rights of Child
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Turkey)
DP	Demokrat Parti (Turkey)
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Convention on Human Right
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EU	European Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Turkey)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
TGNA	Turkish Grand National Assembly
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1. Introduction

On September 8, 2013, people witnessed an event in Tuzluçayır district, Mamak province of the capital Ankara, Turkey (see Onuş, 2013). The Minister of Environment and Social Security of Turkey, and the Cem Foundation, [*Cem Vakfı*], President Prof. İzzettin Doğan, attended the ground-breaking ceremony for constructing a mosque, a *cemevi*², and a culture centre on a single plot (see Bayram & Tercanlı, 2013). This project was planned to include a mosque, a *cemevi*, a conference room, a cookhouse, a room for funeral services, a morgue, an area to sacrifice animals, and additional rooms. All facilities were to be constructed on a single 3,264-square-metre site. The project was to be carried out by the Cem Foundation and the Hac Bektaş-ı Veli Culture Education, Health, and Research Foundation, [*Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür, Eğitim, Sağlık ve Araştırma Vakfı*]. However, just before the ceremony, Alevi protesters, rejecting the idea of a mosque and a *cemevi* on the same site, clashed with the police forces (see Bayram & Tercanlı, 2013). They dismissed the project as an attempt to increase tension between Alevis and Sunnis and to further assimilate Alevis. The clashes continued into the night, until most protesters had been arrested and detained. While these events were happening in Tuzluçayır, new protests emerged in other districts of the capital (see Kızılkoyun & Baykuş, 2013).

Some of the proponents, such as the Cem Federation and the Alevi Foundations Federation [*Alevi Dernekleri Federasyonu*], argued that the side-by-side construction of a mosque and *cemevi* was legitimate, and that this project should be understood as creating harmony. Moreover, the Cem Foundation declared that this project should be considered as promoting peace (“İzzettin Doğan: Cami-Cemevi Projesini Protesto Edenlerin Alevi Olması Mümkün Değil”, 2013). In the process, the president of Hubyar Sultan of the Alevi Culture Association [*Hubyar Sultan Alevi Kültür Derneği*], presented contrary views. He declared that the protests were not directed at the project itself, but at showing a *cemevi* as a minor part of a larger mosque (“Cami- Cemevi Tartışması, Aleviler Ne Düşünüyor”, 2013). For the opponents, it was seen as an attempt to assimilate Alevis rather than promoting harmony between Alevis and Sunnis as equals. Critics included the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, the Confederation of European Alevi Unions [*Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu*], Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation [*Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı*], Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Associations [*Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri*], and other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) (“Cami-Cemevi Tartışması, Aleviler Ne Düşünüyor”, 2013). Consequently, the project was terminated in 2015. In the indictment, it was argued that this was a FETÖ project, aimed at causing conflict and chaos rather than uniting different believers (see Benli, 2017). This incident reveals that the project had opponents as well as supporters.

The illustration above touches on several key issues for Alevis: the attempt to have Sunni and Alevi work jointly together, the building of *cemevis*, and how these issues should be solved. This project, constructing a *cemevi* and a mosque on common land, highlights this diversity of opinions. As in the example above, the project was evaluated as assimilatory by some and harmonising by others. As can be read from the events above, Alevis in Turkey have problems related to their places of worship. Alevis claim that the Republic of Turkey is violating their human rights by not granting *cemevis* a legal status (see Borovalı & Boyraz, 2016) and they believe the problem stems from the current position, power, and duties of the Presidency of

² Places of worship for Alevis, the building where Alevis come together and pray. In most of the *cemevi* buildings there is also a library, conference hall, kitchen, dining room, and similar facilities.

Religious Affairs³ [*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Diyanet*]. Alevi state that *Diyanet* does not provide financial support to *cemevis*, but a budget is allocated to *Diyanet* from their own taxes, and mosques where they do not pray are given financial support by *Diyanet*. They also argue that under Turkish law, places of worship are legally protected and given certain privileges, such as exemption from electricity bills and legal protection, but *cemevis* are not legally given the status of places of worship and are therefore discriminated against. Alevi also objects to obligatory, Sunni-dominated, compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons at school (see Akyüz, 2015). Alevi claim that these lessons impose Sunnism on Alevi children, and Alevi are not given the right to exemption. They also claim that these lessons are not objective, Alevism is not taught, and therefore their human rights and freedoms are violated (see section 1.6). These issues have even been defined as human rights violations by the ECtHR. In other words, Alevi claim that their rights and freedoms are violated by the Republic of Turkey in terms of Turkish law and international human rights law, and they claim that they are also treated as second-class citizens.

In order to understand the upcoming analysis, this chapter continues with a general historical introduction to Alevism, beginning with a brief outline in the second section. The third section details the situation of Alevi in the Ottoman period. The fourth section briefly discusses the establishment and structure of the Republic of Turkey while also introducing the Alevi. The fifth section details the violence and massacres that Alevi experienced in the Republican period. The sixth section examines the human rights-related difficulties Alevi faced during this period. In the seventh section, the research questions are introduced. Finally, the chapter ends with a conclusion.

1.2. A Brief Outline of Alevism

The precise size of the Alevi population density has long been a subject of controversy in the Republic of Turkey. It is estimated that Alevi make up twenty percent of the total population (see Watters, 2015). In 2018 the estimated Alevi population is to be somewhere “between 20 and 30 million” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2018: 197). The Alevi population is dispersed around numerous villages, townships, and cities (see Zeidan, 1999). Although clearly not the majority, they resist being identified as minority (see Akyol, 2000). Briefly outlining the nature of Alevism is one of the most challenging issues of this study. Debates over the definition have been ongoing for decades.

The scientific definition of Alevism is complex. The history of Islam is characterised by political conflicts and the struggle for ascendancy over the caliphate, as well as by hostilities that caused the significant division of Islam into interpretations, mainly Sunni and Shia. Some Turkish tribes adopted Islam merged with Shia, and especially the more esoteric [*batini*], spiritual versions of Islam, probably because of resemblances to previous Shaman convictions. “Shamanism is an ancient spiritual healing practice that was found in pre-modern societies worldwide. There is a remarkable similarity in these practices cross-culturally. The similarities involve: night-time rituals involving singing, drumming and chanting...” (Winkelman, 2015: 331). The beliefs and cultures of ancient Turks affect the understanding of Alevism (see Turan, 2010); before conversion to Islam, the ancient Turks were acquainted with various beliefs, including Shamanism (see Turan, 2010). In Alevism, there are traces of Shamanism, such as distinctive clothing in ceremonies, sitting in sequence and order, and playing music during the ceremony (see Turan, 2010). So, as a religious and lifestyle phenomenon, Alevism is associated

³ It is a Turkish State institution established in 1924 to control and organize Islamic practices, such as worship, in Turkey. It also has some additional duties, such as enlightening society on religious issues and administering places of worship.

with ancient Turks' beliefs and cultures, even before the Ottoman Empire. Over time, the Turkish tribes migrating to Anatolia adopted an esoteric interpretation of Islam. Thus, in this esoteric interpretation, Alevis emphasise in-depth or esoteric meanings of Qur'anic verses over the visible, verbal, meaning.

With regard to the religious practices and beliefs of the overlapping Kızılbaş-Bektaşî-Alevî milieus, we find an array of practices and conceptions rooted in pre/non-Islamic traditions, which amalgamated over time with popular Islamic, and particularly Sufi, concepts, and are embedded in Shiite mythology (Dressler, 2008: 284).

The Alevî religious community centred on the thoughts of two figures, Hoca Ahmet Yesevî (1093-1166), the early Turkish saint, and the mystic Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli (1209-1271). Hoca Ahmet Yesevî united some of the Turks around his Turkish-language mysticism. They said that the early Turks, ancestors of Alevis, professed a non-complex structure of belief that concentrated on morality and decency, love of God, tolerance, and kinship. The discrepancy between the belief systems of Alevis and Sunnis concerns the role of Arab traditions in Islam. For example, the Hoca Ahmet Yesevî Foundation [*Hoca Ahmet Yesevî Derneği*], regards the ancestors of Alevis as nomadic women and men who shared a communal life, in contrast to the Arabic culture. Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli served in accordance with Alevî-Bektashi belief, thought, philosophy, and social comprehension.

The Alevî belief system endorsed the esoteric, inner meaning of Islam, the love and uniqueness of God, and accepts Prophet Muhammed as the prophet of Islam and the holiness of Caliph Ali (Şener, 2009). Alevism is being identified as:

A religious phenomenon —as the true Islam, or a branch of Islam tinged with Shi'a elements and Turkishness, as a religion in its own right, or even as the essence of secularism. Others see it as a primarily political phenomenon— which can range from a philosophy of struggle and resistance against injustice, to a tolerant way of living or even as the epitome of democracy... Aleviness would seem to be an overarching way of life of groups who were rural for a long time: a religion, culture and affiliation to a group with its own rules, all at the same time (Massicard, 2013: 4).

The beliefs of the Alevis are revealed in their prayers. Some Alevî practises and beliefs are distinct from those of Sunni Islam and Shi'ism. "Unlike Sunnism and mainline Shi'ism, Alevism does not possess a tradition of authoritative religious scholarship and official carriers of formal learning" (Zeidan, 1999: 76). The Alevî community, in general, has different views on the importance of hajj⁴, fasting in Ramadan⁵ and other religious rituals of Sunni Islam, and rejects formalism in religion. Some Alevis believe that the current Muslim places of worship and ways of praying differ from the early years of Islam. Some Alevis consider that neither namaz⁶ nor the mosques of today have a place in the core of Islam, believing that institutionalism began after the death of the Prophet Muhammed, especially in the era of the Umayyad period⁷.

Alevis in Anatolia pray in Turkish, not in Arabic. The religious ceremony of Alevis:

⁴ Pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. One of the five pillars of Islam.

⁵ Abstinence from food and drink from dawn to sunset as one of Islam's five pillars.

⁶ The ritual prayer of Islam. This is performed five times a day by bowing in the name of God, Allah, and reading verses from the Qur'an.

⁷ The second caliphate that was established after death of the Prophet Muhammed, 661-750.

Consists of a ritual or set of rituals known as the *cem*, which is presided over by holy men, often known as *dede*. It is part of the purpose of this ritual to pray to Ali, to recall the names of the first twelve *imams*⁸, and to mourn the martyrdom of Hasan and Hüseyin (Shankland, 2003: 24).

In Alevism, the method of praying is the ceremony known as *cem*, meaning gathering or union (see Özdemir, 2011) held in *cemevis*. The *cem* ceremony for Alevi “has an important function in the oral Alevi culture” (van Rossum, 2008: 5). At ceremonies in *cemevis*, males and females pray together, reading verses from the Qur’an in Turkish, singing Alevi hymns, and chanting prayers in unison [*gülbank*]. Hasan and Hüseyin are sons of Caliph Ali and rituals in the *cem* ceremonies “symbolize the martyrdom of Hüseyin at the Kerbala, but they also include music and interpretation of key themes within Alevi doctrine” (Shankland, 1998: 24).⁹ The ceremony concludes with a ritualistic dance, the *semah*. *Cem* ceremonies have not only religious importance, because:

The best known Alevi ritual is the *cem* ceremony, which is not only a religious ceremony but also a social and a judgmental meeting... They perform the *semah*, which can be described as a set of mystical and aesthetic body movements in rhythmic harmony performed by *semahçı* (*semah* dancers), accompanied by the *Zakir* (musical performers in *cem* rituals) playing the *saz* in order to be unified with God and purified from the material world (Doğanyılmaz, 2013: 197).

Some other features of Alevism are the fasting during the month of Muharram¹⁰, and the role of *dedes*. Alevi fast during the month of Muharram, when they mourn the memory of Caliph Ali’s son Hüseyin and his followers, massacred by the Caliph of the Umayyad Yazid I. So, like Shiites, Alevi remember the massacre as an important event.

In Alevism *dedes* are considered holy men, leaders of the community, the man who leads the *cem* ceremony; they “must belong to an *ocak* (hearth), the genealogy of which goes back to Ali” (Melikoff, 1998: 8). *Ocak* in Alevism refers to “literal hearth in the house, to the lineage which owns the house and also to the *dede* attached to the house” (Shankland, 2003: 116). Alevism rests upon a socio-religious organisational system with two main aspects: the follower, *talip*, and *ocak*. *Dedes* and all Alevi are *ocak* family members. However, *dede* families are supposed to be the descendant families of the twelve imams, the philosophical and religious holy leaders who are considered the descendants of the Prophet Muhammed. *Dedes* represent *ocak* families, and every Alevi is bound to a *dede* and follows the thoughts of a spiritual leader, a *pir*. In summary, “the concept of “*ocak*”, which has a wide and significant place as a cult in Turkish culture, holds an authentic meaning and conceptual framework within the Alevi belief system” (Akın, 2017: 239).

Although it seems very difficult to define Alevism, Alevism has its own rituals and understandings. From a religious point of view “while most Alevi regard Alevism as a non-Sunni variation of Islam, some claim that Alevism is not part of Islamic tradition, and others insist that it is not a religion at all” (Hurd, 2014: 418). Despite the controversy over Alevism, it

⁸ Alevi, believe that those who are supposed to lead Islam after the death of Prophet Muhammed must be descendants of the Ahl al-Bayt (family of Prophet Muhammed). The Twelve Imams are descendants of the Ahl al-Bayt, namely, Caliph Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Hüseyin, Zeynel Abidin, Muhammed Bakır, Cafer Sadık, Musai Kazım, Ali Rıza, Muhammed Taki, Ali Naki, Hasan Askeri, Muhammed Mehdi.

⁹ Kerbala event is important for Alevi, because Hüseyin and his followers were brutally martyred by the Caliph of the Umayyad Yazid I in the Kerbala dessert.

¹⁰ The first month of the Islamic calendar. Believers pray and mourn for the martyrdom of Hüseyin.

“could be designated as broadly as possible as a socio-cultural and spiritual belief system that is inherently syncretistic” (Erol, 2012: 42). As Melikoff conceptualises, “Bektashism, as well as Alevism are both, in their earlier stage, examples of religious syncretism” (Melikoff, 1998: 1).

The term Alevi is also used to refer to the Bektashi community. Although the Bektashi community and the Alevi belong to the same syncretic religious belief system, there are some lifestyle differences. “The Bektashis ... led a sedentary life in organized *tekkes*”¹¹ (Melikoff, 1998: 7). Bektashism is a highly-organized order, founded by Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, a mystic, saint, and humanist philosopher. Bektashis are Alevi who are loyal to Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, bound to his Bektashi dervish lodge [*Bektaşî tekkesi*] (see Eröz, 1990). However, as previously stated, both groups have a common religious syncretic belief system, following the teachings of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli. Thus, despite some different statuses between the two, especially in the Ottoman Empire period, as the following section details, the terms Alevi and Bektashi are used interchangeably in this study.

1.3. Alevi in the Ottoman Period

Clarifying the terminology is essential in this research. The words Alevi and Alevism are used as umbrella terms, and they may refer to two historical groups with different roles, the Kızılbaş [*Kızılbaş*], and the Bektashi.

Alevi go by a number of names. They are called *Kızılbaş* after the Turkmen followers of the Safavid Sufi order of the 15th and 16th centuries from which they emerged, and also *Bektashi*, after the Anatolian *Bektashi Shi'a* Sufi order founded in the 13th century to which many belong (Zeidan, 1999: 76).

The term *Kızılbaş* is related to giving support to the Safavid Empire. This term is said to be used for communities that oppose Ottoman rule and have anti-Sunni ideas, and was used for the first time by the Ottoman Sultan II. Beyazid. This term was also used by nomadic Turkmen groups who remained loyal to the Safavids despite living under Ottoman rule (Teber, 2007). *Kızılbaş* people were rural Alevi who lived without an organised social structure. From a historical perspective, Alevism is rooted in the term *Kızılbaş*, which referred to their headdresses during the Ottoman period; however, later, this came to be used as a term of degradation by their enemies.

In the Ottoman Empire, conflicts reached the peak with rebellions such as that of Şahkulu Rebellion [*Şahkulu Ayaklanması*] in 1511, conflicts between the Safavid Empire¹² and the Ottoman Empire, and the War of Chaldiran [*Çaldiran Muharebesi*], in 1514. To create an effective land force, the leader of the Safavid Empire, Shah Ismail [*Şah İsmail*], needed the support of the Anatolian Turkmen people, most of whom belonged to the heterodox community rather than being orthodox Sunnis (see Dedeyev, 2009). The migration of Turkmen people to the Safavid Empire, as well as revolts in the Ottoman Empire, weakened social stability (see Çamuroğlu, 1992). Although the *Kızılbaş* people supported the Safavid Empire, Shah Ismail lost the war, and they began to be persecuted across the Sunni Ottoman Empire. They were characterised as heretics or atheists, and they were assassinated by the Ottoman Empire especially in the period prior to, during, and after the rebellions, generally referred to as the

¹¹ Places where the religious sect's followers receive religious education (see Ceyah, 2011).

¹² An empire lasted from 1502-1732. Its state religion was Shi'a Islam and was founded by Shah Ismail in Iran. Shah Ismail ruled Azerbaijan in 1502, after that the empire ruled Iraq-i Acem, Fars and Kirman regions. The Safavids also maintained their dominance in the region from the Euphrates to the Ceyhun river (see Çay, 2009).

Celali Rebellions [*Celali Isyanları*]. The archives from the *Divan-ı Hümayun*, known as *Mühimme Defteri*,¹³ confirmed the castigations, arrests, killings, or banishments of the *Kızılbaş*, and accusations of atheism and immorality (see Canpolat, 2010). The *Divan-ı Hümayun* is the assembly where the affairs of the Ottoman Empire were adjudicated under the chairmanship of the sultan. The decrees of the Ottoman Sultan Selim II and Ottoman Sultan Murat III reveal the conditions of the oppressed *Kızılbaş* populace. The archives (see Canpolat, 2010) assert that, in some Anatolia provinces, such as Giresun, Amasya, Tokat, Trabzon in the Northern Anatolia region, the *Kızılbaş* performed *cem* ceremonies at which both males and females performed music and dance, and allege that partners were exchanged for sexual purposes (Canpolat, 2010). Similar charges are found in another manuscript in the archived documents (see Canpolat, 2010), sent by the Ottoman Sultan Murat III to the rulers of certain provinces [*bey*] and to the authorities responsible for the Ottoman judiciary and for applying Ottoman law [*kadı*]. The documents, like those of Selim II, assert that in *Kızılbaş* ceremonies (*cem* ceremonies), men and women participate together, and insult each caliph of Islam: Ebubekir, Osman, and Ömer. Ottoman Sultan Murat III ordered arrests, trials, and, in the case of guilt, the awaiting of the sultan's decision (see Canpolat, 2010). These two records provide evidence of the negative image attributed to the *Kızılbaş* in the Ottoman Empire, which is supported by many similar decisions and examples of formal correspondence in the archives.

Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli had a great influence in the Ottoman Empire. Until the closure of the Janissary corps,¹⁴ 1826, and the prohibition of Bektashism by the Ottoman Sultan II. Mahmud. There was a mutually supportive relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Bektashis. Bektashi dervishes¹⁵ in this period resided in the Janissary camp, so a strong bond was established between the two institutions (see Maden, 2015). This important status was achieved by connecting the Janissary corps to Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli (see Melikoff, 1998). In the Ottoman Empire the Bektashi order was appointed “to guide and patronize the Janissaries, as they were recruited from among the Christian children converted to Islam and raised in Turkish circles” (Doja, 2006: 429). The Ottoman Empire benefited from the Bektashi dervish lodge “in colonizing their newly conquered lands” (Melikoff, 1998: 6), especially the Balkan region; thus:

With the famous exception of the Janissary corps, which had been recruited from among the Christian peasantry (but whose members converted to Islam), primarily in the European provinces, the empire had only rarely employed non-Muslims for its land forces. Traditionally the bearing of arms had been the prerogative of the ruling élite, the *Askerî* (military) servants of the sultan. (Zürcher, 2010: 162)

1.4. A Short History of the Republic of Turkey and the Alevi

The Republic of Turkey has its roots in the Ottoman Empire that emerged in the Anatolia peninsula after the thirteenth century. “From their beginnings in western Anatolia, the Ottoman state in the following centuries expanded steadily in a nearly unceasing series of successful wars that brought it vast territories at the junction of the European, Asian, and African continents” (Quataert, 2005: 20). On November 11, 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy). After losing,

¹³ The notebook in which the political, military and socially important decisions discussed at the *Divan-ı Hümayun* meetings are recorded (see Yıldırım & Hayırlioğlu, 2019).

¹⁴ The household troops of the Ottoman sultans.

¹⁵ People who are believed to be mystical in the Alevi-Bektashi belief are also believed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammed, religious leaders, adopted the spiritual life rather than the material life, in other words, who accept Sufism as a way of life (see Şener 1994; Işık 2007).

it was forced to sign the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. The Treaty of Sèvres “left the Ottoman Empire only a rump state in northern Asia Minor with Istanbul as its capital” (Zürcher, 2004: 147). After the Treaty of Sèvres, Anatolia was occupied by the Allies, namely, the United Kingdom, Greece, Armenia, France, and Italy (see Zürcher, 2004). Meanwhile:

Even though the armistice obligated the Ottoman military to demobilize its combat units quickly, the actual demobilization proceeded slowly and came to a full stop with the start of a new war ... against Greek, French, Italian, and Armenian forces (Uyar & Erickson, 2009: 283).

Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, who later took the surname Atatürk, a new army, generally known as national forces [*Kuvay-ı Milliye*], was established by the nationalists and they defeated the Allies in the Turkish War of Independence. Alevi also supported the War of Independence and the stance against the Ottoman Empire (see Şener, 1994) and Atatürk had no difficulty getting the support of the Bektashis in the Turkish national resistance movement (see Öztürk, 1998). The Turkish War of Independence ended with the foundation of the new Turkish State in 1922, the Lausanne Peace Conference, and the Lausanne Peace Treaty. At the Lausanne Peace Conference, commissions addressed territorial, military, foreigners', minorities', and financial issues. The Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed by representatives of the new Turkey, Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes on July 24, 1923. Thus, peace in Anatolia was established.

Following the Treaty, reforms led to the emergence of the new state. On October 29, 1923, the newly declared state was established, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was elected as the first president of the Republic of Turkey. Alevi continued to support Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the new modern Republic of Turkey during the founding years of the Turkish Grand National Assembly [*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi - TGNA*], as well as during the Republic's proclamation and implementation of its revolutions (Şener, 1994). Many political, social, legal, and economic reforms called the Atatürk Reforms [*Atatürk İnkılapları*], were also adopted in the new modern state. Under political reforms, the Republican People's Party [*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP*], the first political party, was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. In the period 1923-1928, there were many reforms introduced to found a modern and democratic Turkish state (İnalçık, 2006). The new regime abolished the caliphate, the Islamic educational system, law, and lifestyle of the Ottoman Empire and instead adopted a westernised system and lifestyle (see Metin & Gelbal, 2008).

In the 1930s, a group of ideas called Kemalism -republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism, and revolutionism- were brought into the new Republic. The six basic principles of the Republic of Turkey are symbolised on the flag of CHP as well. In the new state another issue appeared; how to reshape the national identity, and:

The political and cultural élite of the young republic opted for a radically different definition of its own identity: they decided to be Turks and to take Turkishness as the basis their new national state. This identity was then imposed gradually on the population through a process of nation building in which, as in similar processes the world over, historiography and linguistics played a key role, as did suppression of alternative or even sub-identities. (Zürcher, 2010: 211).

In the Turkish Kemalist ideology, there are three dimensions of Turkishness, or Turkish identity. The first category is territorial; the second is religious; and the last is ethno-religious. In the three dimensions of Kemalist Turkishness, the first one is common to all people living in Turkey, but the other two are not. This may be summarized as:

The first was territorial. This definition, the most inclusive of the three, was embodied in the 1924 constitution. It registered all inhabitants of Turkey as Turks. The second definition, less inclusive than the first, was religious. This was embedded in the millet system, and articulated in the 1930s highbrow works, textbooks, and CHP documents. Due to the legacy of the millet system, the Kemalists saw nominal Islam as an avenue toward Turkishness: all Muslims in Turkey were potential Turks... The third and the least inclusive definition of Turkishness under High Kemalism was ethno-religious (Çağaptay, 2006: 159).

In the founding years of the Republic of Turkey, and in narratives that present the Turkish history, the aim of establishing a unified Turkish state was a main purpose, and “minorities are included and thrive in the community by transforming their identity through Turkification” (Çınar, 2015: 28). The policy of Turkey was to create a common language, history, culture, and even religion (see Çınar, 2015) among the different people living in the country. In other words, the national identity of the new Republic of Turkey trying to be established over common values (see Çağaptay, 2006).

Turkey was ruled by a single-party regime, CHP, from 1923 until the 1950s. The one-party period of the Republic of Turkey ended with the 1950 multi-party elections. The following years in the Republic of Turkey were dominated by a multi-party regime. The Democratic Party [*Demokrat Parti* - DP], a right-wing political party, won the multi-party elections in 1950 and ruled for ten years (see Yılmaz, 2010). In the multi-party system election in the 1950s, the majority of Alevis also voted for DP (see Zariç, 2021). During the period of DP governments, political Islam started to gain power and became institutionalised (Türk, 2015). In these years, debates on secularism and polarisation in society increased (see Sur 2015; Rabasa & Stephen 2008). During DP governments, the influence of *Diyanet* increased (see Türk, 2015). After the 1950s, religious culture and ethics lessons at school were introduced into the state education system. Although the first policy that introduced religious lessons was in 1924, in 1927 these lessons were removed from the curriculum. In 1949, it was decided to provide religious lessons for 4th and 5th grade primary school students with the approval of their parents. However, this education was optional and was not formally organised to be included in the Turkish education system. After the 1950s, religious lessons were added to the official curriculum of the Turkish education system. However, in 1950, students who did not want to attend religion classes could report this to the school and be exempted from exams with the written application of their parents.

After 1957, Alevis ended their support to DP (see Schüler, 1999).

... Republic was an opportunity for Alevis and view Ataturk as their most important political figure, accept that this opportunity was never realized and Alevis did not acquire the same status as Sunnis. The lack of an educated elite with capital and the repressive nature of the one-party system after Ataturk’s death (1938–46) and during Democratic Party rule (1950–60) are most often mentioned as obstacles to the realization of the opportunities that Ataturk’s vision of a secular regime offered Alevis (Göner, 2005: 111).

Meanwhile, in 1960, the democratic regime ended with a military coup, followed by a military regime until the 1961 elections. Turkey experienced coalition governments, political turmoil, and civil unrest following 1961; however, the Justice Party [*Adalet Partisi* - AP] came to power between 1965 and 1971. Alevis also entered Turkish political life in 1966, when they founded the Unity Party [*Birlik Partisi* - BP], a political party aligned with their own ideological affinity.

By the 1969 election, eight members of the party were elected to the TGNA (see Ertan, 2017). At the end of the 1960s, the Alevi identity thus gained representation in the Assembly; however, later political divisions resulted in the disillusionment of BP (see Ertan, 2017).

On March 12, 1970, the Turkish army handed an ultimatum to Cevdet Sunay, the Turkish president, forcing the government to resign (see Zürcher, 2004). During the 1970s, “religion was seen as a means of state hegemony to deceive people; Alevism was useful insofar as it provided them with a cultural framework for socialist ideals” (Göner, 2005: 124). In the following years, coalition governments continued to rule Turkey. In 1977, CHP won the elections and stayed in power for only 30 days. From 1979 to 1980, AP formed a government and remained in power. Meanwhile, civil unrest in Turkey persisted until the military coup of September 12, 1980, and during the civil unrest years of the 1978-80s, Alevis led an introverted lifestyle (see Özmen, 2011a).

During the 1980s, with the rise of conservatism, Turkey experienced radical economic, social, and political changes (see Küçük, 2019). This coup led to an emerging Turkish-Islamic synthesis. “By fusing Islamic symbols with nationalism, the military hoped to create a more homogeneous and less political Islamic community and to insulate the population from the influence of left-wing ideologies” (Rabasa & Stephen, 2008: 37). Following the 1980 military coup, conservatism and political Islam grew rapidly and in strength (see Çoban, 2014). This can also be seen in the introduction of compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, and the expansion of religious schools [*imam hatip*] (see Gündüz, 1998). The total number of mosques built under *Diyanet*'s authority increased by nearly 12,000 in five years, from 47,645 in 1981 to 54,667 in 1984 and 59,460 in 1986, with a corresponding increase in the number of officials and share of the budget (see Çakır & Bozan, 2005).

With the 1980 military takeover of the government, the military did not view Islam as the main threat to the values of Secular Republic, but instead saw Leftist movements and communism as the threat against Kemalist secularism. While using Islam as a cementing force for uniting Turkish society against Leftist threats, the military leadership in the early 1980s became tolerant of Islamic principles, allowing Islamists to gain political power and influence (Hemmati, 2013: 64).

Thus, the power of political Islam continued to increase after the coup (Hemmati, 2013). The military regime ended with the 1983 elections. Motherland Party, [*Anavatan Partisi – ANAP*], a centre-right political party, won the elections in 1983 and 1987 (Akın, 2018). ANAP continued as a single party government from 1983 to 1991.

In the 1990s, Turkish political and social life was characterised by tensions, namely, liberalism and the rise of political Islam (see Köroğlu, 2012). “In the early 1990s the polarization between secularists and Islamists continued apace” (Zürcher, 2004: 290). After 1990, Alevis, particularly young Alevis, continued to participate in political life through social-democratic parties, claiming to be Turkey's modern community and defenders of Kemalism and secularism (Özmen, 2011a). From 1991 to 2002, coalition governments continued to rule Turkey.

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP*], won the elections and has since ruled Turkey. With the constitutional amendment made in 2017, the current parliamentary system was abolished and replaced by the presidential system, and since then, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been serving as president.

In the 2000s, the Republic of Turkey took different perspectives on Alevis, regarding them as both a cultural group and a heterodox sect. The government in Turkey considers that Islam is an umbrella that also covers Alevism (Cansun, 2013). *Diyanet*, the Turkish State institution responsible for governing the country's religious affairs, states that Alevis are Muslims

(Diyanet, 2010). “The Turkish State categorizes Alevism as culture rather than religion. To the State, Alevism is a culture whose core elements protect secularism and democracy as well as instrumental culture in the modernization of Turkey” (Şahin, 2005: 481).

On the other hand, it was not only the Republic of Turkey that defined Alevism. In the official European Commission (EC) view, Alevism was initially regarded as a Muslim religious minority. In the 2004 progress report, the EU suggested that “Alevism is still not recognized as a Muslim minority” (European Commission, 2004: 54). However, some Alevi NGOs and other segments of the society, such as journalists, trade unions and individual Alevi citizens, critiqued the use of the term minority in the report (“Alevilerden AB’ye tepki: Azınlık değiliz”, 2004). One year later, in 2005, the EC instead used the term non-Sunni Muslim Alevi community, no longer identifying Alevism as a minority. In 2006, the EC used the term Muslim Alevi community. Since then, the EC has used Alevi community or only Alevism in its reports.

1.5. Alevism Facing Violence and Massacre in the Republic of Turkey

Another issue in Turkish history involving Alevism was the violence and massacres they faced in the Republic of Turkey. Although this section deals with events that took place after 1970, there were violence and massacres faced by Alevism throughout the history of the Republic, namely the 1937 and 1938 Dersim insurrections, the 1938 Erzincan events, the 1966 Ortaca events, the 1968 Hekimhan events, the 1967 Elbistan events, and the 1971 Hatay and Kırıkhan events. On September 3–7, 1978, in Sivas, a city in Turkey’s Central Anatolia region, Alevi-Sunni conflicts erupted in the Alibaba neighbourhood, spread throughout the city, and resulted in many deaths and injuries.

In December 19, 1978, in Kahramanmaraş (also named Maraş), a city in the Mediterranean region of Turkey, “Islamic fundamentalists and Turkish fascists (Grey Wolves)¹⁶ started a week-long killing spree which left more than 100 Alevism murdered and many more injured” (Sweeney, n.d.).

In May-July 1980, in Çorum, a city in the Northern Anatolia region of Turkey, the events started after:

Rumours were spread that Alevism were planning to bomb Sunni mosques. An agitated Sunni group was swiftly directed towards the Alevi district as they left a mosque after Friday prayers: they were soon joined by armed gangs, and began attacking Alevi houses in the neighbourhood with weapons (Karagöz, 2016: 77).

As a result, 57 people, mostly Alevism, were killed and more than 100 injured.

In the first half of the 1990s, Alevism once again faced violence with the Sivas massacre. On July 2, 1993, 33 Alevi intellectuals who attended the Pir Sultan Abdal¹⁷ Culture Festival and two hotel employees were killed after a mob of extremist Islamists set fire to the Madımak Hotel. The incidents began with protests by radical Islamists. The group protested Aziz Nesin, a left-wing intellectual who was in the city. They marched with the slogan Sivas will be a graveyard for secularists, but the events got out of control as thousands of people gathered in front of the Madımak Hotel. The Turkish State security forces did not (or could not) intervene in the events. One day later, 35 people were arrested, a number that later increased to 190. 124 suspects were accused of overthrowing the secular constitutional order and attempting to

¹⁶ Grey Wolves, [*Bozkurtlar*], are the far-right movement that is affiliated with the ultranationalist right party Nationalist Movement Party, [*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP*].

¹⁷ Alevi-Turkish minstrel, who lived in Anatolia in the 16th century, *dede*, and one of the most important representatives of the Alevi faith.

establish a theocracy; the others were released. The first court case was in Ankara 1st State Security Court on October 21, 1993. On December 26, 1994, the court sentenced 22 suspects to 15 years imprisonment, three suspects to ten years detention, 54 suspects to three years imprisonment, and six suspects to two years imprisonment. Another 37 were acquitted. The attorneys on behalf of the victims appealed to the Supreme Court of Appeals. The Supreme Court of Appeal decided that this case should be examined as a crime against the Republic of Turkey, secularism, and democracy. As a result, the Ankara 1st State Security Court upheld the decision of the high court, the Supreme Court of Appeal. On November 28, 1997, the Ankara 1st State Security Court condemned 33 suspects to death, and the other 14 were sentenced to up to 15 years. The Supreme Court of Appeals approved the prison sentences; however, it quashed the death penalty decisions due to procedural deficiencies. On June 16, 2000, the Ankara 1st State Security Court decided to approve the 33 death sentences; however, in 2002, the death penalty was abolished from Turkey's legal system. Consequently, these suspects were given life imprisonment without parole.

After the Sivas massacre, the violence against Alevis did not subside. In 1995, a provocative attack targeted the Gazi district, an area of Istanbul. The events started as a result of a provocative attack and after a taxi driver was killed by unidentified people against the civilians in an Alevi-dominated coffeehouse in Gazi district. The masses came together in the Gazi neighbourhood to protest the event; however, the security forces lost control and the events spread to another district of İstanbul, such as Ümraniye. In this event, 20 people died.

Alevis had already begun to restructure themselves by the late 1980s, with the new period known as the Alevi Renaissance [*Alevi Rönesansı*]; in other words, Alevis attempted to express their identity through their organisations (Özmen, 2011a). So, “by the late 1980s, Alevi associations in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and France had begun to flourish” (Şahin, 2005: 473). In 1990, another development was the Alevi manifesto. Hamburg Alevi Culture Centre [*Hamburg Alevi Kültür Merkezi*], published an important Alevi manifesto in the intellectual daily Turkish newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, in May 15, 1990, accentuating the Alevi identity as a distinctive one in Turkey. However, this accentuation was not aimed at separatism but expressed demands, as before, regarding the freedom of thought, conscience and religion issues with *Diyanet* and the status of their places of worship, *cemevis*. This manifesto demanded an end to all pressure on Alevis and the recognition of their rights. The violence and massacres, especially the Sivas massacre, stimulated the establishment of Alevi associations in Turkey (Şahin, 2005). Thus, Alevis increasingly emerged as an organised force in the years after the Sivas massacre. So, “the violent attack on Alevis gave an enormous boost to the Alevi movement as the number of Alevi associations in Turkey and abroad increased sharply...” (Şahin, 2005: 476); and Alevis also started to construct *cemevis* in urban areas of Turkey (see Borovalı & Boyraz, 2016).

Currently, in Turkey, there are some local NGOs all around the country, and in general, the three Alevi NGOs, the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation, the Cem Foundation, and the Alevi-Bektashi Federation [*Alevi-Bektaşî Federasyonu*], are the ones that function nation-wide and are well-known by the Alevis in Turkey.

The Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation was established in 1994. It has 44 branches across Turkey and a headquarters in Ankara. The foundation was established through the civil initiatives of Alevi citizens. The purpose of this NGO is to solve the problems of Alevis and meet their needs.

The Cem Foundation was established in 1995 and has a headquarters in Istanbul. Through its 50 branches and units, the Cem Foundation also serves Alevis in Bulgaria, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Its goals include keeping Alevi cultural heritage alive and developing Alevi culture. In addition, it advocates the recognition of Alevi-Islam in Turkey and all over the world.

The Alevi-Bektashi Federation was established in 2002. The Federation represents 148 Alevi-Bektashi organisations operating all over Turkey. The purpose of the Federation is to carry out studies for the research, survival, and promotion of Alevi culture and teaching. In this direction, it tries to ensure coordination and solidarity among Alevi organisations.

Alevi NGOs are important for Alevis and have different roles in their lives. These Alevi NGOs may have different views on the Alevi identity. In other words, these Alevi NGOs also have an idea of how to define the religious identity dimension of Alevism. For example, the Cem Foundation emphasises more the Alevi-Islamic understanding (see Cem Vakfi, 2018), while the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation refuses an Islamic interpretation of Alevism (see “3. Büyük Alevi Kurultayı Yapıldı”, 2013). In addition, some of the Alevi NGOs, such as the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation and the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation, believe in a strict division between the state and religion. However, the Cem Foundation is less strict than the other NGOs about state involvement in religion, and the Foundation’s opinion did not insist on separating religion, Alevism, and the state and even, in some ways, favoured their integration. Although Alevi NGOs may have different ideas on the solutions, they agree that there are common problems related to *cemevis* and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. However, for example, while the Cem Foundation thinks that the problems can be solved by the government’s support for *cemevis*, other NGOs, e.g., the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation, state that the Turkish State should separate from religious affairs and must not give any support to any place of worship or a religion.

Violence and massacres are not the only issues that Alevis in the Republic of Turkey face. As the next section details, Alevis also face discrimination, ignorance, and human rights violations in Turkey. In accordance with the opinion of *Diyanet*, *cemevis* are not considered places of worship, and therefore, *cemevis* do not have a legal status. This means that *cemevis*, unlike mosques, face a lack of legal protection and financial support. In addition, with the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons made obligatory by the state, Alevi children receive Sunni religious education, and these lessons mean assimilation for Alevis and a violation of the right to education. Alevi NGOs also have an important role in trying to solve such problems of Alevis. Firstly, Alevi NGOs try to solve the *cemevi* problem. The Turkish State discriminates against and ignores Alevis’ *cemevis*, as the next section and the following chapters explain. *Cemevis* are established and continue their activities under the authority of these Alevi NGOs. In this way, both legal obstacles and financial difficulties, necessary costs of *cemevis*, are solved. Secondly, Alevi NGOs play an important role in trying to solve the problem of compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons by filing lawsuits, organising protests, or calling Alevis to boycott these lessons.

In the 2000s, Alevis faced another problem in the Republic of Turkey. Since 2012, the front doors of Alevi houses in Turkey’s cities of Adyaman, Çorum, Malatya, and Izmir have been marked with a red cross (X), and over 100 houses in 32 different districts have been marked (see Topuz, 2019). Unknown individuals once again marked Alevi houses and front doors with a red cross in Adyaman in 2015. In 2017, again a red cross was drawn on the doors of 13 houses where only Alevi citizens lived in a neighbourhood in Malatya, a city in eastern Anatolia. Lastly, in 2019, a red cross was placed on the door of an Alevi family in the Mamak district of Ankara.

1.6. Introduction to the Situation of Alevis in the Republic of Turkey

Alevis largely supported the Turkish War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey, paid a visit to the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli lodge and invited the Alevis to join forces (see Şener, 1994). This memorable event led to Alevis

supporting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, his military efforts, and political projects. Alevis has, ever since the time of the Ottoman Empire, experienced violence, and discrimination (see Canpolat, 2010). Alevis' dialogue with governing authorities offered hope after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, and there was optimism that the repressive measures and oppression of the ancestors of the Alevis, experienced under the Ottoman Empire, would diminish (see Şener, 1994). In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis and Sunni live in peace with each other; even so, according to the ECtHR, the human rights of the Alevi are being violated (see *İzzettin Doğan v. Turkey*, 2016). Currently, Alevis' human rights problems derive from state policies and their implementations. Consequently, Alevis expected welfare, freedom, and equal rights from the new Republic of Turkey. Unfortunately, however, Alevis' problems, the institutionalisation of Islam, although in a modified form, and the rise of political Islam in Turkey have continued.

In Turkey, Alevis highlight the difficulties caused by policies of *Diyanet* related to their places of worship, *cemevis*, and the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In the first half of the 1920s, the TGNA founded *Diyanet*, in place of the Sheikh Ul-Islam [*Şeyhülislam*¹⁸], which itself had been reorganised into a ministry called the Ministry of Shariya and Foundations [*Şer'iyeye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*], in 1920. This ministry served as a bridge between the old Sheikh-ul-Islam in the Ottoman Empire and the *Diyanet* in the Republic of Turkey (see *Diyanet*, 2013). After *Diyanet* was established on March 3, 1924, the Ministry was closed.

Diyanet remains the institution responsible for all religious issues in the country. *Diyanet* preserved the traditional missions of Sheikh Ul-Islam (see *Diyanet*, 2013), as the authority for Muslim clergy. It represented state power and control over religion. Article 136 of the Turkish Constitution states *Diyanet* “shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity”. Duties of *Diyanet* are “interpretation of Islam through (a) controlling the content of Friday religious sermons and religious opinions in order to prevent the formation of anti-republican ideas; and (b) formulating a ‘modern Islam’ in accordance with the needs of the state” (Yavuz, 2009: 23).

Alevi discontent with *Diyanet* focuses on its role as a state institution serving only Sunni Islam followers (see Kutlu, 2009); it is seen as a discriminatory institution (see Koca, 2014). Alevis oppose the lack of objectivity of *Diyanet* and consider the institution to hold a religious-political role (see Koca, 2014). *Diyanet* does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship in Islam (see Kahvecioğlu, 2016); thus, *cemevis* do not qualify for the same privileges as mosques, for example, exemptions from payment of electricity costs (see Law No. 5784, 2008) and legal protection (see Akyüz, 2015). In general, *Diyanet* does not consider Alevis' demands when formulating policies. *Diyanet* justified its policy by declaring that Alevis are Muslims, a part of Islam, and arguing that *Diyanet* fulfils all citizens' religious needs according to the law, based on the view that Alevism cannot be conceived as a religion outside of Islam (see *Diyanet*, 2010); thus, the Alevi community holds the same rights and freedoms as the rest of the Muslim community (see *Diyanet*, 2010). In accordance with this official opinion, the government refuses to recognise places of worship in Islam other than mosques. Alevis carried their claims to the ECtHR. The Court decided that “the difference in treatment to which the applicants, as Alevis, have been subjected has no objective and reasonable justification” (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para. 185), and there was a violation of Article 14, prohibition of discrimination, and Article 9, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (see *İzzettin Doğan v. Turkey*, 2016), as Chapter Four details.

The other human rights violation that Alevis complain about is compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons (see Akyüz, 2015). Alevis highlights the injustice of the official education

¹⁸ The head of the Muslim clergy in the Ottoman Empire.

system, which obligates children to attend compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons for eight years, starting in the fourth grade of primary school. According to Alevis, every child, regardless of their beliefs, is obliged to learn Sunni-Hanafi beliefs and practises (see “Aleviler: Zorunlu Din Dersi Kaldırılımsın”, 2018). Alevis regard this as an imposition of Sunnism (see “Alevi Derneklerinden “Zorunlu Din Dersi” Protestosu”, 2014). In the last decade, Alevi citizens sued the government, and organised protests and meetings to put pressure on the state to resolve the issue. Alevis took their case to the ECtHR (see *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007). The ECtHR decision was in favour of Alevis, ruling that Turkey violates their rights to education. Following the case, amendments were introduced to the compulsory religious culture and ethics lesson textbooks with the incorporation of new content about Alevism. However, Alevis persisted with their claims, in 2014, winning a new case, *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*. The court decided that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in the Turkish education system violate the right to education under Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 of the ECHR. Currently, as Chapter Four discusses, Alevis states that the very limited amount of information provided in these books is not satisfactory. Alevis argue that the religious education teachers lack knowledge about Alevism and that the lessons should either not be compulsory or be neutral and objective in content, in other words, “not show any preference to one religion or another, or it could be understood to mean that all religions deserve fair and equal attention” (Relaño, 2010: 26).

In summary, Alevis continue to be confronted with human rights violations and continue to live in difficult legal, political, and social conditions in Turkey (see ECtHR, 2016). In terms of human rights, Alevis claim that the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the right to education, are violated in Turkey. Moreover, the claims in these two articles are supported by a third right, namely the right not to be discriminated against, in line with Article 14 of the ECHR. “The Government’s policy towards Alevis and Alevism clearly indicates the ruling party’s pro-Sunni Islamic ideology... Alevi demands as well as the judgments of the ECtHR are not being implemented” (Akbulut, 2015: 81). For decades, Turkey has failed to implement at least some of the legal advice of the ECtHR (see Akbulut, 2015). As EU’s 2021 progress report states:

A comprehensive legal framework in line with European standards needs to be put in place, and appropriate attention must be paid to implementing the ECtHR judgments on compulsory religion and ethics classes and Alevi worship places (European Commission, 2021: 32).

1.7. Research Questions

During this research, I learned that my family members migrated to Anatolia from central Asia, Khorasan, first to the Mediterranean region, and later, several decades ago, to the Western Anatolia region. For me, the Alevi was a closed box for decades, and understanding what it meant to be an Alevi was a mystery. In this research project that primarily focuses on Alevis and international human rights law, there are two motivations: being a member of the Alevi community and being educated on international human rights law.

Indeed, this research’s central axes remain human rights and freedoms, and Alevis; however, the research is reshaped by the ethnographic research data. I started the ethnographic research to explore the issues of Alevis’ human rights conditions in the field. However, the empirical data shifted the research by opening new issues, namely, exploring the Alevis as a community, understanding the Alevi identity, explaining Alevis’ use of human rights law language in their local contexts, the nature of the Alevis’ relations to the Republic of Turkey, and their attachment

to the Republic of Turkey. In short, this research, explains Alevis' human rights issues but also includes many different aims.

After studying international human rights law in depth, I started to understand Alevi's demands of the Republic of Turkey. Reading more about Alevism, watching news about their protests, organising rallies and congresses against human rights violations, and watching television debates expanded my interest in Alevis' human rights and freedoms in Turkey. My background as one of millions of Alevis, combined with my background in international human rights law, gradually drew my interest to Alevis' human rights situation in Turkey. So, as preliminary work, before undertaking this research, I decided to attend a rally and congress, namely the Grand Alevi Congress [*Büyük Alevi Kurultayı*], in Ankara, 2011, and the Grand Alevi Rally for Right to Equal Citizenship against Discrimination [*Ayrımcılığa Karşı Eşit Yurttaşlık Hakkı için Büyük Alevi Mitingi*] Izmir, 2011, as Chapter Four details. I attended these two major events to understand Alevis' demands more fully. In general terms, the demand was for the application of the equal citizenship principle, as written in the Turkish Constitution, i.e., to be treated as equal citizens. Although Alevis were protesting the government and highlighting decades of conflict, they also stated their attachment to the Republic of Turkey, of which they desired to be a part. Later, I learned more about the intense debate on Alevis' human rights violations in Turkey, consequently, court cases, protests, and declarations. So, the primary focus of the research is international human rights and Alevis. I am not a judge, and therefore, this research does not make criticisms of human rights violations in Turkey. More importantly, such an approach is not appropriate because the ECtHR has already decided in many cases, namely *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey* and *İzzettin Doğan and Other v. Turkey* that Alevis face human rights violations in Turkey.

So, **the first research question** initially the main one is: **What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims?** This research question is still an important one (see Chapter Four), but the focus of my research has shifted towards questions relating to the meaning ordinary Alevis attribute to these claims of human rights violations.

In the main part of this research, formulating the research questions implies not so much top-down armchair academic research consisting of analyses of formal governmental policies or judicial cases but rather ethnographic research among those who are localising and appropriating the human rights law. The focus on Alevis' relations with international human rights law led to my interest in their attachment to and relationship with the Republic of Turkey. As a result, the **second research question** of this study is: **How do Alevis experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground?** Under this research question there are some other sub-questions: How does these human rights violations look like on the ground? How was it judged by the different legal authorities? What kind of violations are we talking about? How do Alevis react against such violations? Are Alevis all aware of their human rights and the violations? How do Alevis use the international human rights law language in their local situation? How do Alevis evaluate their citizenship in the Republic of Turkey despite these violations?

In this empirical study, which I started with a single research question, I developed additional research questions as a result of field studies and literature work. I realised that Alevis in the field often used the term we, the Alevis, even though the term Alevis represents millions worldwide. How could Alevis in cities, townships, and villages identify with Alevis in other parts of Turkey or even beyond Turkey in Europe and other continents, such as Australia, without knowing each other? So, after analysing the empirical data, the **third research question** of this research is: **Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community?**

The data in the ethnographic work also guided me to another subject matter, namely the Alevi identity. The analysis revealed that Alevis suggest different dimensions of their identity, such as holding a syncretic belief system, being followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, or identifying Alevism as a lifestyle, i.e., being modern. So, there are different elements that the Alevis identify. The **fourth research question** is: **If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?**

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter studied Alevism in general and provided the various approaches to defining Alevism, some background information about Alevis in the Ottoman Empire, the history of the Republic of Turkey, and Alevis' problems, political position, and legal situation in Turkey. It ended with the research questions.

Defining Alevism is a complex phenomenon, because of the differences in their belief system. Alevis have a unique religious identity and a unique religious practice. It is not possible to make a general definition for Alevism because there are religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions to the definition of Alevi identity that make it impossible to accept a single definition. Alevis have a different belief system than the majority Sunnis in Turkey, combining rituals from pre-Islamic Turks with esoteric interpretations of Islam; in general, Alevis reject Arabic Sunni religious rituals and lifestyle, and pray in Turkish through *cem* ceremonies in *cemevis*. The rest of this dissertation discusses this situation in connection to the field studies. However, Alevism is an Islamic sect for the Turkish government and *Diyanet*, and initially a Muslim minority but later a Muslim community, or only the Alevi community, for the EU.

In the terminology of Alevism, there is a connection between Alevis and the term *Kızılbaş* in the Ottoman period. The term *Kızılbaş*, which was used for the people that opposed Ottoman rule, was also used to identify, and degrade Alevis. Furthermore, the term Bektashi is mostly applied to Alevis who lived in cities and accepted Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli as their religious leader and were bound to his dervish lodge. Bektashism was associated with the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire; however, in 1826, this positive relationship ended with the closure of the Janissary Corps and the prohibition of Bektashism by the Ottoman Sultan II. Mahmud. Alevism and Alevi are umbrella terms for Bektashism and Bektashi in this dissertation.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic. The Republic of Turkey was founded after the Turkish War of Independence, which ended with the Lausanne Peace Treaty. The new modern Republic of Turkey, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, introduced political, social, legal, and economic reforms. For example, in the new Republic, the caliphate is abolished; it is founded as a secular democratic state. The constitutional values and founding principles of the Republic of Turkey were accepted as republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism. In the new state, national identity policy was called Turkishness; unification of people under Turkification. However, the Islamic plurality in Turkey “covers all shades of Islam, from state-controlled Islam and Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*) to minorities located both inside and outside the Muslim community — depending on the perspective —...” (Hendrich, 2011: 1-2).

The new state was governed by a single party, CHP, the first political party of the Republic of Turkey, until 1950. In 1950, DP won the elections, political Islam started to merge, and Islam became institutionalized. DP ruled Turkey until the military coup in 1960. Turkey experienced political turmoil and civil unrest between 1960 and 1980. Alevis, on the other hand, entered politics in 1966 with BP, but this party later disbanded. The military forces' intervention continued with the 1970 ultimatum and, on September 12, 1980, a military coup. After this

military coup, Turkey was increasingly influenced by conservatism, the Turkish-Islam synthesis, and political Islam. In the 1990s, there was a growing tension between secularists and Islamists. After much political turmoil and changing governments since 2002, Turkey has been ruled by AKP, and in 2017, the current parliamentary system was abolished and replaced by the presidential system. Despite these changes in Turkey, currently according to the Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution:

The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by rule of law, within the notions of public peace, national solidarity and justice, respecting human rights, loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the preamble.

The challenges, violence, and punishments that Alevis face have changed since the Ottoman Empire (see Canpolat, 2010), and most of the oppression in the Ottoman Empire decreased to a certain level with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Alevis faced violence and massacres, such as those in the districts of Kahramanmaraş, Çorum, Sivas, and Gazi. Furthermore, after 2012, unknown individuals began to place red cross X signs on the doors of Alevis houses in various regions of Turkey.

Alevis also argue that they face human rights violations in the Republic of Turkey. *Cemevis* are unrecognised by the state, in accordance with the policies of *Diyanet*, which leads to claims of violation of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right not to be discriminated against. Alevis also underlines that the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons violate their right to education. The ECtHR also ruled that Turkey violates the human rights of Alevis, as discussed in Chapter Four. Moreover, Alevi NGOs also have an important impact on Alevis' human rights and lives. The Alevi NGOs, increasingly established after the Sivas massacre in 1993, helped the Alevis become a more organised community, continue their religious rituals in *cemevis*, and stick up for their human rights and freedoms.

The main aim and starting point of this study is Alevis' human rights; however, the further research questions, the second, third, and fourth, are reshaped in line with the results of the ethnographic research. The field studies were carried out in line with this initial aim, but the data from the ethnographic research led me in different directions. Thus, the second, third, and fourth questions are presented after the ethnographic research (see section 1.7).

After providing a general framework about Turkey and Alevis and unfolding the research questions in this first chapter, the next chapter, Chapter Two, will explain the research methodology and several associated issues.

CHAPTER 2 Research Methodologies

2.1. Introduction

This is a multidisciplinary study. In this study, I used both doctrinal research and ethnographic research methods, combined with central concepts from anthropology and sociology. In the previous chapter, I detailed the research questions. My background in law led me in further directions in empirical research, and in addition to the first research question, the second, third, and fourth research questions emerged from the ethnographic research. The first research question is: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevi human rights violation claims? The second research question is: How do Alevi experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground? The third research question is: Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community? The final, fourth, research question is: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?

This chapter provides a description of the research, and presents the research design as well as the applied methodologies. Section two discusses multidisciplinary research, the doctrinal research method, the ethnographic research method, and the grounded approach to certain theoretical concepts. Section three details the multi-sited ethnographic research method. Section four covers the challenges in the research and methods for overcoming them. Section five continues with validity, reliability, objectivity, and reflexivity. Section six focuses on data analysis, and section seven addresses ethical concerns. Section eight details the structure of the research.

2.2. Multidisciplinary Research

Multidisciplinary legal research investigates a phenomenon using the law and other disciplines; however, methodological debates continue about legal research using auxiliary disciplines. In this descriptive study, desk-based study is insufficient to address the aims of the research; so, research questions may be answered by using doctrinal and ethnographic research methods, that are supported using sociological and anthropological theoretical concepts.

In the doctrinal research method, data is supplied by legal documents and literature reviews. The doctrinal research method answers the first research question. Additionally, I collected field data by ethnographic methods that includes different methods of data collection among interviews and observations (see Goodale 2002; Kritzer 2002; Angrosino 2007; Spradley 2016). Although, as a legal scholar, I am not trained as an ethnographer, the ethnographic methods did provide me with the opportunity to collect inputs from Alevi in different regions of Turkey.

There are various works on Alevi, almost all from religious, historical, and social perspectives, but no study in the literature takes an ethnographic approach to understand Alevi's human rights situations in the field, so the fieldwork in this research provides the primary data. After all, the second, third, and fourth research questions that come later are also revealed by the analysis of the data provided by the fieldwork. As a result, I conducted fieldwork and ethnographic work until there was enough data and it was not possible to obtain any additional new information, data saturation was attained.

2.2.1. *Doctrinal Research*

Legal doctrinal research proceeds via the collection of normative and authoritative materials:

In a first stage, legal doctrine collects all relevant material, notably:

- (a) normative sources, such as statutory texts, treaties, general principles of law, customary law, binding precedents, and the like; and
- (b) authoritative sources, such as case law, if they are not binding precedents, and scholarly legal writings (Van Hoecke, 2011: 11).

In this research as a legal scholar, I tried to “collect legal sources (especially legislation and court cases), interpret the texts, analyse and address apparent contradictions and gaps, and construct a coherent legal doctrine” (Taekema & van der Burg, 2015: 1). These texts directly relate to my research topics. In this multidisciplinary project, the doctrinal research involves using sources on international human rights law and Turkish national law; relevant sources include academic works, international and Turkish national legal texts, case files of Turkish and international courts, and EU reports.

The first set of sources on human rights law are the Turkish legal texts. Statutory texts of the Republic of Turkey are also analysed during this process. The first part of the legal doctrinal research involves examining constitutional provisions, codes, and other legal regulations related to the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. Some of these are legislative sources; the others are state reports of the Republic of Turkey. In this research, the critical instruments studied are as follows: The Turkish Constitution, Turkish Criminal Code, Turkish Construction Code, Turkish Tax Code, Turkish National Education Code, Turkish Civil Code, Law No. 677¹⁹, Law No. 633²⁰, Law No. 5784²¹, and Regulation on Mosques’ Repair, Cleaning and Environmental Arrangements. These legal regulations are chosen because they are directly related to the subject of this research: the conditions of Alevis and related human rights issues, namely the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education.

The second set of sources are the following treaties and other international legal sources: the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe’s legal regulations, namely the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the ECHR, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

An additional group of sources are national and international court cases. Some domestic law sources are court cases concerning Alevis claims, including some first instance and high court decisions, such as the decisions of the Turkish Constitutional Court and the Turkish Council of State, which play an important role in understanding Alevis’ grievances in Turkish domestic law. I also use the ECtHR’s case law addressing Alevis’ human rights and freedoms, namely *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*, and *İzzettin Doğan and Other v. Turkey*. These cases are directly related to the first research question of this study and discuss the most relevant rights and freedoms, namely the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. The only other case in the ECtHR that is related to an Alevi citizen is one that does not connect directly to the research questions of this

¹⁹ The code regulates the closure and prohibition of all dervish lodges and zawiya, i.e., small Islamic monasteries.

²⁰ The code on constitution and functions of *Diyanet*.

²¹ The code related to the electricity market.

study, namely *Sinan Işık v. Turkey*, which “the applicant alleged, in particular, that the denial of his request to have the word “Islam” on his identity card replaced by the name of his faith “Alevi” violated Article 9 of the Convention. He also alleged a violation of Articles 6 and 14 of the Convention” (*Sinan Işık v. Turkey*, 2010: para.3).

Lastly, all the sources above are supplemented with academic literature, such as articles (see Shankland, 2003), books (see Şener, 2009), and conference proceedings (see Kurt, 2018) supplements.

2.2.2. Ethnographic Research Method

Ethnographic research is necessary to gain an understanding of how Alevism and international human rights law are interpreted in the field. It would be impossible to investigate the impact of human rights law on Alevis' lives and their relationship with the Republic of Turkey using doctrinal research methods alone; in other words, these are issues that require disciplines other than legal methods.

In this type of research, material derived from the other discipline serves as a necessary contribution to the legal arguments. The validity of the contributing argument is not determined in terms of the legal discipline only: it needs to be a valid argument within the auxiliary discipline itself. This type is exemplified by research that uses material from an empirical science (van Klink & Taekema, 2011: 11).

The ethnographic research method has provided the opportunity to collect field data by “watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms” (Krik & Miller, 1986: 9).

As a result, empirical data from ethnographic research allowed insights into the second, third and fourth research questions in this research, and “since empirical research is concerned with how law works in practice, it is to be expected that law’s interaction with other social factors is often one of its subjects” (Galligan, 2010: 979). Ethnography is a method “of considering, observing, co-living with human beings of some society, or some piece of society. It uses a microscope, not a telescope” (Friedman, 2002: 186). Ethnography helps to explore complex phenomena through direct experience in the field, providing access to the lives of the people researched; in other words, “that is, to gain a meaningful and nuanced understanding of behavior, attitudes, and values by getting close to the lives of the target population” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015: 182).

The ethnographic method in law is used to understand “how and to what extent law and legal ideas enter into people’s understandings, attitudes, and activities” (Galligan, 2010: 984). The data from the field enabled me to examine the relationship between Alevis, international human rights law and the Republic of Turkey. The ethnographic method is chosen because “ethnographic work on rights explores rights consciousness and asks when and why individuals choose to mobilize rights” (Merry, 2006a: 109). Ethnography “allows us to begin to explore how law features in different ways for individuals from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds” (Darian-Smith, 2004: 555). In summary, ethnographic research as a method provides the opportunity to study how law is working in people’s life (see Partington, 2010), in this study Alevis’.

2.2.3. A Grounded Approach to Some Theoretical Concepts

After analysing the data that I collected through empirical research, I used new theoretical concepts in an inductive process to gain a deeper understanding of the data, which suggested that legal theory alone was not sufficient. The fieldwork presented me with results that could not be fully understood or explained with the theoretical legal concepts with which I was familiar and had used thus far. For example, although I had detailed knowledge of international human rights law, I could not explain how Alevis were able to apply the language of international human rights law in their local contexts. To explain the data, it was necessary to look beyond the legal literature and into the theoretical ideas of social scientists. In other words, the theoretical framework in this research is a bottom-up approach. I started the research and fieldwork with no particular theories in mind, except international human rights law as the legal concept. After the data analysis, these theoretical concepts “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 12). This academic journey allows a broader perspective. I was able to expand my theoretical insights through reading the works of ethnographers, sociologists, criminologists, philosophers, and anthropologists.

Analysing the ethnographic data brings a new perspective on the Alevi identity. In general terms, the legal literature alone is insufficient to explain Alevis’ data about their identity, and other theoretical insights are needed. In other words, I needed to broaden the theoretical background, because I had begun this research without “a preconceived theory in mind” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 12). In my data, my attention was first attracted by their attachment to each other. Alevis in the field frequently spoke of “we, the Alevis”, implying a united community of millions of Alevis worldwide. My empirical data directed me to understand the Alevis’ sense of community and a literature review led me to the concept of imagined communities (see Anderson, 2006).

The empirical data shows that a single perspective cannot explain Alevism and the Alevi identities, which shapes and is shaped by many different elements. Alevis in the field explained their identities in different terms: religious, political, and lifestyle. The Alevi identity is a dynamic one, moulded through history by many different elements. Searching the identity construction literature to explain the data on the Alevi identity, I found concepts that fit this empirical data: fluid identity (see Bauman & Vecchi, 2008), cultural identity (see Hall 1990; Staring, van der Land, Tak & Kalb 1997), and hybrid identity (see Eriksen 2007; Smith 2008).

In the field, another issue related to Alevis’ human rights emerged; the use by almost all informants of terms specific to international human rights law, such as human rights, freedoms, the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. In other words, across cities, villages, and towns, Alevis are familiar with the language of human rights law. This finding from the analysed data, that Alevis on the ground are able to use the international human rights law language, raised the question of how this had come about. After the data analysis, I found another relevant concept, the localisation of international human rights law (see Merry, 2006b). This concept provides an understanding of how Alevis use international human rights law in their local situations and civil movements, as well as the opportunity to investigate the translators in Alevis’ lives who provided them with access to such language.

The ethnographic work revealed other perspectives in Alevis’ views on their situation in Turkey: being exposed to discrimination from the state and fellow citizens and being treated as second-class citizens. After the empirical data, the literature review also revealed the importance of further concepts: discrimination (see Dworkin 1978), inter-personal discrimination (see Whitley & Kite, 2010), citizenship (see Bellamy, 2008), and second-class citizenship (see Bosniak 2006; Waldron 2000; Young 1989).

The final theoretical concept is related to Alevis' attachment to the Republic of Turkey. In this research, the empirical data also revealed that Alevis express their attachment and belonging to the Republic of Turkey through different words and symbols. I found that my data could be explained through the concept of constitutional patriotism (see Habermas, 1996), and I used this to shed light on Alevis' attachment and loyalty despite facing human rights violations and problems in Turkey.

2.3. Multi-sited Ethnographic Research

In this study, the research questions have an impact on my methodology. As discussed in the previous section, ethnographic work was central because ethnography, from a methodological standpoint, occupies contextually direct and rich data. Although "conventionally, ethnography has involved the idea – if not necessarily the practice – of a relatively long term (typically several months upwards) stay in a field site of choice" (Falzon, 2009: 1), in this research, rather than following a single-site ethnographic research method, I used the principles and techniques of multi-sited ethnographic research.

According to Marcus, anthropological approaches were first applied to multidisciplinary researches in the 1980s and there may be some interdisciplinary areas that:

Do not share a clearly bounded object of study, distinct disciplinary perspectives that participate in them tend to be challenged. For ethnography, this means that the world system is not the theoretically constituted holistic frame that gives context to the contemporary study of peoples of local subjects closely observed by ethnographers, but it becomes, in a piecemeal way, integral to and embedded in discontinuous, multi-sited objects of study (Marcus, 1995: 97).

Multi-sited ethnographic research relates to concepts such as globalisation and transnationalism. Transnational networks directed certain scholars, such as Marcus, to question the conventional ethnographic concepts. Therefore, "for ethnographers interested in contemporary local changes in culture and society, single-sited research can no longer be easily located in a world system perspective" (Marcus, 1995: 98). The multi-sited ethnography:

Claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study (Marcus, 1995: 99).

Multi-sited ethnographic research does not study fields with conventional single-site ethnographic understanding, but is:

Designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (Marcus, 1995: 105).

Marcus describes the techniques of the multi-sited ethnography in the following terms: following the people, following the thing, following the metaphor, following the plot, story, or allegory, following the life of biography, or following the conflict (Marcus, 1995).

As Goodale summarizes, in the multi-sited approach the legal ethnographer assumes that “the field” does not denote primarily a bounded location in space - such as a village, courtroom, or legal district - but rather a set of relationships which are linked by common interests” (Goodale, 2002: 64). In this research, multi-sited research method provides to examine “... a defined, contemporary phenomenon that is common to two or more real-world or naturalistic settings” (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010: 587). The multi-sited ethnographic research provides the opportunity to research multiple actors in multiple locations, offers the opportunity to observe the phenomenon in different regions, and understand multiple dimensions in Alevi’s real world. “In other words, by illuminating the experiences, implications, or effects of a phenomenon in more than one setting, wider understandings about a phenomenon can emerge” (Mills et al., 2010: 587) as in this study. As Falzon states, both single-site and multi-site are partial approaches, and considers:

Most people who have written about multi-sitedness distinguish it methodologically from multi-country research, although it may be that in practice. It seems that multi-sitedness actually means not just sites, but spatialized (cultural) difference – it is not important how many and how distant sites are, what matters is that they are different (Falzon, 2009: 13).

In line with Falzon’s thinking, rather than stressing the number and location of sites, it was important to follow Alevi and Alevism as a religious phenomenon and their human rights violations.

As a legal scholar, although I did not know much about multi-site ethnography at first, I started field studies by considering Alevi and Alevism as a religious phenomenon and Alevi human rights violations due to this religious phenomenon. I intuitively proceeded with the field studies from place to place by following Alevi traces as they were explained to me by the locals. In line with Marcus, the ethnographic work in this study focuses on Alevi and allegations of violations of their human rights, and it interprets Alevism as a belief system and follows Alevi in their human rights situations. It was only afterwards that I learned that what I did was called multi-sited ethnography. This study is not multi-country research but was done at different sites in Turkey. It is important to consider the limits of following a multi-sited research approach, one of which is the data collection itself. After the data starts to repeat, new research sites no longer contribute to the research, as illustrated by the metaphor of a sponge, which has an exceptional ability to absorb water until it reaches a certain point. Thus, I ended the ethnographic work when the research could no longer absorb more data and started to repeat. My limit was data saturation, and I ended the ethnographic research when “the generic features of new findings consistently replicate earlier ones” (Angrosino, 2007: 58). After noticing similar cases over again, I was able to confirm that the cases saturated (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and decided to stop collecting data (see Saunders, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs, & Jinks, 2018).

2.3.1. The Multi-Sites in this Research

Alevi reside across Turkey and all around the world; therefore, conducting single-site fieldwork would be insufficient, and multi-sited ethnographic research was considered appropriate to understand the relationships between Alevi and international human rights law in the context of Turkey. “The drive for multi-sited ethnography is as much theoretical as

methodological: it advances a notion of connectivity—one that assumes a ‘local’ site is linked to a broader set of globalised relations” (Henne, 2017: 99); so, to investigate the connection between Alevis in Turkey and international human rights law, multi-sited research was essential. The only possible approach was by identifying multiple research sites across Turkey.

Before travelling to fieldwork locations, I interviewed a lawyer, Mustafa, who was the lawyer of the applicant Alevi family in the case before the ECtHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, as Chapter Four details. The purpose of meeting with my colleague, a lawyer, was to get general information about the case. I also interviewed representatives of the major Alevi NGOs: Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation, Cem Foundation, and Alevi-Bektashi Federation. My aim in organising interviews was to understand Alevis’ perspective on the problems, learn about their opinions, whether widely held or more obscure, and analyse whether the official opinions of Alevis’ problems and solutions were reflected in the field. As the following chapters details, Turkey’s legal system does not permit Alevis to construct and operate their *cemevis* as officially recognised places of worship. As an interim remedy, under the authority of these NGOs, Alevis established NGOs, built cultural centres and NGO headquarters buildings, and organised their *cemevis* in these buildings. For Alevis, NGOs also function as one aspect of the religious service provided, and thus, their leaders and senior administrators are the gatekeepers in my research, since NGOs provided valuable knowledge on Alevism from both religious and human rights perspectives.

In this multi-sited ethnographic research, I visited the Western Anatolia region, the Northern Anatolia region, and the Central Anatolia region, conducting approximately 60 semi-structured or unstructured interviews after obtaining informants’ consent to record and, in some cases, take photographs. I voice-recorded both semi-structured formal interviews and informal conversations. During semi-structured formal interviews, the voice recorder was visible, and in informal conversations, most recordings were made around the village or in the village cafe. Research participants in these multi-site studies have various social, legal, or religious positions, and most are gatekeepers and key informants. I was familiar with most of the persons and locations from my readings, family, and friends; therefore, in many locations, I was able to make formal appointments. Although our conversations started as semi-structured interviews, many continued informally as the interview progressed. For example, during my interview with an NGO or *cemevis* administrator, we were enthusiastically joined by other Alevis from the village cafe or *cemevi* when they understood my purpose. In such interviews and conversations, the suggestions made by Alevis directed my ethnographic work, helping me to follow them more effectively.

I was being guided by the notion of following, and rather than using a single small-scale site, I was using a multi-sited ethnographic method, moving among various sites, establishing a physical presence, and positing logic connections among these sites. These sites are locations where Alevism is considered a religious phenomenon. and the locals view the alleged human rights violations from a religious rights perspective. Some locations are the ones that Alevis directed me to visit. Although Alevis reside in every part of Turkey, I decided to begin the ethnographic work from familiar sites, because “knowledge about the people being studied and familiarity with their routines and rituals facilitate entry as well as rapport once the researcher has gained entry” (Lune & Berg, 2017: 112). I started in the Western Anatolia region, where family connections, i.e., being from the same *ocak* family line, enabled me to overcome suspicion and gain trust. People in these villages openly discussed their problems with me; for example, in the village cafes, intimate dialogues shed light on the research questions. In the village cafes, interviews were undertaken with many villagers simultaneously, and this trust enabled me to interview a local imam.

As a multi-sited ethnographic work, I followed Alevis and Alevism by reasoning through and along religious lines. Following Alevis and their allegations of human rights violation from

a religious perspective led me to locations and people with spiritual significance. The multi-sited ethnographic research method, which requires expansion into multiple realms and multiple actors, directed me to locations in the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region, locations to which Alevis attribute religious importance. These are locations where religiously and historically important Alevi figures, i.e., dervishes, lived and were buried. These dervishes had continued their religious activities in these locations and had become known as significant and respected religious figures (see Erduğan, 2018). As the *ocak* system title in Chapter One explains, the Alevi culture and belief system are denominational, and consequently, these religious leaders are widely venerated and considered holy personalities. For example, one of the mystics, spiritual leader, humanist, and philosopher Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, lived in the Central Anatolia region. In addition, Hamdullah Çelebi, who used to be the head of the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli dervish lodge [*postnişin*], and his followers were exiled to the Northern Anatolia region.

Locations in the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region are important culturally, in addition to their role in the religious belief system. Alevis in these areas are associated with Islamic beliefs but also try to retain the Alevi beliefs, prayers, and practices, such as the brotherhood in Alevism [*musahiplik*] (see Üçer, 2010). So, following Alevism as a religious phenomenon led me to visit these two regions to understand their sentimental and religious value.

My family ties and focus on following Alevis and Alevism also guided my ethnographic research in the Central Anatolia region. For example, during my reading, I learned that an opposition party was governing an Alevi township. In this township, despite a high migration rate, harmony and cooperation are maintained through the NGOs. It was known for its summer religious festival, organised for over 20 years. Although I was an outsider in this township in the Central Anatolia region, I was able to contact a family friend, who became my reference person, and family ties and the *ocak* system in Alevism were once again the keys to entering the field, bringing the opportunity to observe and to interview a senior administrator in a municipality and other elders.

After reviewing my data, I felt dissatisfied with not having interviewed the important Alevi religious leader, Oğuz, who is a religious authority in the Alevi-Bektashi belief system. In 2014, I decided to expand my research to include an interview with him. Again, my family ties guided my research, allowing me to request an appointment with this Alevi religious leader. After my visit, he directed me to the capital city, Ankara. By using snowball sampling, I contacted an important *cemevi* and an NGO representative. I also visited a *dede* in Ankara and a jurist family, with whom I had professional connections.

In some locations, such as in Ankara, snowballing supported my methodological approach. I started the ethnographic research with a group of familiar people and later also asked each participant “to provide details of someone else whom they consider to be a good research subject for the purposes of the study, and in that way gradually build up a larger sample of participants” (Webley, 2010: 934). In the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region, I had the opportunity to expand the research sites to other locations, townships, villages, and people, such as *dedes* and *cemevis* administrators, by snowball sampling. For example, in some of my visits, a *dede*, or sometimes an ordinary Alevi, directed me to other townships and villages. In another location, a senior NGO administrator advised me to interview an important religious figure, a *dede*, in the township, and another *dede* directed me to a *cemevi* in another city. As a result, I incorporated different locations in my multi-sited ethnographic research through suggestions and snowball sampling.

2.3.2. *Why not Istanbul, Europe, and Kurdish Speaking Alevis?*

Notably, I avoided fieldwork in Istanbul. In Istanbul, I interviewed Cem Foundation, senior administrator, and visited two *cemevis*. However, Istanbul and other big cities are idiosyncratic locations; severe living conditions in these areas impact people's priorities. In locations such as Istanbul, the "Alevi revival could never restore the genuine Alevi *cems* since as a consequence of urbanization some 'traditions' (*gelenekler*) were irrecoverably lost" (Erdemir, 2005: 945). Thus, I planned to focus on areas outside the cosmopolitan areas and continue the research in locations where Alevism remains a religious phenomenon.

Including Ankara but not Istanbul can be justified as follows: My visit to Ankara was a direct result of snowball sampling. In 2014, I interviewed the Alevi religious leader Oğuz, and during this visit, he strongly recommended that I visit Ankara. I visited Ankara in 2014 on his advice. Ankara was therefore an important exception to the avoidance of urban areas due to my methodology.

I also excluded Alevis in Europe from this study for two reasons. The first one was financial. As this research is self-funded, I had no budget or time for it. Additionally, none of the Alevis had directed or guided me to Europe, as with Istanbul. The reason for the fieldwork in Ankara did not apply to Europe or Istanbul. However, I spoke with returned migrants, former guestworkers from several European countries, who decided to pick up their lives in their home regions after getting retired. I also spoke with European Turks living outside of Turkey who spend their summer holidays in Turkey.

Another issue was the Kurdish-speaking Alevis. I deliberately did not include this group in this research. As previous paragraphs discussed, this research interprets Alevism as a religious phenomenon. This research aims to explore Alevis' human rights conditions apart from the Kurdish debates in Turkey. Kurdish- or Zaza-speaking Alevis mostly live in Turkey's southern and eastern regions, such as the city of Tunceli. These regions are outside the focus of the current study, which excludes the Kurdish debates. I consider that such issues might be the subject of future research (see Chapter Ten).

2.3.3. *Data Collection: Interview, Observation, and Legal Documents*

The data collected from Alevis' settings "in those that have not been specifically set up for research purposes (such as experiments or formal interviews) also gives a distinctive character to ethnographic work" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 4). In my interviews, I collected information both from face-to-face semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. I also took field notes on people's lifestyles, living conditions, and behaviour (Creswell, 2014). Formal interviews and informal conversations are the primary sources of the ethnographic research. During the research, I conducted semi-structured interviews by asking open-ended questions. In contrast, informal conversations with one of the Alevis often led to the involvement of other Alevis, creating an informal atmosphere in which frank opinions were expressed about the research subject. In some fields, as the above section details, the snowball sampling technique expanded the scope of data collection.

The methodology in this research offers direct interaction with the researched group. The average age of the people who took part in the study is middle age and up. Some of the people taking part in the research are well-educated retired officers, while others are not as well-educated. It is possible to argue that the contributions of the elderly and men are greater than those of women and young people. The fact that women are more reserved in social situations than men, spend more time at home, and that young people are leaving their villages and townships as a result of increased migration. These reasons may help to explain the greater contribution of elderly men. These circumstances were not chosen but followed the natural flow

of doing research. In general, however, interviews were conducted with the certainty that the participants had some knowledge of Alevism or were gatekeepers.

Some interviews conducted with gatekeepers and key informants were formal, semi-structured interviews. For these, I contacted respondents, explained the aims of the research, and scheduled appointments; however, other interviews were unstructured. In semi-structured interviews, I asked descriptive questions of four types: typical ground-tour, mini-tour, example, and experience questions (see Spradley, 2016). In typical ground-tour questions, respondents described general situations in answer to questions such as, what are Alevi's human rights problems? Mini-tour questions further probed the issues arising from ground-tour questions. For example, what are the problems related to Alevi's places of worship? Was one of the mini-tour questions. In example and experience questions, respondents exemplified Alevi's human rights problems or detailed their experiences responding to questions, such as what are Alevi's, or your experiences about places of worship in Turkey? In the formal interviews, descriptive questions allowed me to generalize; however, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews maintained the conversation flow. I obtained permission to interview all key informants and gatekeepers. In discussing their willingness to participate in this research, people expressed a desire to make their voice heard by participating in an academic study, but two local NGO leaders denied my interview request, stating that they were not familiar with me and not interested in my research.

Besides the semi-structured interviews, I also conducted informal conversations. This method is essential to observing people in their local settings. For example, in some cases, I visited village cafes. In these busy places, the number of contributors quickly expanded. In some cases, questions were "non-directive questions, then, are relatively open-ended, rather than requiring the interviewee to provide a specific piece of information" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 118). I listened to the participants without intervening and let them talk as much as they wanted and learned from what they discussed (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The informal conversations also provided an opportunity to examine and observe the researched phenomenon. However, in some cases, I had "constantly to monitor the direction, depth, and detail of the interview, the topics to include and topics to avoid, together with question order" (Burgess, 2006: 98). The informal conversations and semi-structured interviews focused on: Alevi's human rights conditions; debates over places of worship, religious education, and *Diyanet*; the relation between Alevi and Sunni; the relation between Alevi and the Turkish State; Alevism and the Alevi identity.

Observation, which can "present more nuanced images, which tend to contradict the more straightforward results of the interview-based analyses" (Kritzer, 2002: 153), was also done during meetings and informal conversations. Observations were made in private houses and in public areas such as village cafes, *cemevis* and NGO buildings. My observations were not systematic, because in systematic observation "observation and recording are done according to explicit procedures which permit replication..." (Reiss, 1971: 4); therefore, I incorporated observations during the interviews. The observation in ethnographic research method may also be done as an outsider.

This form of observation is more likely to be episodic rather than continuous, in that the researcher observes a specific event or events for a relatively short period. Advocates of this research method consider that it combines some distance with a wealth of opportunities to collect contextualized, rich, description of the setting and quotes from those being observed (Webley, 2010: 938).

I was observer, but not a participant in these contexts, and integrated observations with interviews, which supported each other in fieldwork. For example, I had the opportunity to observe Alevi relations with the mosque and imam while interviewing the imam in a village in Western Anatolia. I was able to observe the conditions of *cemevis* and situations of people while interviewing NGO leaders or *dedes* in *cemevis* and in NGO's branch offices. Consequently, interviews, informal conversations, and observations are intertwined and mutually supportive in my ethnographic research.

During the fieldwork, both in 2011 and 2014, I stayed in hotels centrally located to reach villages and townships, I had to stay in hotels in nearby city centres. I stayed in these locations for a limited time, sometimes for a single interview and at other times for several days.

The language of the empirical data, interviews, was entirely Turkish. The opportunity to use the local language was an advantage. As a researcher, the ability to communicate in the native language allowed me access to the field and detailed data. The ability to communicate in a common language enabled me to investigate research questions from specific domains, broadening the scope of conversations. However, this involved translating all data into English, transcribing the recorded interviews, and writing up my field notes.

There have been many changes in Turkey's political and social structure during, and especially, after the data collection period. The war in Syria led to a massive influx of more than 3.5 million refugees (see UNHCR Turkey, n.d.). In 2016, a military coup attempt was followed by dramatic changes in the country; in 2017, the parliamentary system was replaced by a presidential system with a constitutional amendment, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the President of Turkey (see Yokuş, 2018). Following the coup attempt, the government declared a state of emergency, thousands allegedly involved were arrested (see Demirtaş, 2017), and Turkey derogated from its obligations under the ECHR during the state of emergency. As the data collection process was completed before these changes, the effects of these events and changes to Alevi's situation are not discussed, and the impact of such changes may be subject to further studies (see Chapter Ten).

Besides the empirical data collection process, I also gathered information from legal and official documents, such as the Turkish Constitution, relevant codes, national and international court files, international human rights conventions, international organization, state and EU reports, guidelines, press releases, and newspapers. Such data were collected from open sources freely available via internet access.

2.4. Challenges in the Research

Researching Alevism in Turkey is a sensitive and challenging issue, due to historical experiences, including violence and marginalisation, as Chapter One details. In working at the research sites, overcoming this sensitivity was my fundamental challenge. As a researcher, I had to overcome Alevi's suspicion, build trust, and ensure that they felt confident enough to give interviews and allow access to their sites. My two approaches were using personal recommendations from respected members of Alevi and my own family line, i.e., the hearth families, or *ocak*, system, as Chapter One details.

It would be unrealistic to state that any *ocak* family member would personally know members of all *ocak* families, but in general terms, Alevi have ideas about other *ocak* families. In my research, people are somehow vaguely related to people in my family tree by this *ocak* family system, but they don't know me personally in these villages before my visits. So, I decided to start my research in the Western Anatolia region, where my own *ocak* family members reside. I was able to benefit from a strong degree of mutual trust felt by Alevi within this same socio-religious organisational system, *ocak*. The *ocak* family system also allowed me

access to other research sites. In most sites, Alevis asked about my *ocak* family, and my answers ensured the trust of the people in the research sites.

My second solution to building trust was using reference people, i.e., gatekeepers. Gatekeepers allowed me to enter the field; because, “gatekeepers are people or groups who are in positions to grant or deny access to a research setting... Gatekeepers may be formal or informal watchdogs who protect the setting, people, or institutions sought as the target of research” (Lune & Berg, 2017: 112). I was able to establish trust-based communication via these gatekeepers, such as NGO leaders, senior administrators, and an important Alevi religious leader. Alevi foundations and federations are remarkably well organised, with numerous branch offices around Turkey. In most of my research sites, these NGO leaders and senior administrators were my references. For these NGO representatives, giving an interview with a researcher studying in the Netherlands meant an opportunity to reveal Alevis’ problems to Europeans. For example, in two different cases, NGO leaders and senior administrators declared their wish to be heard by the EU authorities, believing that research and publications would contribute to greater academic attention to Alevis’ problems. In some locations, I overcame suspicion and lack of trust by using the snowball sampling technique (see Burgess, 2006), a method that eased my access to other Alevis.

Researching human rights violations is a sensitive topic in the contemporary political context in Turkey, and there is the danger that the results may conflict with the government’s position. Moreover, the period of this research was one of great turmoil in Turkey’s contemporary political context. The only way to overcome this challenge was to be objective and as open as possible during the research and writing process.

2.5. Validity, Reliability, Objectivity, and Reflexivity

The terms validity and reliability have different meanings for lawyers than they do in the context of qualitative research. The validity that I was familiar with meant being legally enforceable and available, or, in other words, valid according to all the requirements of a legal system. Reliability, on the other hand, meant accuracy, and as a lawyer, it was mostly related to the law of evidence. However, qualitative research requires a truly qualitative perspective, in which the concepts of internal-external validity and reliability have different meanings. For more robust transparency, I adopted the following understandings of the following concepts in this research.

Validity in qualitative research “is a measure of the degree to which an observation actually demonstrates what it appears to demonstrate” (Angrosino, 2007: 58). Internal validity is essential to authenticity, trustworthiness, and the plausibility of the claims; in other words, it “is the term used to refer to the extent to which research findings are a true reflection or representation of reality rather than being the effects of extraneous variables” (Brink, 1993: 35). Internal validity answers the question: “are these findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implication?” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005: 205). I considered internal validity by asking descriptive questions to the interviewees, and I purposefully avoided responding to any question that might reveal my own point of view about the research questions in both semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Interviewees had definite ideas about the issues and subjects of this research, and their clearly stated answers showed that they were able to construct their own opinions without outside prompting, which gives me insight into Alevis’ views. I interviewed experts, gatekeepers, and key informants, such as NGO leaders and senior administrators, *dedes*, and village headmen, gaining insight and direct knowledge of the research questions and relevant topics.

In qualitative research, “external validity addresses the degree or extent to which such representations or reflections of reality are legitimately applicable across groups” (Brink, 1993: 35); in other words, external validity “in general refers to the approximate truth of propositions, inferences or conclusions” (Leeuw & Schmeets, 2016: 121). In my research, some measure of external validity is possible via rich description; ethnographic work in different locations is described in detail, as are the purpose of the study, informants, locations, reasons for selecting these locations, and types of questions. By employing such information, I aimed to ensure that “readers understand that the account is credible. Rich description also enables readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other settings or similar contexts” (Creswell & Miller, 2000: 129). Using the multi-sited ethnographic research method enables readers to compare the data across the different locations through rich description. The multi-sited ethnographic research method avoids the limits of the traditional single-site ethnographic approach, and this offers the potential for generalisation through researching the same question in different locations.

Reliability is about the reproducibility of the research and “is a measure of the degree to which any given observation is consistent with a general pattern and not the result of random chance” (Angrosino, 2007: 58). The “goal of reliability is to minimize bias and error in the collection and analysis of data to the point that the same results and conclusions would be reached if the research were conducted again” (Mills et al., 2010: 800). Reliability in my research is achieved through transparency. The transparency of the processes and data in the research will highlight that the results of the research are not a result of chance. Additionally, reliability is achieved by using the data collected directly from local settings. I questioned and observed Alevi in their environments with minimal disruption to their normal lives. The indicators of transparency and replicability are direct quotations, detailed descriptions of field studies, interviews, conversations, observations, locations, and the people themselves.

“Objectivity/confirmability (or ‘external reliability’): the degree to which conclusions flow from the information that has been collected, and not from any biases on the part of the researcher” (Angrosino, 2007: 60). Objectivity is a fundamental issue of this research; therefore, I proceeded with caution during the research. Objectivity is achieved by being transparent, both for the readers and the respondents. From the perspective of readers, I made clear the methodological steps so that they could form a judgment. Being transparent from the perspective of respondents meant being very open about the research. During interviews, I faced questions from the interviewees that could have harmed the objectivity of the research; however, I restricted my responses to the content of the research and was careful to avoid stating particular positions. To ensure objectivity, I took field notes and recorded voice for all data, including unstructured interviews. In my research, objectivity has required openness in all of the research phases, including the design, methodology, data collection, analysis, and writing. Being Alevi myself and having family ties allowed me access to these people and their confidence, resulting in a greater degree of openness. The interviewees made efforts to discuss their problems as fully and honestly as possible. This is an important step towards objectivity by creating the conditions for accurate first-hand data.

The role of researchers is essential in ethnographic researches. In this regard, reflexivity is “about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the research” (Reay, 2007: 611). During the ethnographic work, I refrained from becoming native, while remembering that I was part of the social world that I was studying (see Lune & Berg, 2017) as a member of the researched people. While conducting observations, I emphasised my relation to the research only as a researcher. I saw myself “as an insider and think as an outsider” (Lune & Berg, 2017: 131) by being fully cognizant that “research is a dialogue” (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017: 436). As an Alevi, I positioned myself in the data collection process in the middle ground

between becoming involved and distant (see Patton, 2002). During the data collection process, I was completely open with the respondents. I introduced myself, the research, and my aims at the beginning of the data collection process and allowed the respondents complete freedom to answer my open-ended questions. Throughout this process, I avoided pressuring them and tried not to interpret their responses during our conversations. The open-ended questions gave me the opportunity to adopt a middle position, i.e., I made efforts to avoid presenting a direct opinion that might affect or in any way constrain the respondent's answers. In my research, I had natural, informal conversations with the Alevis; however, being an Alevi, myself required more effort in objectivity. As Burgess states "the experiences of the insider would appear to outweigh the experiences of the outsider. However, there are difficulties that have to be overcome in this situation; additional effort is required to ensure that the insider researcher does not take things for granted or overlook situations that at first sight appear all too familiar" (Burgess, 2006: 19).

2.6. Data Analysis

In this research, the data analysis process is related to the outcomes of the empirical research method. As a starting point, I transcribed all my research notes, listened to, and transcribed all recorded formal and informal interviews, creating extensive data. Although condensing makes the data stronger (see Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014), a large amount of data in my empirical research took much time during the coding process. I used open coding, and made line-by-line analysis, which is the "close examination of data, phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 119). The themes of the data analysis are descriptive: they describe the researched phenomenon related to the research questions, and semantic: they give proper meaning of the sentences of Alevis by drawing meaning from their words. The themes are first "an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (Saldaña, 2009: 13) of the data guided by reading the related theoretical literature (see Chapter Three). I used codes to label the data and bring them together. There are two descriptive master codes, conceptual labels: Human rights (HR), and identity (ID). Later, under each master code, there are subcodes "to mark off segments of data in each class of variables" (Miles et al., 2014: 81). The master codes in this research are divided into subcodes. These master codes and subcodes are parts of categories, and there are themes from the field studies. All these analyses end with outcomes. The details of master codes, subcodes, categories, themes, and outcomes are in Appendix One.

2.7. Ethical Concerns

Ethnographic research is a method in which researchers should place particular emphasis on ethics because this research subjects' people, and "researchers must give considerable thought to ways they can protect the subjects from harm and injury. This is especially true when dealing with vulnerable groups or settings" (Lune & Berg, 2017: 111). In my research, it is essential to be mindful of ensuring data security and confidentiality of Alevis; thus, I especially considered the issues of informed consent and privacy.

During the data collection process, I maintained complete transparency. All participants in this research were informed about my role and the research topic to gain their verbal consent to participate. Therefore, I had taken the "consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation" (Lune & Berg, 2017: 46). I reminded the participants of their freedom to

withdraw from the study, and stated that I would use the data in strict confidence. In structured interviews, the interviewees were informed in advance about the questions and research topics. Permission to record and use data was given before the interviews and fieldwork, ensuring that participation in this research was voluntary.

Research about Alevis and human rights in Turkey requires particular attention to protect the participants' confidentiality. Strict codes of confidence oblige the protection of informants' identities. In this ethical concept, "subjects should be guaranteed confidentiality, in which the researcher can identify a person's responses, but promises not to divulge that person's identity in any report, paper, or public forum" (Bhattacharjee, 2012: 138). In this research, I remove all elements that may reveal informants' identities, replacing these with pseudonyms and codes for the locations.

2.8. Structure of the Research

The research starts with Chapter One, the introduction. This part explains Alevism, description of the Alevi identity, exploring Alevis' identity construction from the past, the Ottoman Empire, and to the present. The chapter continues with a short history of the Republic of Turkey and the situation of Alevis in the Republic of Turkey. The chapter also deals with the violence and massacre that Alevis experienced in the Republic of Turkey. The chapter deals with an introduction to Alevi NGOs, the role of Alevi NGOs in Alevis' lives, and clarifies Alevis' human rights-related problems in the Republic of Turkey. This chapter details research questions and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Two unfolds the research. This chapter starts with an introduction. Section two is about multidisciplinary research and describes the doctrinal research method, the ethnographic research method, and the grounded approach to some theoretical concepts. This chapter continues with a special focus on the multi-sited ethnographic research method in this study. This chapter deals with the challenges in this research, including validity, reliability, objectivity, and reflexivity in the research, data analysis, and ethical concerns. The chapter ends with the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Three is the theoretical framework and its operationalisation to the situation of the Alevi. The research itself directed me to issues such as understanding Alevis as a community and the dynamic character of the Alevi identity; using international human rights law in local situations; and Alevis' relations to the Republic of Turkey. The theoretical framework is shaped around these issues. After analysing all the empirical data, it was clearly necessary to employ concepts other than law to understand the data in this research. This chapter starts with an introduction, and continues with the literature on imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism. The chapter continues with historical analysis of the Alevi identity, application of the theoretical framework to the current situation of Alevis, and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Four is the legal chapter. This chapter is about the first research question: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims? The chapter is about Turkey and the incorporation of international human rights law into Turkish domestic law. This chapter starts with an introduction and continues with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, the UN human rights legal documents, the Council of Europe, the EU, and with Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, which deals with the incorporation of international treaties in Turkish law. This chapter details human rights and freedoms, particularly the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education and religious education. These rights are the ones related to Alevis complaints in Turkey. These rights are studied from the UN, the Council

of Europe, and Turkish domestic law concepts. Additionally, the Toledo Principles, formulated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) regarding the right to education and religious education are examined. This chapter continues the discussion of Alevis' legal actions regarding related human rights. It also discusses the Turkish religious culture and ethics lessons textbooks and the changes in the textbooks after the ECtHR decision. The chapter ends with the Turkish law related to legal regulations on secularism and a conclusion.

Chapter Five is an introduction to the field studies chapter. This chapter provides the reader with the necessary background information to give meaning to the following fieldwork chapters.

Chapter Six relates to the fieldwork in the Western Anatolia region. This chapter starts with an introduction, deals with three different Alevi settlements, namely, Kazana, Yana and Hakah villages, and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Seven is about the fieldwork in the Northern Anatolia region. The chapter begins with an introduction, then moves on with the famous minstrel's family in Fide township, other Alevis in Fide township, Zirve city, Tepe township, an NGO and *cemevi* in Zirve city, Dereli city and Çatı village, and ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Eight is about the fieldwork in the Central Anatolia region. This chapter begins with an introduction and the locations of this chapter are Sarı township, Yenice township and Çatı village. The Yenice township section details my visits to the mayor and some residents of Yenice, a woman representative of an NGO. The section ends with my fieldwork in Çifteli village. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Nine is the fieldwork done in 2014 in the Central Anatolia region. The first purpose of this fieldwork was to interview an important Alevi religious leader in Turkey, Oğuz. The chapter starts with an introduction and the interview I made with Oğuz. As a result of snowball sampling, I also visited Ankara city in 2014, one of the biggest *cemevi* in the city, and interviewed an Alevi *dede* and an Alevi jurist, father, and son. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

Chapter Ten concludes the research. This chapter starts with an introduction, aims to revisit the research questions and methodology. The chapter continues with an overview of the chapters and thematic comparisons between the field studies. This chapter answers research questions, explores the general conclusions of the thesis, and ends with the current situations of the field study regions in 2022 and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 3 Theoretical Framework and its Operationalisation to the Situation of the Alevi

3.1. Introduction

The data collected during the ethnographic research required concepts other than merely legal ones. The theoretical literature from the broad social sciences domain was therefore a source of concepts and theories that could clarify the data in this study.

In this research, concepts such as imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising international human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism are used. In this chapter, I develop this theoretical framework in section two. Section three details the historical analysis of Alevism and the Alevi identity in relation to these concepts. Section four is the application of the theoretical concepts on Alevism and the Alevi identity. This is not a historical analysis, but rather creating a connection between the theoretical concepts and the current situation of the Alevis. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

3.2. Some Central Concepts from Anthropology, Sociology, and Law

3.2.1. Imagined Communities

The imagined communities concept deals with modern nationalism and the rise of imagined communities, together with the influence of language, press, and other factors (Anderson 2006, originally 1983). A nation may be outlined as an “imagined political community” (Anderson, 2006: 6). “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson, 2006: 6). In constructing such imagined communities, language, book publishing, and capitalism have a role (Anderson, 2006). For example, “with the advent of the appropriate technology, people were not only now able to learn about the same events in the same manner, but as a result it became possible to predicate the nation as a mental construct and the idea of nationhood as a collective state of mind” (Blackshaw, 2010: 119). Members of imagined communities are connected even without any direct contact; in other words, “it was no longer necessarily by knowing each other that individuals could be a community; they could now know community by collectively imagining it” (Blackshaw, 2010: 119). “One could be fully aware of sharing a language and a religious faith (to varying degrees), customs and traditions, without any great expectations of ever meeting one’s partners” (Anderson, 2006: 188).

Imagined community are accepted as a real community.

That community is imagined does not mean that it is not real. We need to abandon the distinction between real versus imagined community. Territorial kinds of community are different from the new expressions of post-traditional community – virtual communities, New Age communities, gay communities, national communities, ethnic communities and religious communities – which are also reality-creating forces (Delanty, 2009: 157).

At this point, remembering the Thomas theorem may be useful. The Thomas theorem holds that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928: 572). In such a case, when a group of people define themselves as a community, they are real

and real in their consequence, i.e., they are real, existing imagined communities. Thus, with the use of the concept of imagined communities, we can understand how people feel and experience being connected with each other without ever having actually met.

3.2.2. Fluid and Hybrid Identity

Definitions of identity vary between researched communities and depending on from which perspective we examine identity. There are many different components of identity, for example, national symbols, religion, and culture. Group members may perceive themselves as alike based on their commonalities (Moore, 2004). What these commonalities are depends on group dynamics and “members of a group can see themselves as having the same social identity, can coerce themselves as being alike in some way” (Moore, 2004: 179).

Identity constantly changes; it is not fixed. Identity is constructed and conceptualised continuously and with different variables. Identity is a process, and in societies, individuals follow this process and form identities by interacting with other members (see Lawler, 2014). In the debate on identity construction, modernity and identity are connected: we live in a fluid form of modernity, which means that identity evolves with changes in society (Bauman & Vecchi, 2008). Identity is a never-ending experiment; we try different identities, causing instability (Bauman & Vecchi, 2008). Similarly, identity never ends; it is a process, identity is always under construction and therefore cannot be explained from a single perspective (see Hall, 1997). Identity may be conceptualised under three different subjects: “(a) enlightenment subject, (b) sociological subject, and (c) post-modern subject” (Hall, 1996: 597). The first concept, enlightenment subject, is about the self, the individual. The sociological subject creates the connection between in and out, the personal and the public. Lastly, the post-modern subject is about the instability of identity, in which “the subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (Hall, 1996: 598). Our cultures have significant roles in constructing our identities, and:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990: 222).

Cultural identity is rooted in the differences, past, and future of people. Cultural identity is a concept that changes over time under the influence of factors such as history and culture. Thus, identity in terms of cultural identity is fluid. So, “localities and identities are perennially forged from specific temporal and spatial relationships marked by systematic asymmetries of power, and systematic conjunctions of politics, economics and cultural process” (Staring & others, 1997: 14).

Hybridisation is about change of identity and how subjects may recreate, reshape, and reformulate identities. “Hybridity directs attention towards individuals or cultural forms that are reflexively – self-consciously – mixed, that is syntheses of cultural forms or fragments of diverse origins” (Eriksen, 2007: 113). New identities and mixed cultures result from the interaction of groups of people; consequently, hybridity challenges the idea of homogenous identities (see Cieslik & Verkuyten, 2006). Globalisation influences hybrid identities. In hybrid identities, elements of different cultures interact and establish a new identity (Smith, 2008), in other words, “the local and the global interact to create a new identity that is distinct in each context” (Smith, 2008: 3). When state borders change, people respond by remaking, reshaping, and reformulating their identities; identities become hybrid in the process of reshaping. The

hybridisation of identity is a dynamic process; thus, many cultures are interacting and hybrid identities are appearing (see Smith, 2008).

In this research, the concept of identity is seen as a fluid and never-ending process. In such a fluidity, hybridisation has an essential role in allowing people to recreate, reshape, and reconstruct their identities. This also implies that identities are not fixed and static.

3.2.3. Localising Human Rights

Localising human rights means making global human rights law available at a local level.

Localization was defined as a process whereby local human rights needs inspire the further interpretation and elaboration of human rights norms at levels ranging from the domestic to the global, and serve as a point of departure for human rights action (Feyter, 2006: 23).

Localisation may occur with transplantation, i.e., adapting a program or model from a different place. This process is a global one, and it requires “appropriation and translation” (Merry, 2006b: 135). Appropriation refers to, “taking the programs, interventions, and ideas developed by activists in one setting and replicating them in another setting” (Merry, 2006b: 135). “Translation is the process of adjusting the rhetoric and structure of these programs or interventions to local circumstances” (Merry, 2006b: 135). Translation has three dimensions (Merry, 2006b). The first is framing, which is packaging and presenting ideas. In this dimension “the images, symbols, and stories through which the program is presented draw on specific local cultural narratives and conceptions” (Merry, 2006b: 136). The second dimension “is adapting the appropriated program to the structural conditions in which it operates” (Merry, 2006b: 136) and the last the redefinition of the target population as programs are translated.

Human rights language is similarly being extracted from the universal and adapted to national and local communities. But, as we have seen, to translate human rights into the vernacular is not to change their fundamental meanings. Instead, the legal basis of human rights and the institutions through which they are implemented retain their grounding in global structures and understandings (Merry, 2006b: 219).

The vernacularization involves appropriation and translation (see Merry, 2006b). “As ideas from transnational sources travel to small communities, they are typically vernacularized, or adapted to local institutions and meanings” (Merry, 2006c: 39). In vernacularization, two aspects are important: layers and translators. The different groups may frame the problems in different terms and perspectives that may be understood as the distinctions in social layers (Merry, 2006b). “Each layer had a distinctive way of framing the problem and acting on it” (Merry, 2006b: 194). In this context, for example, activists and NGOs from one layer may interpret problems as a violation of human rights and discrimination, while those from another layer may evaluate the same issues as a product of political or historical conflicts. There will be different layers, but the question is, how will these layers interact? “The translators were people who helped the members of one layer reframe their grievances in the language of others” (Merry, 2006b: 194). Moreover, “...it is important to have translators who can redefine particular problems in terms that flow across national and class lines” (Merry, 2006b: 194).

3.2.4. *Discrimination*

Another central concept in this research is discrimination. In general terms, discrimination may be defined as:

A detrimental distinction based on grounds which may not be attributed to the individual and which have no justified consequences in social, political or legal relations (colour, race, sex, etc.), or on grounds of membership in social categories (cultural, language, religious, political or other opinion, national circle, social origin, social class, property, birth or other status) (United Nations Secretary-General, 1949: para.88).

In other words, “discrimination consists of behaving differently toward people based solely or primarily on their membership in a social group” (Whitley & Kite, 2010: 370).

Discrimination is also about being denied equal rights. The distinction between the right to equal treatment and the right to treatment as an equal is useful in this context. The citizens may have two sorts of rights related to equality.

First is the right to *equal treatment*, which is the right to an equal distribution of some opportunity or resource or burden. Every citizen, for example, has a right to an equal vote in a democracy... The second is the right to *treatment as an equal*, which is the right, not to receive the same distribution of some burden or benefit, but to be treated with the same respect and concern as anyone else... (Dworkin, 1978: 227).

Discrimination may also happen based on people’s opinions, for example, not being hired because of one’s political opinions. According to the definitions of discrimination, there may be different discrimination grounds. The state may adopt policies that discriminate against people based on their religion and beliefs. For example, people may experience discrimination in workplace due to being a member of a religious community: “Religious discrimination at work refers to any unfavourable treatment of an applicant or employee based on his or her religious beliefs” (Ghumman & Ryan, 2018: 143). This kind of discrimination may occur in recruitment, job assignments and promotion (see ILO, n.d.).

A second distinction is between discrimination by the state, including employment discrimination by the state and local authorities, and interpersonal discrimination, including employment discrimination by private employers and not being able to do business as a result of interpersonal discrimination. Discrimination by the state can occur in different ways. It may happen in the form of not being hired or promoted in the workplace due to the person’s religion and beliefs. Discrimination by the state also occurs by not giving social services to some local authorities due to their political affiliation or by not giving any share to a certain group from the total state budget because of their political opinion.

Another form of discrimination is interpersonal discrimination, which involves one group of people discriminating against another group. Individuals of stigmatised groups are exposed to interpersonal discrimination, which refers to being discriminated against due to being a member of the stigmatised group. Interpersonal discrimination may include:

The display of behaviors that tend to be subtle and are often nonverbal. Additionally, interpersonal discrimination may be the result of unconscious intentions to discriminate and/or may result when individuals’ are trying to consciously control their verbal reactions and hence, their nonverbal reactions “leak out” prejudicial reactions (Madera & Hebl, 2013: 57).

Interpersonal discrimination may include nonverbal reactions but also “nonverbal behavior, it may include nonverbal, verbal, and paraverbal expressions” (Madera & Hebl, 2013: 57). This kind of discrimination “is more ambiguous but unequivocal way in which social exclusion of stigmatized groups continues to be achieved and maintained” (Madera & Hebl, 2013: 58). Interpersonal discrimination is experienced by members of stigmatised groups in terms of not being hired or promoted by private employers or not being able to do business because of being a member of the stigmatised group.

3.2.5. *Citizenship*

There are different perspectives on citizenship, but “citizenship has traditionally referred to a particular set of political practices involving specific public rights and duties with respect to a given political community” (Bellamy, 2008: 3). In modern understandings, citizenship components are: holding a legal status, enjoying citizenship rights, participating in political decision-making processes, and feeling a sense of belonging (see Beaman, 2016). Citizenship has interconnected components. The three components of citizenship may be counted as “membership of a democratic political community, the collective benefits and rights associated with membership, and participation in the community’s political, economic, and social processes – all of which combine in different ways to establish a condition of civic equality.” (Bellamy, 2008: 12).

The concept of second-class citizenship combines the concepts of citizenship and discrimination, and second-class citizens “are people who enjoy status citizenship but who nevertheless are denied the enjoyment of citizenship rights, or “equal citizenship” (Bosniak, 2006: 15). People rely on their citizenship when claiming their rights and freedoms; however, not being able to use such rights and freedoms demonstrates second-class citizenship. In second-class citizenship, people are disadvantaged; in other words, the “social disadvantage prevents their full participation in the life of the community” (Heywood, 1994: 159).

Second-class citizenship concerns both the ability to enjoy equal treatment and the right to be treated as an equal. In equal treatment, the state is expected to ensure that every citizen can access public services, opportunities, resources, rights, and freedoms on an equal footing (see Carens, 2000); moreover, these must be available to all without any discrimination; otherwise, individuals will feel that they are treated as second-class citizens. The right to be treated as an equal will be denied, i.e., citizens will be considered second-class citizens if they are considered less than equal, for example because they belong to an oppressed religious or cultural group. The second-class citizens are neither treated equally nor respected compared to the majority (see Waldron, 2000). Second-class citizens experience inequality and oppression in society while the others are privileged.

In a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce that privilege; for the perspectives and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public marginalizing or silencing those of other groups (Young, 1989: 257).

3.2.6. *Constitutional Patriotism*

Constitutional patriotism, a form of loyalty, is a concept that refers to how people are attached to the values of a democratic constitution. Constitutional patriotism is a method of integrating multicultural communities (Habermas, 1996). This concept supports unity and attachment in

states where different cultures and identities coexist. Constitutional patriotism embraces all citizens in a country and seeks to foster political attachment and equal rights for all.

The main idea in constitutional patriotism is that citizens develop a political attachment through the principles and values of a democratic and liberal constitution (Müller, 2009). “The purpose of constitutional patriotism, as a set of beliefs and dispositions, is to enable and uphold a liberal democratic form of rule that free and equal citizens can justify to each other” (Müller, 2008: 72). In the concept of constitutional patriotism, pluralism in a state can be said to exist because people are attached to common constitutional principles and values (Ingram, 1996). Constitutional patriotism is considered to promote the aim of creating solidarity and equality by appealing to the values and principles of a democratic and liberal constitution. Such an attachment has become more feasible in an increasingly globalised world.

The next section deals with the historical process and the analysis of Alevism and Alevi identity within the framework of the above concepts.

3.3. Alevi Identity: A Historical Analysis

Alevi identity is one of the central issues of this research. This section discusses how Alevi have been identified in different time periods and how the Alevi identity can be understood in terms of the concepts of fluid and hybrid identity. I discuss the Alevi identity in terms of fluidity and hybridisation and the historical background of the Alevi constitutional patriotism. This section also explains the Alevi identity in terms of being marginalized, becoming a more organised community, and using human rights in their local situations.

3.3.1. Alevi Before and During the Ottoman Times: Cultural and Religious Hybridisation

Chapter One briefly details the relationship of Alevism with other belief systems. This section explains more elaborately, from a historical perspective, the Alevi identity as a hybrid identity and details the connection of the hybrid Alevi identity with other cultures and belief systems, namely the ancient pre-Islamic Turks' belief and culture and Islam.

Before and during the Ottoman period, the Alevi identity experienced changes. In different geographic settings, Islam was understood in different ways due to political, sociocultural, and living conditions. While Turks migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia, some of those who were particularly influenced by Shiism have continued their Alevism in Anatolia (see Özmenli, 2014). The first transformation that Alevi experienced was immediately after their early encounters. Alevi adopted the esoteric [*batini*] meaning of Islam and reconstructed their identities and culture after adopting Qur'anic verses in their praying; however, Alevi ancient pre-Islamic Turks beliefs and ritualistic practises have continued. In other words, Alevi interpreted Islam within their own local culture. Islam spread in new regions not only through its own values but also through interaction with these societies' ideologies. People perceived Islam through the cultural features of the regions through which it spread, and as a result, different understandings were born (Şahin, 2011). For example, Alevi continue to use a stringed musical instrument [*saz, bağlama*], and perform a ritualistic dance [*semah*] during the pray ceremonies [*cem*]. We may conclude that beliefs and cultures of ancient pre-Islamic Turks and Islam have both influenced the Alevi identity, which resulted in a cultural and religious hybrid identity. Hybridity of the Alevi identity can be exemplified as follows:

Cultural forms which are collected during the centuries like storytelling, playing bağlama, the tradition of minstrels in archaic Turk culture, obtained many Islamic elements after the assent of Islam belief. Till then, the essential aspect of the social

life like singing folk songs while playing bağlama and the literary elements which constituted this culture were decorated with religious motives as a natural result of this incident. In the course of time, these social aspects created noticeably different branches in terms of their literary and musical forms as well as their functions (Kurt, 2018: 135-36).

Currently, Alevi are believed to represent the ancient Turk culture that pioneered by Yesevîlik (Kurt, 2018).²²

The Ottoman Empire initiated a policy of systematizing the Sunni cult, and “promoted an orthodox, Sunni Islam against the Shi’a branch of Islam, which was adopted by the Safavid dynasty as the state religion of Iran in the sixteenth century via two institutions: the Caliphate and the *ulema* (doctors of Islamic law)” (Azak, 2010: 2). During the Ottoman period, the Bektashi order was connected to the Janissary, which was the military force of the Ottoman Empire. In 1826, the Janissary was dissolved, the Bektashi dervish lodge was closed, and the Bektashi order was prohibited (see Günay & Türk, 2010). The ideological and social gap between the Ottoman Empire and the Bektashis widened after these events.

In the Ottoman Empire, the status of Bektashis and Alevi differed, as Chapter One details. In the Ottoman Empire, the Alevi community suffered from oppression, and was accused of desecrating Islam and its caliphs (see Canpolat, 2010). Alevi, mostly living in rural areas during the Ottoman Empire, were the people who supported the Safavid Empire (Azak, 2010). Alevi were given names that derogate them, such as rejectionists or unbelievers (see Azak, 2010). Therefore, in the Ottoman period, Alevi faced castigations, arrests, killings, or banishments (see Canpolat, 2010). Alevi, in terms of their belief systems, are:

Marked with indigenous terms such as Sufi and Shia, or with outside qualifiers such as heterodoxy and syncretism. It is further widely taken for granted that Alevism constitutes an intrinsic part of Anatolian and Turkish culture. Indeed, it is widely believed that Alevi traditions carry an ancient Turkish heritage reaching back beyond Anatolia into the depths of Central Asian Turkish pasts (Dressler, 2013: xi-xii).

3.3.2. Alevi and the Young Turks: Becoming Constitutional Patriots

The strong relationship between Alevism and politics has historical roots. In the late Ottoman period, movements such as the Young Turks emerged. In the second half of the 19th century, Young Turks was a common name for the Ottoman intellectuals who chose an orientation towards the West and Europe. The Young Turks sought to establish a system based on constitutional order and free elections. This resulted in the proclamation of the first and last constitution of the Ottoman Empire in 1876 [*Kanun-i Esasi*] (see Burak, 2003).

The Young Turks started a campaign of agitation and subversion to overthrow the autocratic Sultan Abdülhamit II and establish a constitutional, parliamentary regime (with which the Ottoman Empire had a few months experience before the Sultan suspended it in 1878) (Zürcher, 2010: 214).

²² Yesevîlik, a Sufi order founded by Ahmet Yesevî who became the first Turkish cult founder in history, and while conveying his teachings, he used Turkish instead of Arabic and Persian.

The most influential formation, as a political movement, among the Young Turk groups was the Committee of Union and Progress, later the Party of Union and Progress, a political party that was active until 1926.

Although Alevis and Bektashis have common religious beliefs, it can be said that Bektashis' relations with the Young Turks were more developed. The Bektashi order gained support among the intellectuals of the Young Turks because of its progressive and liberal philosophies. Bektashis supported the Young Turk movement because of their critical approach towards the attitude of the Ottoman sultans' caliphate (see Ramsaur, 1942). Alevis, who lived in rural areas, also supported the Young Turks, and had ties with the Party of Union and Progress.

The Party of Union and Progress, after 1912–1913, adopted the policy of Turkism. After the Party of Union and Progress adopted the policy of Turkism, Alevis were accepted as holders of the Turks' core culture and authentic identity (Taştan, 2012).²³ Turkish Islam, which is freed from Arab and Persian influences, was intended to be built by the Party of Union and Progress (Taştan, 2012), which was also accepted by Alevis and Bektashis.

Despite the great shortage of research on the Ottoman Alevis it seems safe to say that few other ethnic groups were more interested in the promises of early Young Turk regime. The slogans “liberty”, “equality”, and “justice” sounded most attractive for a community that knew neither the privileges of the *ümmet* nor the guarantees of a recognized *millet* (Kieser, 2001: 99).²⁴

The Young Turks and Alevis played a significant role during the national struggle [*milli mücadele*] and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. “The period of the National Struggle represents liberation from Ottoman oppression and unity as a nation” (Watters, 2015: 112). During the founding years of the Republic of Turkey, Alevis and Bektashis supported the independence struggle, and they suggest that they are the original architects of Turkish modernization and the struggle for liberation (see Taştan, 2012). For Alevis, the new state meant gaining rights, freedoms, and equality; in other words, the republic was the manifestation and materialisation of their thoughts (see Şener, 1994). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk visited the convent of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli dervish lodge and gained the support of the Bektashi order (see Şener, 2001). After the oppressive regime of the Ottoman period, the Republic of Turkey represented Alevis recognition and accommodation of rights and freedoms. The historical tension that Alevis experienced during the Ottoman Empire strengthened their attachment to the Republic of Turkey. “Many Bektaşis also took elite bureaucratic posts in the early years of the Turkish Republic. This is another important reason why Alevi-Bektaşis embraced the new regime” (Köse, 2013: 600).

²³ Turkism or the “Turkish nationalism became an element of the Ottoman political scene in the late nineteenth century. Although its roots can be traced back to the Hamidian period (1876–1909), Turkish nationalism emerged as one of the most important political ideologies during the Constitutional Regime. Wars that the Ottoman Empire participated in from 1911 to the end of the empire in 1918 resulted in population and land losses. Especially, following the Balkan Wars, most of the lands that were populated by non-Muslim and non-Turkish subjects were lost. Within this context, Turkish nationalism came to be seen as the most dominant ideological tool intended to save the Empire” (Balkılıç & Dölek, 2013: 316).

²⁴ *Ümmet*, is a concept that expresses the entire Islamic society, the Muslim majority, in the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire “the Ottoman rulers recognized the diversity of religious and ethnic communities that made up the empire and also understood that this diversity could not and should not be assimilated into an overarching principle of sameness. Instead, they organized a series of ad-hoc negotiations with the heads of religious communities, resulting in what became known as the millet system. Under these arrangements Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities organized their existence in the empire and survived through a generalized system of imperial toleration and intense negotiation” (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016: 24).

The new, modern Turkey was moving towards democracy, and as the first constitution of Turkey was introduced in 1921, sovereignty rested unconditionally with the nation. Alevis' constitutional patriotism is a historical process. For Alevis, constitutional order was a promise of liberty and rights denied to them in Ottoman period; therefore, Alevis became supporters of the new constitutional order.

3.3.3. The Alevi Identity and the Republic of Turkey (1923 onwards): Continued Marginalisation

In the Republic of Turkey, “for the first time, the Alevi Turks got an opportunity to improve their position in society, and to a large extent they supported Atatürk” (Aringberg-Laanaatza, 1998: 187). With the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, the marginalised Alevi community in the Ottoman Empire expected to be recognised, treated as equal citizens, and to be granted rights and freedom in the new state (see Watters, 2015). However, “in 1925, two years after the proclamation of the Republic, the basis of the new state was Turko-Sunni to an extent nobody could have foreseen” (Kieser, 2001: 106). In other words, the new state “promoted a particular religious identity primarily as a means of promoting cultural and social solidarity among its citizens. As result, members of non-Sunni communities, such as the Alevi, suffered from the biased standpoint of the state” (Koçan & Öncü, 2004: 472).

Alevis have supported both Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and CHP, the first party he founded, since the early years of the Republic of Turkey. From this point of view, Alevis can be defined as both leftist party supporters and secularists. Although in the political dimension “there is a tendency to activate the political potential of the Alevi population, which is seen as “leftist” and “democratic” (Rittersberger-Tılıç, 1998: 89), Alevis supported DP, the centre-right political party, in the 1950 multi-party elections (see Zariç, 2021). Although Alevis supported DP then, they later withdrew their support. So, there have been some changes also in the political dimension of the Alevi identity.

The Alevi identity situation gained a different dimension for Alevis in the late 1960s. In the civil unrest events that took place in Turkey in the late 1960s, Alevis, as leftist, secular, supporters of CHP, became the target of the far-right movement called Grey Wolves. The Alevis were marginalised and branded as communists in Turkey by the far-right movements and their supporters.

As the Alevi community became involved in politics in the 1970s, they were increasingly attracted to leftism, striving to find an identity in socialism under the harsh conditions of the 1970s (see Çamuroğlu, 1992). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, violence against Alevis increased, and the marginalisation of Alevis continued. After the 1980 military coup, there was a rise of conservatism and political Islam. The 1980 military coup introduced the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and “the inculcation of Sunni Islam beliefs as the basis of Turkish identity totally excluded Alevis from its discourse: there was one legitimate understanding of Islam and it was Sunni Islam” (Göner, 2005: 116).

In the history of Alevi identity, both in their identification of themselves and by outsiders, there have been multiple dimensions. Alevis have been identified in different ways by outsiders; some of these identifications were degrading and others were political. For many years, the Alevi identity was defined by outsiders in negative terms such as non-Muslim, atheist, anti-Osman, sinful, leftist, and even communist (see Canpolat, 2010). In the Republic of Turkey, Alevi identity was influenced by their marginalisation by outsiders (see Yaşar & Sağlam, 2017).

3.3.4. *Being More Organized After the Massacres and Embracing Human Rights Law*

The Republic of Turkey failed to meet Alevi expectations, and Sunni dominance continued in the Republic. As Chapter One details, “Alevi have traditionally been regarded with suspicion by Turkey’s Sunni Muslim majority and suffered both discrimination and occasional pogroms” (Jenkins, 2007), such as in Kahramanmaraş, Çorum and Sivas.

However, in 1993, the Sivas massacre was a turning point, and Alevi’s passive resistance ended. Since the early 1990s, Alevi have begun to organise themselves, and they have built an organised community led by NGOs (see Ecevitoglu 2011; Şahin 2015). Alevi started to construct *cemevis* and religious-political headquarters in their regions and distanced themselves from the religious institutions of the state (see Bozkurt, 2006). So, after the 1990s, the number of Alevi NGOs was growing, and the Alevi culture was becoming more visible (Göner, 2005). This Alevi revival in the 1990s founded “new organizational structures (associations) in order to create an accepted place for Alevi identity within a “civil society”, be it in the European diaspora or in Turkey” (Kieser, 2001: 110). Even in the twenty-first century, Alevi and NGOs are still protesting the Sivas massacre. In 2012, the Republic of Turkey’s president asked the State Supervisory Council [*Devlet Denetleme Kurumu*] to research the Sivas massacre. According to the Council’s final report, the responsibility for the massacre was found to lie not only with those who directly caused the events but also with the state (see Tuğsuz, 2014). For the first time, the executive branch and the state were declared complicit by the Republic of Turkey itself (see Tuğsuz, 2014). Social reactions and the state’s attitudes showed that the Sivas massacre had become imprinted in social memory, and Alevi were more determined to oppose violence and human rights violations.

After the Sivas massacre, massacres, and violence against Alevi ended in part due to criticisms and reactions to governmental policies and due to the increasingly well-organized structure of Alevi. However, Alevi continued to face problems, such as not being able to establish *cemevis* or not being recognised by the state (see Poyraz, 2005) or unknown people placing red cross X signs on the doors of Alevi’s houses in different regions of Turkey.

Alevi demand their rights and freedoms from the state using legal procedures relying on human rights law. Since the last decade, Alevi have begun to use human rights law to seek legal remedies. For example, in the ECtHR case law, there are some cases discussing Alevi’s human rights violations, such as *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*; *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*; *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*; *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*. Alevi started to identify themselves as the victims of human rights violations and made efforts to localise international human rights law.

The next section details the current situation of Alevi and the Alevi identity in connection with the theoretical concepts.

3.4. Application of the Theoretical Framework to the Current Situation of Alevi

In this part of the chapter, I take a more systematic perspective and detail each of the theoretical concepts relevant to the current situation of Alevi. In other words, the current situation of Alevi and the Alevi identity are analysed considering these concepts, namely, imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism.

3.4.1. *Alevis Under the Imagined Communities Concept*

Members of imagined communities are connected even without any direct contact, and they develop the state of mind of being a community. These people know that they are sharing common values, such as customs, without meeting each other.

Alevis are neither a territorially located nor a small-scaled group; thus, it is not possible for all Alevis to be in physical contact. With so many Alevis living all over the world as well as across Turkey and so many different views on the Alevi identity, how can Alevis be defined as a community? The answer, I found, lies with the concept of imagined communities. Despite the physical distance from each other and the differences and heterogeneity within the descriptions of the Alevi identity, the Alevis are still connected.

Alevis are connected and conscious of each other in different ways. For example, Alevis use the internet and other technological developments to acquire information and become aware of each other's status and conditions, especially in terms of human rights. Following the bilateral Turkish-West German labour recruitment treaty signed in 1961, many Turks moved to Europe. This process has led to the situation where there are "more than 3.5 million Turkish migrants in Europe" (İçduygu, 2012: 12). "Like Sunni Turks, many Alevis emigrated to Germany after migrating from villages in Central and Eastern Anatolia to the cities of Istanbul or Ankara" (Sökefeld, 2003: 139). Since the 1980 military coup in Turkey, Alevis have continued to migrate to Europe and, later in the 1990s, established institutions there (see Massicard, 2011). For example, "18 Alevi organizations and one Alevi foundation in the Netherland have united under one Federation, so-called HAK-DER (Federation of Alevi Communities in the Netherlands / *Hollanda Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) which is founded in 1990 and connected with AABK (European Alevi Community Konfederation" (Eke, 2014: 178). An institution as "HAK-DER thus maintains institutionalised national ties with a range of Turkish organisations in the Netherlands and institutionalised transnational ties with Alevi organisations in Europe and Turkey" (Mügge, 2010: 111). This example shows how Alevis relate to each other through NGOs in today's globalised world.

It is appropriate to use the term community for Alevis under the concept of imagined communities, because Alevis are connected even without any direct contact. They are becoming a community by knowing that they share common faiths, customs, human rights violations, and expectations from the Republic of Turkey. Thus, Alevis have mentally constructed the idea of being a community.

3.4.2. *Fluid and Hybrid Identity of Alevis*

Identity changes and is a dynamic process. The fluidity of identity is related to the interaction of people with different factors, such as different beliefs and cultures. Cultures and identities interact, leading to the hybridisation of identity. Therefore, cultural identity is an example of the changeability of identity, as it is shaped by culture and history. In the hybridisation of identity, people interact and create new identities. Hybridisation in identity construction is a never-ending process.

Alevis and Alevism cannot be limited to a single definition or categorization. The Alevi identity has never been fixed or stable. Alevis may be identified in terms of religion, politics, and lifestyle. These dimensions are constructed through history and in interaction with other factors, such as other beliefs.

The religion-oriented Alevi identity can be seen in various ways. Some scholars (see Korkmaz, 2000) have considered that the differentiation between the Sunni and Alevi traditions could amount to the emergence of two different religions. As religious sects and their rituals become more distinct for these scholars, they may even start to be perceived as separate religions, and their members might rightfully require them to be recognised as such. For

example, one current approach to describing Alevi is as “a sufi (dervish) order based on ancestry (lineage)” (Üçer, 2005: 161) or a religious syncretism (see Melikoff, 1998). While some Alevi see themselves as a part of heterodox Islam, others see Alevism as a synthesis and follow the Turks’ ancestral traditions and beliefs, as the fieldwork chapters below detail. Even after meeting with Islam, Alevi maintained some of their ancient beliefs and customs, such as Shamanism. Currently, the link between Alevism and Shamanism is significant, as the Shamanist and the Alevi mysticism, belief, and ritualistic application share similarities, such as particular ways of dressing at ceremonies, the sacred ceremonies, the stress on verbal and oral traditions, musical compositions, poems, and ritualistic dances (see Turan & Yıldız, 2008). The Alevi culture still involves the pre-Islamic Turkish culture, so:

It is observed that the whirl ritual has many significant traces of the Central Asian culture. There are similarities between Shaman rituals and whirls in terms of philosophy, figure and motive. The themes and motives observed in Shaman rituals have been transferred especially to the Muslim Turkish religious life in Anatolia in various ways (Turan, 2010: 153).

Presently, Alevi also use verses from the Qur’an in their worship; however, these are in Turkish, not Arabic. In other words, there have been changes in the religious identities of Alevi along with Islam. In hybridisation, the religion-oriented identity consists of a combination of Islamic and pre-Islamic religious practices. Alevism is then seen as a different interpretation of Islam, i.e., a heterodox Islamic belief, a process starting with encountering Islam in the migration to Anatolia.

In Turkey, Alevi are also identified with political positions such as being leftist, secular, supporters of Atatürk’s reforms, or being against political Islam. Alevi’ call for a modern constitutional state originated with the Ottoman Empire’s collapse. Their reaction against political Islam emerged during the Republic of Turkey after political Islam gained strength in Turkish politics after the 1980s. The political identity of Alevi is also dynamic (see section 3.3). Alevi for some time in the 1950s supported the right-wing party DP; however, currently Alevi are defined as being leftist and as allies of secularism, Kemalism, and leftist political parties in the modern Republic of Turkey (see Özmen 2011a).

The lifestyle-oriented Alevi identity was influenced by many different cultures, including insights from pre-Islamic Turkish beliefs such as Melamilik²⁵, Kalenderilik²⁶ and Hurufilik²⁷ (see Özcan, 2007). The hybridisation of Alevi identity may also be witnessed in lifestyle-oriented Alevism. The nomadic Turks who accepted Islam had not abandoned their ancient cultures but merely reshaped them according to Islam. Also in Muslim Turks, the traditions of Altai²⁸ Shamanism has persisted for centuries (İnan, 1972). Alevi continue to follow the pre-Islamic lifestyle, and this effects Alevism; “as a result, it can be said that there is a close

²⁵ The aim of this mystical view is to make people happy and reach wisdom. They believe that this can be achieved through self-knowledge. They hold the view that we should humiliate the self and exalt the love of God. People must not hide their sins. The sins of a person should be exposed, so they can be reprimanded. They also believe that by being reprimanded, people’s souls will be disciplined, and ultimately, the human will reach the right path that he must reach, which is purifying the soul and trying to live by the morality of God (see Yıldırım, 2016).

²⁶ A mystical, sufi movement that rejected efforts to acquire property and preferred voluntary. They oppose the beliefs and traditions of the society and social order in which they live and do not care about the world and worldly values (see Azamat, 2001).

²⁷ “Hurufi philosophy is based on the contemplation of God in the universe by means of letters. The reason of using the letters as the instrument of contemplation of God is the close parallelism among human existence, God and the letters” (Usluer & Yıldız, 2010: 268).

²⁸ Altai people are the Turkic people living in northern Asia and are believed to be some of the ancestors of Alevi.

relationship between Alawism and Old Turkish Traditions and Shamanism” (Yılmaz, 2014: 2). One of these traditions is equality between men and women, which the Alevis are still following. As in the Shamanistic tradition, women and children co-exist with men in Alevi religious ceremonies (see Yılmaz, 2014). Moreover, in the lifestyle dimension, Alevis, who consider Alevism a lifestyle, “do not perform religious rituals often, but they have the idea that they are familiar with the rituals in general and that they should protect Alevism as part of the system of cultural values” (Geçgin, 2019: 1070). “Alevis, especially the Turkish-speaking community, have characterized themselves as maintainers of true Turkish culture, religion and folklore in the face of the influence of Sunni Islam” (Koçan & Öncü, 2004: 477).

In brief, there are many explanations for how Alevis differ among themselves, and the Alevi identity has different dimensions, namely, religious, political, and lifestyle.

3.4.3. Alevis Localises Human Rights

In localising international human rights, local communities adapt global human rights language to their local situations with the help of translators. Translation is a requirement for the localisation of global ideas such as human rights. After ideas are presented, they are adapted into local situations, and the target population is redefined. Locals may benefit from human rights protection regimes by translating international human rights into their local life and language. In this vernacularization, the key concepts are layers and translators. While layers concern framing problems in general, translators reframe people’s specific problems, which localises global human rights.

After the Sivas massacre, Alevis started to become more organised and to appeal to international human rights (see subsection 3.3.4). Alevis adopted the language of victims when discussing human rights abuses and human rights law, by translating the universal human rights ideas into the language of the local Alevi people, extracting concepts from universal human rights, and adapting them to local situations. For years, Alevis protested government policies by using the language of human rights (see “Alevilerin zorunlu din dersi protestosu”, 2014). Alevis requested to be recognized as people with an Alevi identity, and to be granted human rights and freedoms (see Sanbur, 2009). Alevis also emphasised human rights in their local situations by bringing numerous court cases, such as those before the Turkish domestic courts and the ECtHR. In this way, they used international human rights.

Within Alevis’ human rights problems, there are different layers. The field studies in this research show that some Alevis emphasise that Alevis’ problems are related to their lifestyle, while some Alevis discuss their problems as being the result of historical or political conflicts. In making Alevis use the language of human rights the Alevi NGOs and activists acted as translators. These translators enable Alevis to perceive the issues they are experiencing in Turkey as human rights violations. For example, to deal with human rights violations, Alevis are supported by activists and NGOs who filed cases at the ECtHR or organised protests and assemblies against the policies of the government, such as the Third Grand Alevi Congress [*Üçüncü Büyük Alevi Kurultayı*], May 11, 2013, where approximately 23 Alevi NGOs came together with others to discuss Alevis’ problems and make their voice heard. In addition, the EU, the Turkish state, Turkish domestic courts, and the ECtHR, the Turkish media, historical experiences remembered by Alevis, technological developments, and migration also supported Alevi human rights awareness. These factors brought the human rights issues of Alevis on the agenda or helped them stay on the agenda.

Consequently, Alevis succeeded in adapting international human rights law to their local situation and problems (see White & Jongerden, 2003). For Alevis, human rights law became an instrument for demanding freedom and rights from the state (see ECtHR, 2016) and, at the

same time, for identity reconstruction (see Göner, 2005): Alevi also use human rights violations to identify themselves as being treated as second-class citizens in Turkey.

3.4.4. Alevi Voice Discrimination and Second-Class Citizenship

The principle of non-discrimination is about distributing opportunities equally and providing equal treatment for all. Discrimination means unjustifiable unequal treatment; correspondingly, the principle of non-discrimination protects human dignity. Unequal treatment results in second-class citizenship, i.e., not being granted the rights and freedoms on an equal footing; in other words, being denied citizenship rights and equal treatment in the state. However, discrimination can occur not only between the state and citizens, but also between fellow citizens. In this case, citizens may be exposed to interpersonal discrimination verbally, in paraverbal communication, or in behaviour. This situation can lead to the segregation of people belonging to certain groups and even to their social exclusion.

Alevi hoped to survive in the Republic of Turkey and gain rights and freedoms; “though they still have to suffer discrimination occasionally, and though some of the Kemalist reforms have dealt Bektashism and the Alevi religious system some harsh blows” (Vorhoff, 1998: 31). For example, for Alevi, the foundation and the current role of *Diyanet* and its discriminatory policies are controversial; moreover, various events experienced in history are also considered discriminatory (see Demir & İpek, 2015). So, discrimination is a key concept in Alevi grievances (see Sanbur, 2009), which threatens their identity and lifestyle (see Tol, 2016). Discrimination, Alevi allege, causes difficulties in matters such as continuing their religious ceremonies and participating in business and education. Field studies have shown that Alevi may be discriminated against by the state in the recruitment process or in business life, in the form of not being promoted because they are Alevi. Alevi may also be exposed to discrimination due to their political affiliations in the form of not being able to receive social services from the state because of being leftist or because they are governed in local governments by a political party other than the ruling party. “No matter how it is framed, it is clear that Alevi have suffered from the oppression of the State which contributed to their discrimination in social and economic life” (Alemdar & Çorbacıoğlu, 2012: 124).

From a general point of view, the post-Republic human rights problems of Alevi are three-fold: being discriminated against, violations of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and violations of the right to education. The problems of the Alevi in the context of discrimination and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion are related to the lack of official recognition for their places of worship, the *cemevis*, as a result of *Diyanet* and treating Alevi places of worship differently compared to officially accepted places of worship in Turkey. Their problems in the context of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education, and the right not to be discriminated against are related to the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons.

Alevi allegations were also submitted to the ECtHR, which ruled that there was a violation of the prohibition on discrimination in some cases, as in *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, and *İzzettin Doğan and Other v. Turkey*. In these cases, the ECtHR decided that the prohibition of discrimination is being violated by the Turkish State in conjunction with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The ECtHR also decided that Turkey violates the right to education in the *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* and *Mansur Yalçın and Other v. Turkey* cases.

In terms of discrimination by fellow citizens, Alevi and Sunnis may still face difficulties in their relationships. Lack of dialogue and trust between both groups (see Taşkesen & Ceylan, 2015) may be reasons for having difficult relations. The field studies, as detailed in the

following chapters, also show that Alevis face discrimination from Sunnis, specifically interpersonal discrimination in business and social exclusion due to their Alevi identity.

Alevis demand not only the right not to be discriminated against but also the right to be recognised as equal citizens (see Association for Liberal Thinking, 2014). In other words, Alevis want the state to recognise them as a religious group equal to, but distinct from, Sunnis (Sanbur, 2009). Alevis claim not to have the opportunity to enjoy the rights and freedoms of the majority (see Kılıç, 2011). Alevis therefore claim that they are treated as second-class citizens (see Göner, 2005) and strive to be recognised legally, politically, socio-economically, and culturally as full citizens. Alevis are dubious of their equal citizenship in Turkey, and:

In this context, equal civil rights are discussed. In a secular government structure, caring for and defending the rights of the individuals belonging to Sunni Islam specially puts Alevis, who make up 25 percent of the society, into the position of second-class citizens (Özmen, 2011b: 77).

Moreover, in contemporary Turkey, “according to Alevis’ thesis, especially under the governance of right-winded political parties in Turkey, Alevi people have complained to be seen as secondary citizens” (Günaydın, 2017: 547).

3.4.5. *Alevis and Constitutional Patriotism*

Constitutional patriotism is a kind of political attachment to the norms and principles of a democratic constitution. In this kind of patriotism, the values of a liberal and democratic constitution reinforce the feelings of attachment and solidarity.

Alevis’ support for the republican constitutional order, fundamental principles, and values of the Republic of Turkey continued uninterrupted after the Republic's foundation years. Alevis show their attachment to the fundamental principles of the Republic of Turkey written in Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution (see section 1.8). Alevis present themselves as supporters of secularism and against the rise of political Islam (see Dressler, 2008), and:

Alevi youngsters, ... carrying out their political activities in Social-Democrat political parties since 1990s, have been the pioneers of secularism, Kemalism and modernism, and have argued that the religious belief they are connected with corresponds to principles such as modernity, modernism and progressivism” (Özmen, 2011a: 12).

Alevis’ commitment to the modern Republic of Turkey’s constitutional values is also associated with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, because he is the founder of these principles. These principles are also the principles of CHP, the first political, leftist party in Turkey and today’s major opposition party, established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Alevis perceives itself as having a close relationship with CHP (see Cansun, 2013). In these terms, Alevis regard Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a saviour from the oppression of the Ottoman Empire and the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey who “enabled Anatolian, Turkish civilisation to emerge once more after centuries of Arab and Koranic-dominated interpretations of history” (Shankland, 2003: 21).

Currently, the religious and political divisions and the human rights violations in Turkey have not weakened Alevis’ constitutional patriotism. In this respect, Alevis’ situation is contrary to what Waller & Linklater (2003: 3) suggest: “unconditional loyalties to the state are weakened by the strengthening human-rights culture...”. Although Alevis had never gain recognition at the state level, experience human rights violations and continue to strengthen their human-rights culture, they remain loyal to the Republic of Turkey through the fundamental

principles of the Republic of Turkey in the constitution. Alevi continue to demand to be recognised in the Turkish constitutional level (see Fendoğlu, 2016), continue to propose that their issues can be solved within the constitution and constitutional reforms (see Zırh, 2012), and argue that their problems can only be solved by legal means.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter deals with the theoretical concepts used to understand this research. In this context, the concepts are imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism.

The concept of imagined communities suggests that people can be perceived as communities without personal connections. According to this concept, individuals who do not meet each other can form a community. Alevi are one of the largest religious groups in Turkey; within the Republic of Turkey's borders, however, they are not recognised and are a minority, whereas the majority of the population is Sunni (see Çakır, 1998). Alevi are living all around the world, and if Turkey becomes a member state of the EU, Alevi may be accepted as one of the most populous minority groups in the EU (Akbulut & Uysal, 2008). In Turkey, Alevi should be understood as a community living all around the country, with approximately more than 20 million members (see Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Alevi, with such a structure, may be a community in terms of the concept of imagined communities. This concept expresses how Alevi feel connected through different means, such as media and technology, and through NGOs that they establish in Turkey and abroad, without ever meeting personally, and how they are aware of each other and their human rights problems.

This chapter concludes that Alevi have a fluid identity, one that is dynamic and changing, and a hybrid identity. Throughout history, Alevi identity has been influenced by different religious, political, and lifestyle elements, and it may be currently defined according to these three dimensions. These three dimensions, religious, political, and lifestyle, in the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity may not be so distinct, however, and should be understood as interacting.

In the religious dimension of Alevism, historically, Alevi were characterised by different definitions in the Ottoman period, such as irreligious or unbeliever.

Alevi "tend to define their identity on a history of repression, and they perceive a continuous suppression of and cruelty towards their identity from the early days of the Ottoman Empire onwards" (Göner, 2005: 109). In addition, they were also identified as *Kızılbaş*, the supporters of the Safavid Empire. Alevism has both been influenced by pre-Islamic belief systems, such as Shamanism, and by Islam. As a result, although there are many different perspectives on the Alevi identity, from a religious dimension, Alevism may be defined as a syncretistic belief system because the Alevi's religious hybrid identity emerges from being both part of Islam and interacting with different belief systems. Currently, Alevi's religiously-motivated identity is comprised of a mixture of pre-Islamic and Islamic religious tenets.

The political identity dimensions of the Alevi are also shaped under the influence of historical events, such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Young Turks, who aimed for constitutional order in the Ottoman period. Alevi, who survived the oppression of the Ottoman Empire, supported the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, and shaped their political identities in this direction. Currently, this political identity dimension, which is described as leftist or secular, also maintains its existence as Alevi being supporters of CHP, although in the past they have at one time also supported the right-wing political party DP. As a result of the events in the Republic of Turkey, for example, the 1980 military coup, the political identity of the Alevi is further reshaped as being against political Islam.

Alevis' lifestyle hybridity results from following the pre-Islamic Turkish culture, which is recreated their own cultures. Although Alevis met with Islam, they did not leave aside their lifestyles from the past, they have not accepted the Arabic understanding of Islam, and they continue their old customs. For example, in the Republic of Turkey, Alevis can be identified as a segment that attaches importance to the equality of women and men.

Localising human rights, as another concept of this research, explains how international human rights are used at the local level and indicates that this is a process that takes place through translators. After the Sivas massacre in 1993, it was mostly possible to understand the Alevis' situation from a human rights point of view. Although Alevis had been subjected to violence and massacres in the Republic of Turkey before 1993, the Sivas massacre was a turning point because Alevis managed to organise both in Turkey and Europe and establish many NGOs after the Sivas massacre. Moreover, in this process, Alevis have also succeeded in exercising their human rights in their local situations, i.e., they localised international human rights law, aided by NGOs and activists playing the role of translators. In addition, many different elements, namely the EU, the state, the courts, the media, historical experiences remembered by Alevis, technological developments, and migration, have also increased Alevis' awareness of human rights and kept human rights violations on the agenda of Alevis and of the Republic of Turkey. Currently, Alevis base their protests on international human rights law, blaming the Sunni-dominated Turkish State for not recognizing their identity and violating their human rights, such as the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. Alevis resort to legal remedies both in Turkish domestic law and in international human rights law through the ECtHR.

Discrimination is another issue that is necessary to understand the situation of Alevis in Turkey. Alevis are facing unjustified and unreasonable unequal treatment, and the Turkish State is denying equal rights to Alevis as citizens. Alevis experience discrimination by the state and by fellow citizens who are Sunnis. The state policy that rejects *cemevis* as places of worship, not receiving financial and legal support from the state, and the violations of the right to education of Alevis by compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are examples of the discriminatory practises of the state that Alevis protest. Alevis also experience discrimination due to their political affiliation. This discrimination may occur in the form of not being able to receive social services or in the form of local governments that are not ruled by the governing party not getting a fair share of the total state budget because of their political affiliation. Alevis also states that they are facing discrimination in the recruitment process or in business life in the form of not being promoted. Alevis also experience discrimination from their fellow citizens, the Sunnis. Alevis face interpersonal discrimination, and they experience difficulties in the private sector and while doing business with Sunnis due to their Alevi identity. They also have concerns about facing social exclusion because of being Alevi.

Alevis use human rights law as a language of victims and discrimination to shape their thoughts about citizenship in Turkey. These experiences lead Alevis to perceive themselves as people treated as second-class citizens in Turkey because they think they cannot exercise their rights like Sunnis. They attribute this situation to the human rights violations and discriminatory practises of the state.

Although Alevis experience such problems in the Republic of Turkey, they also retain their attachment to the Republic of Turkey. It is possible to understand this situation in terms of the concept of constitutional patriotism because Alevis show loyalty to the modern Republic of Turkey through modern constitutional values and Atatürk's reforms. This commitment can be considered a process that dates back to the Ottoman period. The supportive relations between Alevis and Young Turks, who demanded a constitutional order in the Ottoman period, were followed by Alevis' support of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the War of Independence. Alevis continue their commitment to the principles included in the Turkish Constitution, namely

republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism, and revolutionism, which were also adopted as the party principles of CHP. Alevi regard the Republic of Turkey and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as liberators from the oppression in the Ottoman Empire because most of the oppression in the Ottoman Empire decreased to a certain level. In other words, even though Alevi are exposed to human rights violations, discrimination, and being treated as second-class citizens, their loyalty to the Republic of Turkey through constitutional patriotism continues.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, deals with the rights and freedoms that are the subject of this research from a legal perspective within the framework of both international human rights law and domestic Turkish law. The chapter details the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevi's human rights violation claims.

CHAPTER 4 International Human Rights and Domestic Law of the Republic of Turkey

4.1. Introduction

The specialised institutions and declarations of the United Nations (UN), introduced after World War II, were designed to guide states on the standards of human rights. UN covenants cover economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) elaborate the rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in binding covenants. The first-generation human rights in the ICCPR regulate civil rights, that “guarantee the liberal freedom of the individual “from the State”, and political rights that guarantee the democratic freedom of access “to the State” (Nowak, 2005: XX). Following the ICCPR, the ICESCR was introduced in 1966 to formulate the second generation of human rights that are economic, social, and cultural in nature.

In a regional human rights protection regime and document of the Council of Europe, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with various Protocols, was inspired by the UN human rights protection regime; however, the ECHR does “not simply duplicate the rights referred to there” (Ovey & White, 2006: 2). Additional protocols of the ECHR amended and supplemented the convention with additional provisions and rights. The ECHR also set up the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 1959.

The European Union (EU) candidacy and consequently the fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria discuss the human rights progress in Turkey. The EU requires its candidate states to achieve the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities” (European Council, 1993). The Copenhagen criteria were adopted by the EU in 1998. The European Court of Justice (ECJ), “held in a series of cases that fundamental rights of individuals were enshrined in the general principles of Community law protected by the Court, and that fundamental rights form part of the Community law” (Defeis, 2007: 1110).

The Republic of Turkey became one of the first members of the UN in 1945 and of the Council of Europe in 1949. In the course of time, membership in such organisations and Turkey's candidature for the EU increased its human rights concerns. With the concern of the accession process, Turkey has made several amendments to its legal system, however, “for Turkey, the catalyst for change has been prospective membership in the European Union rather than the precepts of international human rights law” (Tomaševski, 2005: 230).

As Turkey became more in line with international human rights law, Alevis were able to use some of the rights and freedoms that international human rights law protects. Alevis assert that the Republic of Turkey violates the rights and freedoms guaranteed by international human rights law.

This chapter aims to discuss international human rights law and domestic Turkish law related to Alevi human rights violation claims. Section two deals with the history of human rights law in Turkey and discusses how Turkey adopted international human rights law into national law, ensuring that domestic law is compatible with international human rights law. Section three details international human rights law and Turkish domestic law clauses related to Alevi claims, namely the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. Section four describes several relevant court decisions in international law. This section analyses legal actions concerning Alevis' claims over the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right

to education in the ECtHR and domestic Turkish courts. This section also discusses revisions to the textbooks for compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. Section five details the role of secularism in Turkish domestic law. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

4.2. Turkey Adopts International Human Rights Law

This section begins with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, which was signed after the Turkish War of Independence. This treaty is important because, as a result of the pressures from the Allies in the Lausanne Conference on subjects such as the status of foreigners and non-Muslim minorities, the new state was also prevented from using the Ottoman law applicable for centuries (see Aydın, 1995). The Lausanne Peace Treaty also played an important role in the secularisation of the Turkish legal system (see Aydın, 1995). Thus, this treaty influenced the Turkish legal system, especially the national minority policy and law of Turkey. This section also examines the effects of the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe (CoE), and the European Union (EU) on the human rights issues of the Republic of Turkey. The section also examines Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, which determines the importance and place of international agreements concerning human rights law.

4.2.1. The Lausanne Peace Treaty

The Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 has been the new Turkish State's main legal tool for figuring out how to treat national minorities. The third section of the Treaty, protection of minorities, stipulates that Turkey's contemporary implementations and regulations of minorities shall be compatible with articles 38 to 44 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty. Non-Muslims specified by the Lausanne Peace Treaty benefit from the Treaty's minority regime provision. According to the Lausanne Peace Treaty, only some of the non-Muslims in Turkey hold minority rights and freedoms, namely Jewish, Armenian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox people. "Turkey's non-Muslim religious minorities comprise less than 0.2 percent of the overall population, and mostly are members of the Jewish, Armenian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox communities, the three faiths recognized under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne" (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2018: 197 – 198). Article 39 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty states "Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems". Article 42 of the Lausanne Peace Treaty states:

The Turkish Government undertakes to grant full protection to the churches, synagogues, cemeteries, and other religious establishments of the above-mentioned minorities. All facilities and authorisation will be granted to the pious foundations, and to the religious and charitable institutions of the said minorities at present existing in Turkey, and the Turkish Government will not refuse, for the formation of new religious and charitable institutions, any of the necessary facilities which are granted to other private institutions of that nature.

However, in Turkey, questions remain about the non-recognized religious communities' rights and freedoms, especially regarding the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. In the context of the minority regime:

The aim of the Turkish policy is to stay within the boundaries of the Treaty of Lausanne and prioritize national security considerations over minority issues.

However, Turkey's traditional minority regime falls short even of the requirements of Lausanne, while bringing the Lausanne legal framework to the fore against the EU demands and pressures (Toktas & Aras, 2009: 697).

4.2.2. United Nations Human Rights Legal Documents and Turkey

Turkey has signed the fundamental international human rights legal documents and accepted them as part of its domestic legal system. Turkey is a party state to 16 of the human rights treaties within the UN framework, and it has accepted the special procedures, agreeing to visits by special rapporteurs and representatives as a part of the UN human rights mechanism.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the first declaration in the UN human rights mechanism that Turkey agreed to. After the publication of the declaration in the Turkish Official Gazette in 1949, Turkey became one of the first countries to ratify the UDHR. Following the UDHR, Turkey followed the progress on human rights law and continued to sign and ratify UN human rights documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which it signed in September, 1990 and ratified in December, 1995. Later, Turkey signed the ICCPR in August, 2000 and ratified it in September, 2003. However, Turkey made a reservation at the ICCPR.

The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to Interpret and apply the provisions of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the related provisions and rules of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 and its Appendixes (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.).

The Republic of Turkey made a reservation on Article 27 safeguarding minorities because of the Lausanne Peace Treaty's provisions regarding Turkey's minority policy. The provisions of the Lausanne Peace Treaty (see section 4.2.1) are for non-Muslims in terms of the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish communities, and everyone else is accepted as Turkish citizens. In other words, every Turkish citizen who is not covered by the Lausanne Peace Treaty's minority policy will not be considered a member of a minority. As stated in Article 66 of the Turkish Constitution, "everyone who is bound to the Turkish State by citizenship is Turkish." Additionally, the principle of nationalism in Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution is another reason for the reservation in Article 27 of the ICCPR. Nationalism in Turkey is interpreted as unity, solidarity, and integrity; as a result, Turkey has made a reservation about minorities for these reasons (see Dalar,2015). So, the Treaty of Lausanne is accepted as the only document regarding minority policy in Turkey, and the provisions of the Lausanne Peace Treaty were found to be sufficient regarding minorities.

Integration of Turkey's legal system with international human rights law continued with the signing of the ICESCR in August, 2000 and its ratification in September, 2003. Turkey also made a reservation to Article 13 (3) and (4) of the ICESCR, the right to education, and stated that it reserves its right to interpret and apply these paragraphs in accordance with the provisions under Articles 3, 14, and 42 of the Turkish Constitution. Article 3 is about the integrity of the official language, the flag, the national anthem, and the capital city. Article 14 regulates the prohibition of abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms, and Article 42 is about the right and duty of education.

4.2.3. The Council of Europe and Turkey

Although there are numerous international human rights documents, there are far fewer legally binding mechanisms. One of these binding mechanisms is the human rights system under the mandate of the Council of Europe. The members of the Council of Europe agreed on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) on November 4, 1950. Turkey signed the ECHR on March 20, 1952, ratified it on March 19, 1954, was party to Additional Protocols No. 1 and No. 13, and acknowledged the judicial power of the ECtHR in 1990. A reservation was made to Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1, stating that the provisions of Article 2 shall not influence Turkish Law No. 430, which is about the unification of education in Turkey. Therefore, the ECHR has the force of law in Turkish domestic law and is a part of Turkey's legal system. Turkey cooperated with the Council of Europe on many issues, such as:

The fields of abolition of death penalty, fight against torture, reform of prisons and detention houses, freedom of thought and expression, freedom of association, freedom of religion, functioning of the judiciary, civil-military relations, economic, social and cultural rights and fight against corruption (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

Turkey also ratified the revised version of the European Social Charter on June 27, 2007, and on June 10, 2009, Turkey ratified the Amending Protocol of the Charter.

4.2.4. The European Union and Turkey

From the Copenhagen political criteria perspective, Turkey's candidature for the EU is related to civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights, as well as the rights of minorities. EU Progress reports on Turkey emphasise the importance of respecting human rights, protecting minorities, and improving religious communities' conditions. Respecting human rights and freedoms is one of the main requirements in EU accession progress, because the EU especially emphasises conditionality in the accession process, i.e., that accession negotiations and membership depend on guaranteeing human rights and freedoms and respecting and protecting minorities. Such conditionality and membership negotiations generate and influence the legal reform process in Turkey. Reforms in Turkish legislative regulations aimed to harmonise the Turkish national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, the EU law. For example, in this direction, the amendment made in 2001 to Article 13 of the Turkish Constitution stated that the fundamental rights and freedoms may be restricted without infringing upon their essence, in accordance with the secular republic and the principle of proportionality. The reforms also continued with the addition of a sentence to Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution in 2004, which is related to international agreements, as the next section details.

After AKP's election victory in 2002, efforts to improve relations with the EU and harmonise the Turkish national legislation with the *acquis communautaire* gained momentum. With a series of reforms implemented in Turkey after 2002, steps have been taken to align the Turkish national legal system with EU standards, such as amendments to the Turkish Constitution, the Turkish Penal Code, the Law on Associations, the Press Law, and the Turkish Civil Code. In 2005, the European Council (EC) opened accession negotiations with Turkey, and until that period, Turkey followed the EU Adjustment Laws. However, in recent years, the negotiation process stalled, and the adaptation process has not continued regarding human rights and other standards, at least not in the direction that the EU requires (see European Commission, 2019). As a result, eight chapters are not yet being opened in the negotiation process, and 2021 has been an uncertain and tense year for EU-Turkey relations in terms of membership (Sezgin,

2021). According to the European Parliament, currently, Turkey is continually distancing itself from the ideals and standards of the EU (European Parliament, 2022).

4.2.5. Incorporation of International Treaties in Turkish Law: Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution

The domestic legal protection of states may occasionally be insufficient to ensure fundamental rights and freedoms, so the international protection of human rights and freedoms may serve to address this shortcoming. As the sections above discuss, Turkey, as a member state of the UN and the Council of Europe, is obligated to conform with the international human rights legal documents and, as a candidate country to the EU, to reform its legal system. The reform process incorporated amendments to the Constitution, and the incorporation of international treaties in Turkish law was attached to Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution that states:

International agreements duly put into effect have the force of law. No appeal to the Constitutional Court shall be made with regard to these agreements, on the grounds that they are unconstitutional. (Sentence added on May 7, 2004; Act No. 5170) In the case of a conflict between international agreements, duly put into effect, concerning fundamental rights and freedoms and the laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.

The aim of this amendment is to resolve the confusion in cases where the Turkish domestic law conflicts with international fundamental rights and freedoms treaties, and it was added as a result of the EU Adjustment Law (see Efe & Han, 2012). In the legal system and legislative process of Turkey, no single act is allowed to contravene the international treaties concerning fundamental rights and freedoms already duly put into effect. According to Article 90, all other legal documents in Turkey, such as codes, regulations, or by-laws, must conform to the international treaties concerning fundamental rights and freedoms. As well as the legislation and execution authorities, Article 90 also influences the judiciary organs of Turkey. An important contribution was that judges were obligated to implement international human rights treaties.

4.3. Selected Human Rights Connected with Alevis Complaints

In Turkey, Alevis' grievances related to their human rights focus on the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. International human rights law and the related Turkish domestic law regulations should be described in detail to understand Alevis' human rights violation allegations, so the aim of this section is to review the relevant international human rights standards and Turkish domestic law rules. This section details legal regulations under the mandate of the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe, and the Republic of Turkey regarding the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education.

4.3.1. The Right Not to Be Discriminated Against

Through the international protection of human rights, states made a commitment to refrain from discrimination and fulfil the obligations of international human rights and freedoms. In

international human rights law, various documents in the UN and the Council of Europe human rights protection regimes regulate the right not to be discriminated against, and in Turkish domestic law, the Turkish Constitution plays the same role.

UN Human Rights Legal Documents

Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regulates that:

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Additionally, Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) contains an extensive protection clause against discrimination by stating:

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The ICCPR does not limit protection to the specific grounds stated in this article, such as those relating to age or gender, but also includes the term other status in the article, thus widening its domain of application. The Human Rights Committee's case law demonstrates the scope of this principle in the case of *Young v. Australia*, which indicates that Article 26 covers every kind of discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation. Article 2 (1) of the ICCPR also refers to the right not to be discriminated against in relation to all the rights and freedoms in the Convention and states:

4. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

International human rights instruments grant freedom from discrimination without providing an exact definition. The Human Rights Committee's case law decreed that not every different treatment constitutes discrimination and that the criteria for defining discrimination should consider the principles of objectivity and reasonableness. The Committee concludes:

The right to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law without any discrimination does not make all differences of treatment discriminatory. A differentiation based on reasonable and objective criteria does not amount to prohibited discrimination within the meaning of article 26 (*F. H. Zwaan-De Vries v. The Netherlands*, 1987: para.13).

From the perspective of religious minorities, it should be noted that the United Nations' human rights protection regime emphasises that not granting religious minorities the benefits of the state is discrimination (see Taylor, 2005).

The Council of Europe

In terms of protection against discrimination within the scope of the Council of Europe, Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) provides that:

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

The protection against discrimination in the ECHR is limited to the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention. The ECHR's anti-discrimination principle is dependent, which means that it is linked to the rights and freedoms that the ECHR and its Protocols protect. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) also reaffirms the issue as follows:

While it is true that this guarantee has no independent existence in the sense that under the terms of Article 14 (art. 14) it relates solely to “rights and freedoms set forth in the Convention”, a measure which in itself is in conformity with the requirements of the Article enshrining the right or freedom in question may however infringe this Article when read in conjunction with Article 14 (art. 14) for the reason that it is of a discriminatory nature (*Relating to Certain Aspects of The Laws On The Use Of Languages In Education In Belgium v. Belgium*, 1968: 30).

In the same case, the ECtHR declared that a distinct, unreasonable, and unjustifiable treatment of a group should be considered discrimination against that group. Furthermore, Additional Protocol No. 12 is not limited and includes the term other status. Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 expresses the rule that the exercise of human rights and freedoms should be in accordance with equality and the non-discrimination principle by stating that:

1. The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.
2. No one shall be discriminated against by any public authority on any ground such as those mentioned in paragraph 1.

The ECtHR decided that understanding discrimination should be associated with objectivity and reasonableness. The Court emphasised the relationship between different treatment, legitimate aim, and the principle of proportionality and states:

A difference of treatment in the exercise of a right laid down in the Convention must not only pursue a legitimate aim: Article 14 (art.14) is likewise violated when it is clearly established that there is no reasonable relationship of proportionality between the means employed and the aim sought to be realised (*Relating to Certain Aspects Of The Laws On The Use Of Languages In Education In Belgium v. Belgium*, 1968: 31).

The Court also discussed the issue of the nature of discrimination or difference in treatment. The Court held that “the right not to be discriminated against in the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed under the Convention is also violated when States without an objective and reasonable justification fail to treat differently persons whose situations are significantly different” (*Thlimmenos v. Greece*, 2000: para.44). A violation of the objectivity criteria as well

as the right not to be discriminated against occurs when “a state’s predominant religion or church is automatically granted financial support, but other religious groups have to go through arduous procedures to reach that level of legal recognition...” (Temperman, 2010: 252-53). While agreeing on the importance of objectivity, the right not to be discriminated against is being violated when equal cases are treated differently with having no objectivity and reasonableness (see Tsatsa-Nikolovska, 2006).

Turkish Domestic Law

Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution, which is under the title General Principles of the Turkish Constitution, concerns the right not to be discriminated against. In accordance with international law, Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution states:

Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.

(Paragraph added on May 7, 2004; Act No. 5170) Men and women have equal rights. The State has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice. (Sentence added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality.

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Measures to be taken for children, the elderly, disabled people, widows and orphans of martyrs as well as for the invalid and veterans shall not be considered as violation of the principle of equality.

No privilege shall be granted to any individual, family, group or class.

State organs and administrative authorities are obliged to act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings.

In Turkish domestic law, the Turkish Constitutional Court interpreted the right not to be discriminated against. The Court, in its decision no. 2017/156, November 15, 2017, stated that Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution must be interpreted as an article applicable to equal cases and situations. Article 10 aims to ensure that laws apply to people in the same positions and protect them from being discriminated against (see Turkish Constitutional Court, 2017). Turkish domestic law, like international law, formulates the right not to be discriminated against as a principle applicable to other rights and freedoms, such as the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education.

4.3.2. The Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, one of the oldest human rights, was first given legal status in Western Europe (see Vermeulen, 2010), and “freedom of conscience, religion, and belief is intended to be thought of as among the most sacred or most fundamental of the universally recognized human rights” (Little, 2001: 604). A democratic state should not hinder any religion, promote freedom of choice over whether or not to adopt any religion, and as the ECtHR states “the autonomous existence of religious communities is indispensable for pluralism in a democratic society...” (*Hasan and Chaush v. Bulgaria*, 2000: para.62). Democracy requires that “we allow freedom for beliefs and practices which we do not share, and which may go against the views of the majority” (Trigg, 2010: 413). Moreover, people are also protected against interference of states by the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, because “freedom from religion guards against any unwanted religious interference on the part of the State” (Temperman, 2010: 190).

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion involves people's right to manifest religion, which has not only an individual dimension, such as private practises of a religion, but also an aspect of manifesting as a community, such as communal prayer (see Vitkuaskaite-Meurice, 2011). This freedom includes some issues such as having places of worship, religious education, and publications (see Vitkuaskaite-Meurice, 2011). In this direction, legal status is important for religious communities because performing religious activities could be challenging for religious groups with no legal status. "Without legal status a religion would find it difficult, if not impossible, to own land, operate bank accounts, insure premises and other assets, enter into contracts with public authorities, exercise prison visitation rights and legally protect itself when necessary" (Barnett, 2001: 93-94).

UN Human Rights Legal Documents

Article 18 of the UDHR regulates that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is also protected in Article 18 of the ICCPR, which states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

The Human Rights Committee asks states to protect the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and declares that these freedoms "cannot be derogated from, even in time of public emergency..." (Human Rights Committee, 1993: para.1).

UN human rights documents also accept the manifestation of religion as a part of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. UN declares that "the concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship..." (Human Rights Committee, 1993: para.4). Additionally, in General Comment No. 22, the Human Rights Committee reaffirms that places of worship are fundamental to manifesting the freedom of religion. The UN also stated that:

The fact that a religion is recognized as a State religion or that it is established as official or traditional or that its followers comprise the majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the

Covenant, including articles 18 and 27, nor in any discrimination against adherents of other religions or non-believers (Human Rights Committee, 1993: para.9).

The UN Human Rights Council detailed the individual's right to manifest religion and states that people have the right to build and own places of worship as a human right. UN urges states "... to ensure that religious places, sites, shrines and symbols are fully respected and protected and to take additional measures in cases where they are vulnerable to desecration or destruction" (UN Human Rights Council, 2007: 9/e). Protection for places of worship is reaffirmed in the Article 6/A of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which indicates that the freedom of religion involves the freedom "to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes".

The Council of Europe

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is also under the protection of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 9 of the ECHR states that:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

In this context, for states to legitimise their interference in the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, it must be required due to a serious reason (see Martinez-Torron, 2005). There is no general theoretical framework that covers this margin of appreciation, in other words "the room for manoeuvre the Strasbourg institutions are prepared to accord national authorities in fulfilling their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights" (Greer, 2000: 5), related to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The ECtHR examines the circumstances of each case independently in order to determine the relevance of its application (see Brems, 1996). The ECtHR has taken a broad approach because the ECHR's protection regime covers many beliefs, such as atheism (see *Angelini v. Sweden*, 1986). In the case law of the ECtHR, judges dealt with many matters concerning the limitation clause of Article 9. In *Kokkinakis v. Greece*, 1998, Kokkinakis, a Greek Jehovah's witness living in Crete, sued Greece before the ECtHR after being arrested and imprisoned for proselytism on several occasions. As a result, the ECtHR decided that Article 9 was violated in this case; however, in this case, the Court upheld the view that the meaning of restrictions on Article 9 should be considered under the principles of legitimate aim and "necessary in a democratic society... for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (*Kokkinakis v. Greece*, 1998: para.49). The clause of democratic society includes elements "such as pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness" (*Mehmet Hasan Altan v. Turkey*, 2018: para 210).

According to Article 9 of the ECHR "in exercising its regulatory power in this sphere and in its relations with the various religions, denominations and beliefs, the State has a duty to remain neutral and impartial" (*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova*, 2001: para.116). The *Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova* case concerned the Moldavian authority's non-recognition of the church, which violated their freedom of religion and made the church a subject of discrimination (*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and*

Others v. Moldova, 2001). The ECtHR accepted the applicant's argument that a group that considers itself different from other religious groups must have the right to form a place of worship, "and that it was not for the State to determine whether or not there was a real distinction between these different groups or what beliefs should be considered distinct from others" (*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova*, 2001: para. 96). The Moldavian government "submitted that the applicant Church, as an Orthodox Christian church, was not a new denomination, since Orthodox Christianity had been recognized in Moldavia on February 7, 1993 at the same time as the Metropolitan Church of Moldova" (*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova*, 2001: para.98). The Court recalled that:

The State's duty of neutrality and impartiality, as defined in its case-law, is incompatible with any power on the State's part to assess the legitimacy of religious beliefs, and requires the State to ensure that conflicting groups tolerate each other, even where they originated in the same group (*Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and Others v. Moldova*, 2001: para.123).

The Court decided that Article 9 (1) was violated in this case.

Another ECtHR decision that decided that a state had violated Article 9 regarding places of worship is the case of *Manoussakis and Others v. Greece*. The case concerned Jehovah's Witnesses' place of worship on Crete. Followers of Jehovah's Witnesses were prosecuted for operating a room for worship without state authorization. In this case, the ECtHR declared that "the right to freedom of religion as guaranteed under the Convention excludes any discretion on the part of the State to determine whether religious beliefs or the means used to express such beliefs are legitimate" (*Manoussakis and Others v. Greece*, 1996: para.47).

Turkish Domestic Law

Turkish domestic law regulates the freedom of thought, conscience and religion under Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution that states:

Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction.

Acts of worship, religious rites and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, as long as they do not violate the provisions of Article 14.

No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious rites and ceremonies, or to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.

Religious and moral education and instruction shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.

No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political interest or influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets.

In the individual application of Esra Nur Özbey, the Turkish Constitutional Court stated that individuals use religion to give meaning to life (see Turkish Constitutional Court, No. 2013/7443, 2015). The Court also attributed to religion an important role in shaping social life; therefore, the Court decided that the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the bases for a democratic society. Therefore, the Court argued that persons cannot be compelled

to perform a form of worship, religious practice, or ritual. In addition, their worship and religious practises cannot be condemned, and the authority that decides on the requirements of a religion or belief are members of the religious community themselves (see Turkish Constitutional Court, 2015).

In Turkish domestic law, the right to open and operate places of worship, which is related to the right to manifest religion, is overseen by *Diyanet*. *Diyanet* is a state institution that has a central role in places of worship in Turkey, and with the power to declare a place as a place of worship, manage and control worship activities in places of worship. In Turkish domestic law, Article 136 of the Turkish Constitution regulates *Diyanet*. Article 136 designates *Diyanet* as a constitutional institution and regulates that *Diyanet* operates under Turkish law in accordance with secularism. Constructing mosques or small mosques by individuals is also allowed by Law No. 633, the act on the constitution and the functions of *Diyanet*; and according to this law, *Diyanet* carries out the religious service in the state in accordance with Islam and operates places of worship, namely mosques and small mosques. Moreover, the Turkish Criminal Code also concerns places of worship. The Turkish criminal law protects legally recognised places of worship and ensures that they are protected from being damaged (see Criminal Code of The Republic of Turkey, 2004).

Two other domestic legal regulations related to places of worship are the Turkish Construction Code and the Turkish Tax Code. Additional Article 2 in the Turkish Construction Code regulates that the government should reserve lands for places of worship in each district construction plan. The same article states that places of worship can be constructed in cities and townships with the permission of the local authority and in accordance with the Turkish Construction Code rules. Article 4 in the Turkish Tax Code exempts places of worship and their auxiliary buildings from building taxes.

The other legal instrument that regulates issues related to the right to manifest religion is Law No. 677 of 1925. Law No. 677 regulates the closure and prohibition of all dervish lodges [*tekke*] and *zawiyas*, i.e., small Islamic monasteries [*zaviye*]. For example, lodges of Bektashis were closed after this law (see Hakyemez, 2014). Article 136 of Law No.677 also declares illegal the usage of the appellation's *baba* and *dede*. Although this law aimed at modernization in the new Republic (see Apaydın, 2017), according to some scholars, by means of this law, the state has allowed no other Islamic discourse than a category whose legitimacy was determined by the state. Law No. 677, one of the reform laws, is protected by Article 174 of the Turkish Constitution which states that “no provision of the Constitution shall be construed or interpreted as rendering unconstitutional the Reform Laws...”.

4.3.3. The Right to Education and Religious Education

The right to education is an inalienable human right that has positive obligations. With the French and American Revolutions, “it was realised that the state, by assuming a more active role in the sphere of education, could promote the ideal of education being available and accessible to all” (Beiter, 2006: 21). In addition, religious education may also be considered under the provision of the right to education; so, freedom of religion also has a public dimension, namely, the teaching of religion or worship and practice.

UN Human Rights Legal Documents

Article 26 of the UDHR states:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.

Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Additionally, Article 13 of the ICESCR regulates that this is a right granted to all, and the right to education is declared an “indispensable means of realizing other human rights” (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999: 1). If granted this right, people will be empowered to live according to their own values.

The right to education is therefore also part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 28(1) of the CRC states that “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity...”. Moreover, according to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the right to education must involve some features, namely, availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability (see Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999).

Under the UN human rights protection regime, Article 26 of the UDHR, Article 18 of the ICCPR, and Article 13 of the ICESCR also regulate the right to religious education, from a parental rights perspective. These three international human rights law documents declare that states shall respect parental choices in religious education. Article 26(3) of the UDHR states “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” and Article 18(4) of the ICCPR states that “the States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions”.

From the point of view of parental rights, the ICESCR continues to protect the freedom to religious education. Article 13(3) of the ICESCR states:

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

In addition to the parental right to decide on religious lessons, the child’s perspective should also be safeguarded. It is important that all these rights are considered in line with the CRC. Article 14(2) of the CRC concludes:

2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.

With the legal documents of the UN, children are secured against being forced to attend any religion or belief related teaching that is contrary to parental requests. The child shall not be obligated to undergo such an education, and according to Article 5(2) of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief:

2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

The UN frames religious education from a human rights law perspective. According to the Human Rights Committee, in state schools, courses such as the history of religions can be introduced on the condition that they are based on the principles of neutrality and objectivity (see Human Rights Committee, 1993). For an objective and neutral religious education, these lessons should “not show any preference to one religion or another, or it could be understood to mean that all religions deserve fair and equal attention” (Relaño, 2010: 26). The best interest of the child is often accepted as being treated according to the parents’ wishes (see Lundy, 2005). Such an approach may be understood as protecting the children and the parental rights from state interference (see Sullivan, 1988).

*The Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*²⁹
Article 2 of the Additional Protocol No.1 to the ECHR states:

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

The right to education is granted to everyone under this; however, it may be limited because it is not an absolute right, and “the Contracting States enjoy a certain margin of appreciation in this sphere, although the final decision as to the observance of the Convention’s requirements rests with the Court” (*Leyla Şahin v. Turkey*, 2005: para. 154).

According to the ECtHR decisions, religious knowledge shall be conveyed in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner in the state’s education system. The Court dealt with several cases concerning parental rights over the child’s education. For example, in the case of *Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark*, 1976, the Court heard a Danish family’s allegation of a violation of the right to education over the issue of compulsory sex education. The Court decided that parents’ religion and convictions had to be respected in every branch of education, and:

The second sentence of Article 2 (P1-2) implies on the other hand that the State, in fulfilling the functions assumed by it in regard to education and teaching, must take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. The State is forbidden to pursue an aim of indoctrination that might be considered as not respecting parents’ religious and philosophical convictions. That is the limit that must not be exceeded (*Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark*, 1976: para.53).

In the *Sluijs v. Belgium* case, 1992, the Court once again decided on a matter related to Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. The issue in this case was a policy change. The government withdrew the

²⁹ The OSCE is a regional organization works for security, peace, and democracy. There are 57 member states all around the world.

exemption option, and children were required to attend the lessons, which had been changed so that they no longer supported any ideology or philosophy. The Court's decision was that no violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 had occurred, and the Court reaffirmed that Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 does not prevent states from conveying knowledge on religion or philosophy, if the lessons are pursued in an objective and pluralistic manner, and do not constitute indoctrination.

In another case, *Bernard and Others v. Luxembourg*, 1993, the applicant complained that the rejection of their application to be exempted from the moral and social education lessons violated their rights guaranteed by Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. Although the Commission declared the application inadmissible, it stated that there should be no discrimination in who should be able to benefit from the rights regulated in the ECHR, such as the right to education.

The religious education cases of the ECtHR continued with the *Folgerø and Others v. Norway* case in 2007. Rejection of the applicant's full exemption from a compulsory subject in Christianity, religion, and philosophy had been the subject matter of the case. The parents were forced to disclose their religion and convictions to justify their exemption request and to exempt their children from the lessons. The Court also considered that the procedure of partial exemptions from the lessons is problematic. In the case Justice Stang Lund stated:

Article 9 of the ECHR and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 do not preclude compulsory instruction in the content of various religions and beliefs and in the history of religions and ethics, provided that such instruction is given in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner (*Folgerø and Others v. Norway*, 2007: para.36).

The lesson was not in accordance with the standards of being conducted in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner and had no efficient exemption process. Norway was therefore found to have violated Article 2 of Protocol No. 1.

Another case regarding religious education was *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007. Turkey was found to have violated Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 because of the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. The Zengin case is analysed in greater detail in subsection 4.4.3 of the chapter.

In the same year as the *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* and *Folgerø and Others v. Norway* cases, in 2007, the OSCE worked on the issue of religious education. Religious education was discussed in the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, with the document being responsible for setting the standards of religious education. The guiding principles for preparing curricula state that "teaching about religions and beliefs should be sensitive, balanced, inclusive, non-doctrinal, impartial, and based on human rights principles relating to freedom of religion or belief" (OSCE, 2007: 40). In the conclusion part of the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools, the OSCE states:

Where compulsory courses involving teaching about religions and beliefs are sufficiently neutral and objective, requiring participation in such courses as such does not violate the freedom of religion or belief (although states are free to allow partial or total opt-outs in these settings) (OSCE, 2007: 77).

It is the duty of schools "to assist students in developing attitudes that contribute to a culture of peace, conflict resolution, human rights, and freedom of religion and thought, all essential to a modern, democratic, and secular state" (Selçuk & Valk, 2012: 448-49). The function of religious education is to support children in gaining knowledge "about the nature of religious communities but marginalising the social and sometimes diverse and controversial contexts in

which those religions exist in the classroom serves only to undermine that role” (Revell, 2010: 214). Thus, religious lessons can play a significant role in increasing children’s understanding of tolerance and peace in society.

Under such provisions, there are three main approaches to teaching religion. The first is the total separation of religion and state, as in France; another is non-confessional religious education, as in Sweden; and finally, “confessional religious education, nurture in the faith tradition of heritage, to appear as a subject in the curriculum” (Cush, 2007: 219) as in Greece. However, according to Toledo principles, religious education must not be confessional because it must be neutral and objective enough to not violate principles of human rights.

Turkish Domestic Law

Turkish domestic law regulates the right to education at the constitutional level. Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution states:

No one shall be deprived of the right of education.

The scope of the right to education shall be defined and regulated by law.

Education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, based on contemporary scientific and educational principles, under the supervision and control of the State. Educational institutions contravening these principles shall not be established...

According to the Turkish Constitutional Court, education is a complex and costly activity using limited state resources; the state must create a balance between educational needs and the limited resources (see *Mehmet Reşit Arslan v. Turkey*, 2017). Education, as a public service, is guaranteed by the Turkish Constitution (see *Mehmet Reşit Arslan v. Turkey*, 2017). The Court decided that despite the importance of education for society, the right to education is not an absolute and unlimited right, and the state may limit this right (see *Mehmet Reşit Arslan v. Turkey*, 2017). The Court interprets that Article 42 imposes a negative duty on public authorities not to prevent an individual from receiving education and training. However, it does not impose a positive duty on the state to provide education and training to all individuals, except for primary education (see *Yüksel Baran v. Turkey*, 2014).

In Turkey, for decades, the religious education system has been an issue under the national education policy and political debates (see Grigoriadis & Gurcel, 2014). In the early years of the Republic of Turkey, between 1927 and 1947, religious education was excluded from the educational system (see Gündüz, 1998). In this period, some religious communities, orders, and groups undertook missions such as training religion service staff on their own initiative, ensuring the continuity of a religious culture in society. The policy of accepting religious teachings into the education system first began with arrangements for optional religious lessons, initiated by the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s [*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* – TGNA] decision on February 1949, which permits religious lessons in schools (see Şimşek, 2013). In the 1950s, the new government of Turkey, consisting of members of the Democrat Party [*Demokrat Parti* – DP], incorporated religious instruction into the primary education system with the option of exemption (see Gündüz, 1998). More recently, religious culture and ethics education adopted as a compulsory lesson with Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution, stating that:

Religious and moral education and instruction shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other

religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.

The legal reasoning that prompted this was the fear that if the state followed a hands-off policy, society's demand for religious education would be fulfilled by other bodies, such as religious sects (see Turkish Constitutional Court, 2012). The Turkish Constitutional Court interpreted the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons as a necessity, and declared that the Turkish Constitution regards religious services, including compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, as a social need that the state is obligated to meet (see Turkish Constitutional Court, 2012).

Additionally, in the domestic legal system of the Republic of Turkey, Article 12 of the Turkish National Education Code states that secularism is essential in the Turkish public educational system and that religious education is compulsory, starting from elementary school. Moreover, in the Turkish educational system, the legal exemption procedure for religious education lessons was only made available to certain groups.

According to the Turkish Supreme Council for Education:

Following the proposal by the Ministry of Education, pupils of Turkish nationality who belong to the Christian or Jewish religions and who attend primary and secondary schools, with the exception of schools for minorities, are not obliged to follow the classes in religious culture and ethics, provided they affirm their adherence to those religions (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007: para.18).

The other important regulation related to religious education is Article 341 of the Turkish Civil Code. This article is about religious education and states that parents have the right to determine the pupil's religious education and that adults are free to choose their religion.

4.4. Alevis Takes Legal Action Based on International Human Rights Law

For a religious community, it is essential to be able to execute their devotional requirements without discrimination. However, the policies and implementations of states may impede religious communities' fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right not to be discriminated against due to their beliefs, the right to possess their own places of worship, or the right of parents to teach their own religion to their children.

In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis are a religious group experiencing problems related to human rights. Alevis have taken legal actions based on international human rights related to the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. The actions that I will discuss in this section revolve around three key issues. Firstly, Alevis underline that they are facing discrimination through *Diyanet* policies. Secondly, the Turkish government does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship, denying them the benefits of the legal regulations that financially support and protect legally recognised places of worship. Finally, Turkey's compulsory religious education presents complications for the Alevi religious community, which claims that the religious education system teaches their children Sunni Islam.

4.4.1. Discrimination Allegations of Alevis

Although the Turkish Constitution formulates the principle of equality and non-discrimination, its application and some legal regulations are not in accordance with Alevis' demands. In this

respect, one of the most important issues is the role of *Diyanet*, which is a Turkish state and constitutional institution. *Diyanet* is an institution that institutionalises Islam, which it regards as its sole and authentic reference. From the founding years of the Republic of Turkey until the 1950s, *Diyanet* was given the role of creating a modern, national, and secular state. However, later, its function shifted, and its role became to shape the state-religion relationship according to the changing interests of the ruling parties (see Koca, 2014). Policies of *Diyanet* started to shift in favour of Sunnis (see Koca, 2014) and have continued to do so until now. While *Diyanet* provides services based solely on the Sunni Islamic understanding, its budget is covered by the general budget; it has an enormous budget based on taxes from all citizens: 16 billion, 98 million, and 580 Turkish Liras for 2022. This offends the Alevis' sense of justice, as they receive no service from this institution. Additionally, Alevis are using their own resources for their own needs while subsidising Sunni religious services with their taxes (see Demir & İpek, 2015). *Diyanet* also declared that *cemevis* cannot be recognised as places of worship in Islam. So, Alevis came to consider *Diyanet* as conflicting with secularism, with the right not to be discriminated against, and with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey

İzzettin Doğan, head of the Cem Foundation, and other applicants justified their claims with the right not to be discriminated against and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion recognised in the Turkish Constitution and the ECHR. The applicants sent a petition to the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, expressing their concern that *Diyanet* was not providing service on equal footing, denying Alevis and other faiths from benefiting from its public service. In their petition, they stated that although the Republic of Turkey is under the obligation to ensure that citizens may exercise their right to freedom of conscience. According to the applicants' petition to the Prime Minister:

The rights of Alevis are disregarded, their places of worship, namely the *cemevis*, are not recognised as such, numerous obstacles prevent them from being built, no provision is made in the budget for running them, and the exercise of their rights and freedoms is subject to the good will of public officials (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.10).

The Prime Ministry rejected their requests, stating that *Diyanet* sees every religion on an equal footing. The Turkish Council of State also concurred with this decision. After exhausting all of the legal domestic remedies in the Republic of Turkey, İzzettin Doğan and others applied to the ECtHR, and the case started in 2013.

In the ECtHR, the applicant's main submissions were claims of discrimination in conjunction with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the Republic of Turkey, stating that they were "victims of discrimination on the ground of their religion as they received less favourable treatment than citizens of the Sunni branch of Islam in a comparable situation, without any objective and reasonable justification for that difference in treatment" (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.138). The applicants declared that *Diyanet* rejects their places of worship, and they requested "equal treatment of all beliefs and religions in the provision of public services, without favouring a particular branch of a religion in the administration of the religious public service to the detriment of the others" (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.144).

The Turkish state declared that these allegations lacked sufficient grounds. The state asserted that Alevis are freely practising their religious beliefs in *cemevis* without interference; therefore, Alevis are not subjected to discrimination. The Turkish government also stated that Alevis are not treated less favourably in Turkey when compared to other Muslim citizens, namely the other

members of religious orders (see *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016). The Turkish government also argued that *Diyanet* aims to promote solidarity and functions according to secularist principles (see *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016). The government also denied that *Diyanet* gives financial support to mosques and defended its actions, stating that its “task consisted in authorising mosques built by citizens or legal entities to operate as places of worship, inspecting those places, administering them and assigning religious functionaries to them” (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.153).

The ECtHR decided that a theological debate on Alevi belief “is inconsistent with the State’s duty of neutrality and impartiality towards religions” (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.179). After pointing out the importance of being legally recognized, the ECtHR stated there is “almost blanket exclusion of the Alevi community” (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para.184) from the religious public service. Moreover, the Court decided that there was no objective and reasonable justification for the difference in treatment to the applicant Alevi and that Article 14 taken in conjunction with Article 9 of the Convention is violated (see *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016). This decision was taken by the Grand Chamber of the ECtHR, which meant that the decision was final and could not be appealed by the Turkish government. Although there were other decisions related to Alevi, this was the first that confirmed that *Diyanet* was discriminatory in terms of religious public service and international human rights law.

4.4.2. Alevi’s Places of Worship and Their Legal Actions

Diyanet counters the Alevi’s struggles for their *cemevis* to be recognised as places of worship by declaring that Alevi are Muslims within Islam, and *Diyanet* meets the citizens’ requirements stipulated by law (Law No. 633, 1965), which covers the expenditures of Muslim places of worship, i.e., mosques and small mosques. In support of the opinion of *Diyanet*, while Alevi assert that their places of worship are *cemevis*, some scholars propose that it is not possible for *cemevis* to be an alternative to mosques, since they are not places of worship for all Muslims and therefore not eligible for state support (see Sofuoğlu & İlhan, 2006). However, for some other scholars, this argument may damage the status of Alevism (see Kılıç, 2008). Again, other scholars imply that *cemevis* and mosques are not mutually exclusive and propose that the two can exist side by side (see Küçük & Küçük, 2009).

Beyond the debates above on *cemevis*, the failure to recognise the *cemevis* as places of worship results in a lack of legal and financial support and legal protection, such as that regulated in Article 153 of the Turkish Criminal Code. The Turkish legal system allows electricity costs for places of worship (mosques, small mosques, and the 400 synagogues and churches in Turkey) to be paid from the budget of *Diyanet* (Law No. 5784, 2008: Article 17); furthermore, no charge is made by municipalities for water for mosques and small mosques across the country (Regulation on Mosques’ Repair, Cleaning, and Environmental Arrangements, 1986: Article 10). Alevi, as taxpayers, suggest two solutions: either *Diyanet* is dissolved, or if it cannot be dissolved completely due to the existing constitutional regulations, it can be rearranged within the framework of equality (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation and Alevi Cultural Associations, 2009).

Alevi’s increasing reactions to the refusal of accepting *cemevis* as places of worship in the last decades encouraged AKP government to hold discussion workshops with Alevi community representatives since 2009, known as the Alevi Initiative [*Alevi Açılımı*]. The workshops were convened to debate Alevi’s problems and respond to Alevi’s demands, and included experts, academics, researchers, journalists, government representatives, and representatives of non-governmental organisations such as the World Ahlul Bayt Foundation [*Dünya Ehlibeyt Vakfı*] and the Cem Foundation. In the final report of this Alevi Initiative, the Alevi Initiative Final

Report in 2010, *cemevis* were described as newly established places that needed to be evaluated under Law No. 677. Article 22 of the report states that the legal status of *cemevis* shall be solved and Alevi demands shall be responded to by the state under the principle of equality (Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, 2010). The purpose of the Alevi Initiative seemed to have been polemical, resulting in some unexpected outcomes, such as the boycott of the workshop by the Alevi Bektashi Federation, which denied that the workshops truly represented Alevi demands (Alevi Bektashi Federation, 2010). Other organisations that joined the boycott were the Alevi Cultural Association [*Alevi Kültür Dernekleri*] and the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associations [*Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri*].

A remarkable event occurred in 2012, when a member of parliament from CHP proposed to the TGNA that *cemevi* must be constructed in the TGNA. In reply, the president of the TGNA recalled the view of *Diyanet* that Alevism is not a separate religion but a variation of Islam and that the only places of worship in Islam are mosques. Therefore, the president of the TGNA rejected the request based on *Diyanet*'s written opinion No. 1773 of December 17, 2004, which states that Alevism is an interpretation of Islam, whose places of worship are mosques and small mosques. Consequently, *cemevis* and similar places cannot be acknowledged as places of worship. The president of the TGNA also supported the position of *Diyanet*, and the member of parliament's request was rejected.

The Turkish Supreme Court Assembly of Civil Chambers took a crucial decision on the issue after an association was established to construct a *cemevi* in Ankara. The association's regulatory statute denotes that *cemevis* are places of worship. In June 2008, by referring to Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution, the Directorship of Associations of the Governorship of Ankara sent a written notice to the association requesting the amendment of the reference to *cemevis* as places of worship. Subsequently, the association insisted on their proposition, and the directorship sent a notification to the public prosecutor of Ankara. The prosecutor in turn brought an action for the rescinding of the association's regulatory statute. The Ankara 16th Civil Court decided that the proclamation of *cemevis* as places of worship for Alevi did not contradict the law or Article 2 of the Constitution, and therefore *cemevis* could be recognised as places of worship by the society. However, in contrast to the Ankara 16th Civil Court, the Court of Cassation decided in 2012 that, according to *Diyanet*, no places other than mosques and small mosques could be recognised as places of worship in Islam. The Court of Cassation also emphasised that the restrictions in Law No. 677 corresponded with the Turkish Constitution and, consequently, reversed the decision of the Ankara 16th Civil Court.

However, the legal process did not end until the decision of the Supreme Court Assembly of Civil Chambers. The Supreme Court Assembly of Civil Chambers referred to Article 11 of the ECHR, the freedom of assembly and association, and Article 33 of the Turkish Constitution, the freedom of association. These articles have limits, but the Assembly states that Article 18 of the ECHR, concerning the limitation of restrictions on rights, shall be safeguarded. The Assembly agreed that restrictions could be placed on the exercise of these rights under the condition of having an acceptable social reason. Furthermore, the Assembly specified that arbitrarily taking back the given rights or restricting the financial resources should be regarded as interference with the freedom of assembly and association. The Assembly stated that the common purpose of restricting such rights should be a benefit to society and decided that under the freedom of assembly and association, groups are permitted to work together to establish places of worship, unless there is a conflict with the law. In its decision, the Assembly repeats the conditions for restricting the right of association, as written in Article 11 of the ECHR. The Assembly decided that, for social reasons, it was unnecessary to restrict the activities of the association in Ankara, and so, along with the right to believe in Alevism, people should be permitted to form associations in order to establish places of worship (Turkish Supreme Court Assembly of Civil Chambers, 2014). On this legal basis, the Assembly stated that the

prohibition of the association established to construct *cemevis* would lead to a distortion of social peace and order. As a result, the decision of the First Instance of the 16th Civil Court of Ankara was approved, and the decision was recognised by the Assembly.

In 2022, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan suggested that the *cemevi* issue of Alevis could be solved by establishing a state institution called the Alevi Culture and Cem House Presidency under the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, in the view of Alevis, the Presidency is not the appropriate channel for resolving the issue because of its policy of nationalising Alevis' *cemevis* (Elçi, 2022).

The Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey

In 2014, a case was won in the ECtHR by the Cem Foundation, an NGO that aims to research and disseminate Alevi values and work for their demands. The Foundation's case was that *cemevis* should be recognised as places of worship and should receive a share of the state budget. In the *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey* case, the Cem Foundation alleged that not recognising *cemevis* as places of worship was discrimination.

In Yenibosna, a district in Istanbul, the Cem Foundation built a multipurpose building, with a *cemevi*, library, and conference hall under the name of the Yenibosna Culture Centre [*Yenibosna Kültür Merkezi*]. The Cem Foundation, on behalf of the Yenibosna Cultural Centre, applied to state authorities for recognition and exemption from electricity bill, as with mosques. In Turkish domestic law, mosques are exempt from utility expenses such as electricity. The application was rejected by the District Court of Beyoğlu in 2008, based on *Diyanet*'s official view on places of worship. *Diyanet* responded to Alevis' grievances by emphasising that Alevis are Muslims and that *Diyanet* by law, meets all citizens' requirements, which cover Muslim places of worship, mosques, and small mosques expenditures. After the rejection, the Yenibosna Cultural Centre authorities appealed the decision, but the Court of Cassation also dismissed the application in 2009. The Cem Foundation on behalf of the Yenibosna Cultural Centre applied to the ECtHR, and over time, the unpaid electricity bill reached 668.012.13 Turkish Liras.

In the application to the ECtHR, the applicants claimed violations of Article 14, the prohibition of discrimination, and Article 9, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion of the ECHR. The Turkish government rejected these allegations. In this case, the matter extended from funding issues to discrimination. The ECtHR decided that the Yenibosna Culture Centre was treated differently than officially recognised places of worship in Turkey, and that there was no objective and reasonable justification for the applicant's discriminatory treatment (*Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, 2014).

Thus, the ECtHR decided the government was violating both Article 9 and Article 14. The decision was interpreted from various perspectives. Some Alevi representatives and media organs read the *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey* decision as an affirmation of their views, i.e., that the ECtHR found that Alevis were being discriminated against in terms of their places of worship. However, the Turkish Government requested that the case be re-examined in some areas, such as seeking a reduction in the amount of the pecuniary damage and not exempting the Cem Foundation from a possible payment related to the electricity bills in question. In 2019, the request of the Turkish government was refused by the ECtHR.

4.4.3. Compulsory Religious Education in Turkey and Alevis Legal Actions

Alevis argue that the beliefs of the Sunni sect of Islam form the basis for the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. Alevis continue their arguments by stating that the lessons are a breach of Alevis' human rights and freedoms and ignore their own distinct convictions.

For many years now, Alevi have voiced their demands through protests, rallies, or by organising assemblies about religious culture and ethics lessons. Alevi have shown their opposition to compulsory religious education, especially in three remarkable rallies held in Ankara in 2008 and 2012, with approximately 115.000 participants, and in Izmir in 2011, with approximately 60,000 participants, which I visited. Thousands had attended these rallies to call on the government to implement equal citizenship policies and solve Alevi's problems.

One of the best-attended public assemblies was held in Ankara on January 16, 2011 under the name of the Grand Alevi Congress [*Büyük Alevi Kurultayı*], which I visited, organised by Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation. The assembly of approximately more than 4.000 participants asked the end of assimilation, the abolition of compulsory religious education, the dissolution of *Diyanet*, the return of the dervish lodges to the Alevi, which were closed with the Law No.677, the transformation of the Madımak Hotel into a museum, and the recognition that *cemevis* are Alevi's places of worship. The discussion in the congress, also focused on the knowledge conveyed in its textbooks; for example, attendees pointed out that the state gives a single definition for Alevi and Alevism, with which not all Alevi agree. In the congress some people emphasised that Alevi families face complications when teaching their children their own faith and belief system. The children are confused by contradictions between their teachers and their parents' teachings.

On January 15-16, 2012, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation organised the Second Grand Alevi Congress [*İkinci Büyük Alevi Kurultayı*] in Ankara. Representatives, spiritual leaders, politicians, academics, and Alevi representatives from Syria and other countries attended the assembly. Regarding religious education in Turkey, it was asserted that religious culture and ethics lessons should not be compulsory. The theme of the assembly was shaped around Alevi's expectations of a new constitution, embracing equal citizenship and abolishing Article 24, and providing for compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons.

On May 11, 2013, the Third Grand Alevi Congress [*Üçüncü Büyük Alevi Kurultayı*], was held in Ankara under the leadership of Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation. In his speech, the president of Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation stated that the Alevi would never accept the Islamic religion emphasis as a part of their identity (see "3. Büyük Alevi Kurultayı Yapıldı", 2013), and in the congress, the demands, and problems of the Alevi were discussed.

Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey

For years, Alevi's discontent with the compulsory religious education system of Turkey involved passive resistance, requests, protest, and engagement in legal action in domestic and international tribunals. However, a milestone was reached in the Alevi struggle against compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons with the case in the ECtHR, namely *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007.

The Zengin family, an Alevi family in Istanbul, sued the government of Turkey regarding compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. The Court dealt with Hasan Zengin's parental rights over his daughter Eylem Zengin's right to education. In accordance with Turkish administration procedure, Hasan Zengin applied to the Governorship of Istanbul, referring to the Provincial Directorate of National Education, stating that, against his will, his daughter Eylem Zengin was forced to attend compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. Hasan Zengin referred to Article 26 of the UDHR, the right to education, and stated the current lessons are incompatible with the secularism principle. After the rejection of their exemption request from the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, in terms of Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution and Article 12 of the Turkish National Education Code, Hasan Zengin sued the Ministry of National Education. Hasan Zengin applied to the Istanbul Administrative Court and challenged the compulsory nature of these lessons. His request was rejected, this time by the

Istanbul Administrative Court. The court's rejection was based on Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution. The last resort in the Turkish domestic legal system to which Hasan Zengin could turn was the superior court, that is, the Turkish Council of State. The Turkish Council of State rejected his request, and regarding the Council's refusal, the Istanbul Second Administrative Court's decision became final. The Zengin family had to exhaust all attempts at domestic solutions, in a process that started in 2001, before they were able to apply to the ECtHR. Eventually, the dispute of *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* was brought before the ECtHR.

Hasan Zengin alleged in the ECtHR that the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons violated their rights and freedoms protected under Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1, the right to education, and Article 9 of the ECHR, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The crucial argument of the application was that religious education disregarded Eylem Zengin's Alevi faith and only taught Sunni Islam. The government stated that the lessons complied with the principles of objectivity and pluralism and were taught in a neutral manner. The government pointed out that the nonspecific variety of Islam was taught in these lessons and that "knowledge of the Alevi faith, which seemed to belong more to the area of philosophy, required more in-depth teaching. Thus, information on this topic was given in the 9th grade (the first year of upper secondary school)" (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007: para.43). The Court affirmed the distinction between Sunni Islam and Alevism as a religious conviction and decided the information given in the ninth grade was deficient in the eyes of those with Alevi religious convictions.

The ECtHR declared that the religious culture and ethics lessons at the date of application were not given in the spirit of objectivity and pluralism (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007). The ECtHR stated that religious education in schools is referred to in the second sentence of Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1, and this article essentially guarantees pluralism in education, which is seen as a measure of a democratic society (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007). The Court also criticised the impossibility of exemption from the lessons and the lack of availability of alternatives for believers other than those adhering to Sunni Islam (*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007). Finally, the Grand Chamber of the ECtHR decided that the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in Turkey were incompatible with the ECHR and that the religious education system constituted a human rights violation regarding the second sentence of Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1.

The Revisions in the Religious Culture and Ethics Lessons Textbooks

Following the case of *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, new topics and knowledge about Alevism were added to religious culture and ethics textbooks. One of the lawyers of the applicants in the *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* case, Mustafa, whom I visited before the field studies of this research in 2010, expressed his views about the textbooks. He indicated that the context of the topic of Turks and Muslimism was used as evidence by the government to claim that Alevism was, in fact, being taught in religious education lessons. Before the decision of the ECtHR, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli was only mentioned in the context of Turks and Muslimism. Mustafa recalls the case and textbooks as follows:

After the submission of textbooks on religion and ethics for the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, the ECtHR investigated these books, and the ECtHR's expert group stated that only in the seventh-grade book was a fifteen-page discussion of other religions. Instead of general information on religion, the curriculum focuses on Sunni Islam's faith... I think official translators translated the books, and the ECtHR's experts evaluated the matter and reported... During its defence, the government declared that the Alevi faith was taught. We asked them to produce evidence; their answer was the ninth-grade textbook on religion and

ethics. In the textbook, one page was devoted to Turks and Muslimism and individuals who were influential during the establishment of Islamic perception in Turks, which included Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli. On the same page, two books were named in the footnotes, which the government produced as evidence... Currently, the government is not executing the judgment. In August 2008, we applied to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, but no decision has yet been made because the government declares that they are teaching the Alevi faith.

Although Mustafa gave information about the textbooks in the case, I wanted to learn how Alevism was added to the compulsory religion textbooks after the *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* decision of the ECtHR. For this purpose, I visited the bookstore of the Ministry of Education and obtained the books to be used in the 2011 primary, secondary, and high school year.

Among the textbooks I obtained, the books and topics in which information about Alevism is included can be listed as follows: The secondary school sixth-grade textbook included issues on the relationship between Islam and Turks, considering spiritual leaders such as Ebu Hanife, Yunus Emre, and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli (see Akgül, Albayrak, Çatal, Çiftçi, Koç, Paça, Türker, Yıldırım, Kara, Özbay & Şimşekcan, 2011). Information on the Alevi-Bektashi faith is first adopted in the secondary school seventh-grade textbook. In the textbook, nine pages out of 150 are devoted to Alevism. Alevi is defined as Muslims who respect, love and support Caliph Ali, believe in the unity of God, love, and accept the Ahl al-Bayt, the family of Prophet Muhammed, and Muhammed himself as the last prophet. Bektashi belief is also framed as the believers and followers of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli. The section on Alevism continues with short descriptions of Alevi rituals, such as *cem*. In this section of the book, the *cem* ceremony is defined as coming together to turn to God, repent for sins, and commemorate the prophet Muhammed and his family. *Cemevi* are defined as places founded after urbanisation where *cem* ceremonies are performed. The section covers topics such as different types of *cem* ceremonies, how *cem* ceremonies are performed, *semah*³⁰, *musahiplik*³¹, prayer, chanting prayers in unison [*gülbank*], and fasting in Alevism (see Akgül, Albayrak, Çatal, Çiftçi, Ekşi, Yıldırım, Kara, Paça, Türker, Özbay, & Şimşekcan, 2011). The secondary school's eighth-grade religious textbook has some quotations from Caliph Ali and a reading passage about sacrificing animals in Alevi culture (see Akgül, Albayrak, Çatal, Çiftçi, Ekşi, Yıldırım, Kara, Koç, Paça, Türker & Şimşekcan 2011). In the high school 12th grade compulsory religious education textbook, the section entitled mystical texts that are influential in our culture [*kültürümüzde etkin olan tasavvuf yorumları*] covers the knowledge on Alevism-Bektashism in eight and a half pages out of 120. The topics are like those in the seventh-grade religious textbook, and it defines Alevi in a similar way as in the secondary school seventh-grade religious textbook. The section continues with similar information as in the seventh-grade religious textbook for secondary schools about *cem*, *cemevi*, *semah*, *musahiplik*, prayer, chanting prayers in unison, and fasting in Alevism (see Akgül, Albayrak, Çatal, Çiftçi, Ekşi, Yıldırım, Kara, Koç, Özbay, Paça & Türker, 2011).

Attempts to revise the textbooks, however, were not a satisfactory solution. Alevi claimed that they had been excluded from the process of revision and criticised the incorrect characterization of Alevism, the lack of teachers with adequate knowledge, and the lack of data in the books (see Başdemir, 2011). For example, Alevi NGOs declare that they were never consulted on the data on Alevism and have no idea who created it. In detail, although Alevism was included in the revised curriculum, the teachers who will teach it graduated from the Faculty of Theology and received Sunni education; moreover, Alevism is not taught in the

³⁰ A kind of ceremonial dance performed with music in *cem* ceremonies.

³¹ Brotherhood in Alevism.

curriculum of the Faculty of Theology (see Başdemir, 2011). In the textbooks, the inclusion of Alevism into the curriculum is based more on ideological than pedagogical grounds and does not meet with the approval of Alevis (see Başdemir, 2011). As a summary, the textbook revisions can be seen as trying, but ultimately failing, to respond to Alevis' demands.

Mansur Yalçın and Other v. Turkey: A Second Compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics Lessons Case

In 2005, Mansur Yalçın and others asked the Ministry of Education to revise the syllabus by consulting Alevi faith leaders and include Alevism into the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. They also asked about a mechanism that trains and monitors the teachers of compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. The Ministry of Education stated that the textbooks and curriculum of religious education did not convey a specific belief but rather adopted a supra-denominational religious education and that Alevi-Bektashi culture is being taught. After receiving the rejection of the Ministry of Education, the applicants exhausted all domestic remedies in Turkey and applied to the ECtHR in 2011.

In the case before the ECtHR, Mansur Yalçın and other Alevi families alleged that the textbooks of the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are not neutral, and the current system violates the right to education, second sentence of Article 2 of Additional Protocol No. 1, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, Article 9, and the prohibition of discrimination, Article 14 of the ECHR. However, the government of the Republic of Turkey argued that Alevi-Bektashi religious authorities had examined the textbooks in a series of meetings and that there is a wealth of information on Alevism-Bektashism in the textbooks. In reply, the applicants alleged that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in Turkey impose the Sunni Islam faith and that the lessons are not objective, critical, and pluralist. The government rejected all the allegations of the applicants and declared that the textbooks and lessons are based on a supra-denominational approach.

The Court notes that some changes were made to the syllabus for religious culture and ethics. It observes at the outset that these changes were primarily intended to facilitate the provision of information on the various faiths existing in Turkey, including the Alevi faith. "However, the changes did not entail a real overhaul of the key components of the syllabus, which focuses primarily on knowledge of Islam as practised and interpreted by the majority of the population in Turkey" (*Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*, 2014: para 68). The Court, once more, drew attention to the need for impartiality and neutrality. The dominance of the Sunni interpretation of Islam in the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons was judged as not being plural or objective. In the assessment of the Court, not having an exemption procedure from the lessons was also criticised. The Court declared that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons do not respect the right of parents' convictions and decided that, regarding the applicant's application, compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons violate Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, the right to education, and recommended the implementation of a system where children have the right to be exempted from compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons.

Alevi citizens considered the decision of the ECtHR as an achievement, while the government and Turkish State representatives reacted strongly. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan opposed the decision on the grounds that western countries have no exemption system (see "AHİM'in Din Dersi Kararı", 2014). He continued by arguing that nowhere in the world are compulsory physics, chemistry, and math lessons debated, and that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons should not be an exception (see "AHİM'in Din Dersi Kararı", 2014). Moreover, he also reacted to the ECtHR by asserting that the gap among children caused by abandoning the compulsory religious culture and ethic lessons will be filled by drugs, racism, and violence (see "AHİM'in Din Dersi Kararı", 2014). The president of *Diyanet*, as another state representative, also criticised the ECtHR decision, and pointed out the dangers of equating religious education

with religious culture and ethics education. He meant that in the current religious education system, subjects such as religious culture and morality are taught. In his opinion, the ECtHR may have implicitly confused the two types of lesson (see “Diyaret İşleri Başkanından AİHM’in “Zorunlu Din Dersi” Kararı Yorumu”, 2018).

Sinan Işık v. Turkey

There is also the case of *Sinan Işık v. Turkey*. In this case, Sinan Işık, an Alevi citizen, brought a lawsuit over “the denial of his request to have the word ‘Islam’ on his identity card replaced by the name of his faith ‘Alevi’” (*Sinan Işık v. Turkey*, 2010: para.3). So, the *Sinan Işık v. Turkey* case was about the ID cards in Turkey, and in this case, the ECtHR found that Turkey violates Article 9; however, the claims in this case did not concern facing discrimination resulting from *Diyaret*, places of worship, or religious education. Although the *Sinan Işık v. Turkey* case is also important in and of itself, it is not within the scope of the current research.

Situation After 2016

Alevis' problems related to Turkish domestic law continued even after the ECtHR decisions. The role of the ECtHR declined further after 2016, because after the July 15, 2016, military coup attempt, the government declared a two-year state of emergency. During this period, the authority of the ECHR in Turkey was suspended, according to Article 15(1) of the ECHR, which states that “in time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation any High Contracting Party may take measures derogating from its obligations under [the] Convention ...”. In 2018, the state of emergency and the suspension of the ECHR expired, but currently, according to the ECtHR database, no new cases from Turkey have been brought to the ECtHR by Alevis.

4.5. Secularism in the Turkish Domestic Law

In the modern Republic of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire’s policies towards religion were continued by the politicisation and state control of religion (see Denli, 2007). In Turkey, secularism is the basis for controlling religion (see Koçan & Öncü, 2004), a process that started during the founding years of the Republic of Turkey. For example, the Law No. 431, 1924 established the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and subsequently, with the idea of establishing a strict secular modern state, the:

Founding political decision-making elite of Turkey... did not want to have a unit within the cabinet dealing with religious affairs. Instead, by assigning religious affairs to an administrative unit, the ruling elite both took religion under their control and at the same time managed to break the potentially sacred significance of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Gözaydın, 2006: 1).

Although Article 2 of the 1921 Constitution, which is the first constitution of the Republic of Turkey, declared the religion of the state to be Islam, this religion clause was abolished in the second constitution of the Republic of Turkey in 1928. As a result of the amendment made in Article 2 of the 1928 constitution, secularism was eventually adopted into the constitution in 1937. Currently, in Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution, secularism is stated as the principle of the Republic of Turkey, thus indicating that the Republic of Turkey is a secular state. Secularism in Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution must also be interpreted in combination with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, because for Turkey to be qualified as secular, it must have recognised and guaranteed religious freedom, which may be understood as freedom

of belief and worship (see Özkul, 2014). Additionally, Article 4 of the Turkish Constitution gives special importance to secularism by stating that “the provision of ..., the characteristics of the Republic in Article 2, ... shall not be amended, nor shall their amendment be proposed”.

In Turkish domestic law, secularism is also referenced in the foundation principles of *Diyanet*. The Turkish Constitution regulates in Article 151 that *Diyanet* must function in accordance with the principles of secularism. Also, secularism is closely related to the education system of Turkey. Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution and Article 12 of the Turkish National Education Code state that secularism is essential to Turkish national education. Secularism in the Turkish legal system relates to Alevi complaints, such as those concerning *Diyanet*.

However, in the Republic of Turkey, it was not possible to separate religion from the state, especially after the increase of Turkish-Islamic synthesis ideology (see Dressler, 2008). Moreover, after the introduction of the multi-party system, following 1946, “Islam henceforth became an integral part of the program of all center-right parties, which in turn could count on the financial and electoral support of religious interest groups” (Karakaş, 2007: 12). The problems in applying the principle of secularism led to charges that the “official secularist policies in Turkey are inherently biased, exclusionist, and discriminatory” (Denli, 2007: 96). According to this supposition “public resources are used to promote Sunni teaching by sponsoring the imam-hatip schools, Qur’an courses, emissions on state radio and TV, and ultimately by initiating compulsory religious education in the 1980s” (Denli, 2007: 96). In this context, according to Alevis, who are defined as secularists in the Republic of Turkey, compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons that violate the right to education are incompatible with the secularism principle (see *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007). These lessons have a “provision of a public service exclusively to Muslims adhering to Sunni theological doctrines” (*İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016: para 15) that conflicts with secularism. Moreover, for Alevis, *Diyanet* has become an institution that contradicts secularism.

4.6. Conclusion

The Republic of Turkey, established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, set out the regulations regarding the status of minorities with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, and accordingly, Jewish, Armenian Orthodox, and Greek Orthodox communities were recognised as minorities. The Republic of Turkey has been a party to many international agreements since its establishment and was one of the first countries to integrate international human rights legal texts into domestic law.

The UDHR, the CRC, the ICCPR, and the ICESCR within the UN body are international human rights documents approved and recognised by the Republic of Turkey, with some reservations on certain articles. In addition, Turkey, as a member state of the Council of Europe, signed and ratified the ECHR and its additional protocols, and accepted the ECtHR’s jurisdiction. Turkey also ratified the revised version of the European Social Charter and the Amending Protocol of the Charter. In terms of its relations with the EU, Turkey is also bound by the Copenhagen political criteria. In accordance with its EU candidacy, Turkey took measures to harmonise its national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, the EU law, and introduced some legal reforms, such as amendments to the Turkish Constitution. One of these reforms was the addition to Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, which accepts that international treaties will prevail in case of a conflict with Turkish domestic law over an issue that concerns fundamental rights and freedoms.

Among the rights and freedoms addressed in international and Turkish domestic legal documents, Alevi grievances are directly related to the right not to be discriminated against, the

freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. The right not to be discriminated against is protected by the UDHR, the ICCPR, and the ECHR. The ICCPR widened its domain of application by prohibiting any kind of different treatment that is not reasonable or objective. The right not to be discriminated against in the ECHR is limited to the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention, and it again states that unreasonable and unjustifiable different treatment should be treated as discrimination. Also, judgements by the ECtHR emphasised the need for objective and reasonable justification. In Turkish domestic law, the right not to be discriminated against is enshrined in the Turkish Constitution.

The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is regulated by the UDHR and the ICCPR and detailed in Human Rights Committee General No. 22, which stated that freedom also concerns the right to manifest religion. The ECHR documents this freedom, and the ECtHR decided that this freedom must be understood in a broader context and should ensure that all beliefs, including atheism, are protected by this freedom. In addition, the ECtHR has also decided that the state's neutrality and impartiality are important in guaranteeing the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Also, the ECtHR denies the state any discretion in determining the legitimacy of religious beliefs or the means used to express them. In Turkey, a state institution, *Diyanet*, is assigned to regulate the places of worship and the holding of religious services, and this institution recognises only mosques and small mosques [*mescits*] as places of worship in Islam. The Turkish Criminal Code protects places of worship that are legally recognised in Turkish law. The issues related to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion are also subject to other regulations, namely the Construction Code of the Republic of Turkey, the Turkish Tax Code, and Law No. 677 of 1925. According to some scholars, by means of Law No. 677, Alevis were thus unofficially rendered illegitimate by the law (see Subaşı, 2010).

The right to education, which involves religious education, is formulated in the UDHR, the ICESCR, the ICCPR, the CRC, the ECHR, and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. In addition, the Toledo Principle of OSCE laid out standards for religious education, that is, lessons should be neutral, objective, and non-doctrinal. Parents have a right to determine the kind of religious education their children receive. In international human rights law, the emphasis is on parental responsibility for choices made, and the protection of the freedom of parents relating to their children's religious and moral education. In the ECtHR rulings, it is emphasised that such education should be objective, critical, and pluralistic, and that the state has a responsibility to ensure an efficient exemption process from such lessons. The right to education and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in Turkish domestic law are determined by the Turkish Constitution and the Turkish National Education Code.

Diyanet does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship, and provides financial support and legal protection to Sunni mosques, but not to *cemevis*. In the case, *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016, the ECtHR decided that the difference in treatment constitute the exclusion of the Alevi community from receiving equal treatment in terms of religious provisions, and violates the prohibition of discrimination taken in conjunction with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. In addition, in the *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey* case, 2014, the ECtHR again ruled that discrimination occurs regarding the issue of places of worship.

Alevis consider the exposure of their children to Sunni beliefs in obligatory religion classes a violation of the right to education, and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and accordingly, the right not to be discriminated against. In *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007, *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*, 2014, the ECtHR ruled against Turkey, stating that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons violate the right to education. After *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, textbooks for compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons were

revised to include information about Alevism. However, in the *Mansur Yavaş and Others v. Turkey* case, the ECtHR stated that Sunni beliefs continue to dominate the content of the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, which were neither pluralistic nor balanced.

Following a military coup attempt in 2016, Turkey declared a state of emergency, and the ECHR was suspended. Although reinstated in 2018, since then, no Alevi lawsuits have been brought before the ECtHR.

Alevis' allegations against *Diyanet* and the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons also concern the principle of secularism, which was declared a principle of the Republic of Turkey in its Constitution. However, Alevis dispute the assertion that secularism is applied in Turkey (Karakas, 2007), because the state continues to promote Sunnism, and the state policies regarding *Diyanet* and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are incompatible with the secularism principle.

The first research question of this research is: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims? In summary, this chapter details the answer to the first research question. In this context, current international and domestic human rights law related to Alevis human rights violation claims includes the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. There are many legal sources that standardise these rights. In addition, secularism is a constitutional value that Alevis base on their allegations. To this end, to gain their rights and freedoms, Alevis have used legal remedies at both the domestic and international level, including the ECtHR.

Chapter Five, which follows this chapter on the legal aspects, is a general introduction to field studies. It describes the planning of my field studies, attending rallies, and congresses. This chapter also revisits the research questions, theoretical concepts outside human rights law, observations, and themes.

CHAPTER 5 The Experiences of Alevi: The Backgrounds of the Field Studies

Since childhood, I have often heard discussions about Alevi and their problems. As time passed and after my education in international human rights law, I started to consider how Alevi felt about human rights violations, discrimination, neglect, or marginalisation. Personally, I cannot admit having any such feelings. Perhaps because of my liberal family and educated social environment, I was never exposed to such situations. It became clear that what the Alevi were stating was different from my own feelings or experiences. So, after reading and hearing about many instances of Alevi' human rights violations, discrimination, and neglect, my curiosity about Alevi human rights situation grew, especially as my international human rights law education progressed.

I was aware that many legal regulations protect human rights in Turkey; however, Alevi were not satisfied with these current applications and regulations. In Turkey, debates about Alevi' conditions have continued for decades. I was aware of legal rules, texts, codes, and the Turkish Constitution that protect people's human rights, but from the Alevi' perspective, might there be problems in applying such provisions in Turkey?

This introduction presents the necessary background information to give meaning to the following chapters. For a full and detailed methodological exploration, I refer the reader to Chapter Two on methodological issues. I decided to explore in detail Alevi' opinions about their conditions in order to address such questions. Thus, the above-mentioned chapters describe and interpret Alevi' human rights conditions in the field. There are many court decisions about violations of Alevi human rights; however, as a lawyer, I was only concerned with exploring the human rights violations towards Alevi in Turkey in the field. Thus, I decided to embark on this research to investigate Alevi' situation in depth through fieldwork. As a first step, I decided to visit the Alevi NGO offices and attend their meetings. Between 2010 and 2012, I interviewed influential Alevi NGO leaders and representatives in Turkey. NGOs have varying degrees of agreement about the situation in Turkey, so this data serves as a guide to understanding NGOs' ideas and ideologies and how far these are aligned with those of Alevi in the field. Moreover, I attended rallies and congresses (see Chapter One) to gain a general overview of Alevi' human rights conditions. Later, I undertook field studies focused on understanding the Alevi human rights situation and their relation with the Republic of Turkey. It was important to be selective while choosing locations. I excluded metropolises such as Istanbul and locations in Europe for three reasons: Alevi have not directed me to visit these locations, except Ankara; the urban life conditions in these areas, which impact people's priorities; and my financial constraints. I also aimed to avoid selecting areas where the Kurdish debate was influential (see Chapter Two).

Interviewing and visiting every Alevi in Turkey was impossible; in any case, the exact numbers in Turkey are not clear. These people are scattered over Turkey and abroad, and it was important to be selective. The first locations chosen were a result of personal and family ties in the villages of Western Anatolia. As a second step, in line with my methodology, I selected locations where Alevism is more likely to be interpreted as a belief system. My research took me to the northern and central parts of Turkey, where there are still strong religious ties, including centuries-old religious dervishes and Bektashi lodges (see Yıldız 2011; Coşkun 2014). Snowball sampling was the other technique that I applied. In each location, people recommended other places to visit, and people, such as religious leaders, to interview. Details on these topics are provided in the methodology chapter (see Chapter Two).

The field studies in the following chapters should be read considering the theoretical concepts described in the next paragraph. These serve as a tool for interpreting and giving

meaning to the data. I should add that I decided to include these central concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law when it was clear that further explanation was needed to make sense of the data. Details of these concepts are in the theoretical framework chapter, Chapter Three.

As the fieldwork continued, additional research questions emerged (see Chapter One). My second research question is: How do Alevis experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground? I realised that many Alevis were employing the language of international human rights law. I found that the concept localising human rights (see Merry, 2006b) was valuable in understanding how Alevis were able to apply concepts from international human rights law to their local situations. I observed that those in the field discussed the situations and problems of their counterparts in other places; i.e., Alevis across Turkey and the world were able to relate to each other. To explain this unity, I read about imagined communities (see Anderson, 2006), leading to the third research question: Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community? Moreover, the data revealed the dynamic nature of the Alevi identity. I had already learned from my readings that the Alevi identity is changing; however, further field studies and reading raised this as the key issue, leading to the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades? To understand the construction and changes in the Alevi identity, I adopted the following three guiding theoretical concepts: fluid identity (see Bauman & Vecchi, 2008), hybrid identity (see Eriksen 2007; Smith 2008), and cultural identity (see Hall 1990; Staring & others 1997). Another theme in the fieldwork data concerned feelings of being discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens. Valuable concepts here were discrimination (see Dworkin 1978), inter-personal discrimination (see Whitley & Kite 2010), citizenship (see Bellamy, 2008), and second-class citizenship (see Bosniak 2006; Waldron 2000; Young 1989). Lastly, field studies revealed many different indicators of Alevis' attachment to the Republic of Turkey, via various statements and symbols; the field studies revealed the relevance of the concept of constitutional patriotism (see Habermas, 1996). So, from the field studies addressing the first single research question, three further questions were developed.

Considering the answers to these questions, three conclusions can be drawn. First, Alevis experience human rights violations, but in varying degrees, and they offer different solutions to their problems. Second, Alevi identity is no longer hidden but a public identity. Third, the religious dimension in the Alevi identity is not being practiced as before; but Alevism as a political identity and part of a lifestyle identity keeps its vitality. These main observations have different aspects and outcomes, according to specific regional conditions.

These observations and answers to the questions will be explained through themes obtained from the empirical data. The five themes are: historical experiences, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, Alevis' relations with Sunnis, Alevis' relations with the state, and the role of (internal, international, and return) migration. The first theme, historical experiences, affects three key areas: Alevis' experiences of human rights violations, their different proposals for solutions, and changes in identity. Historical experiences are the first theme used to formulate the three observations. The influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs is the second theme used to understand experience of human rights violations, proposals for solutions, and Alevis' understanding of their identities. Alevis' relations with Sunnis, the third theme, will be described in a context of change: there were clear changes in these relationships over time. This is another theme that will be used to shed light on the three observations. Alevis' relations with the state also changed, either becoming more positive, or moving to a more neutral position, but in both cases, moving away from the strongly negative relations of the past. This relationship also enlightens the three observations. Migration, whether internal, international,

or return, also has an impact on Alevis' awareness of human rights, on their experiences of human rights violations and the intensity of these, their different proposals for solutions, and on how their identity changes. All these themes and three observations will be highlighted in the next chapters and subsequent sections.

These theoretical concepts, research questions, observations, and themes are essential background for the following chapters on each region visited, namely, the Western, Northern and Central Anatolia regions, and the 2014 fieldwork using my car. These empirical fieldwork chapters are written and presented in chronological order. The field studies also bring out regional differences in Alevis' conditions. In the following chapters, Chapter Six covers the Western Anatolia region; Chapter Seven, the Northern Anatolia region; and Chapter Eight, the Central Anatolia region. These locations are either small cities and townships with a population of over 5,000 or smaller villages. The first tour of fieldwork was completed in 2011; however, it was resumed in 2014 after an important Alevi religious leader, Oğuz, directed me to contacts in Ankara. After visiting Oğuz, as a result of this snowball sampling, I visited Ankara in 2014, and Chapter Nine details this fieldwork.

CHAPTER 6 The Western Anatolia Region

6.1. Introduction

In the Western Anatolia region, I began the fieldwork in familiar locations. The starting point was villages in the region with ties to my family. This was the easiest way for me to access people, and I organised two separate periods of doing fieldwork in Kazana³² and Yana villages, and then, using snowball sampling, Hakah village. I was directed to this village by Alevis for whom it has a religious significance. Chapter Five, must be kept in mind while reading this chapter.

6.2. Kazana Village

Kazana, my first destination in the Western Anatolia region, was known to me since childhood. Many of our relatives used to live here, so I was sure that people would trust me. So, I decided to interview several people as a first step. My parents described a mosque, a place of worship in Sunnism, in this village, and my relatives were not pleased with this situation. I was curious about this mosque's story following Alevis' dissatisfaction that, instead of a *cemevi*, there is a mosque in the village. My uncle directed me to a doctor of internal medicine, Asım³³, living in a township close to this village. As I was also a relative, I called him. We arranged to meet at his office in the township, 10 km from the village. The next day at our meeting, he started by talking about Alevism, rather than the mosque. Alevis' problems, he said, come from the Ottoman Empire. This was something that I had heard repeatedly from almost all the representatives of Alevi NGOs, such as the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation, the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, and the Cem Foundation. He held the views of the NGOs, arguing that Alevis settled in isolated locations and mountains to avoid the Ottoman Empire's repression. According to the Asım, the historical experiences of Alevis reshaped their belief system and religious identity. He stated:

Alevis lived in the mountains, so they could not have regular worship practices, and this led them to forget the mosque. Alevism is a reaction against some rules of Islam, that does not accept dogmatic discussions.... Therefore, Alevis reject some of the Sunni beliefs, such as hajj...Alevis are faithful but differently from Sunnis. In other words, Alevism is based on a loving God, not on a fearing of God, as Sunnis. They respect the prophets and their descendants.

At this point, Asım described the Alevi identity as being part of Islam but having different interpretations, which differentiates them from Sunnis. He also discussed the change in Alevism. He revealed that previously Alevism was regarded by Sunnis as an ogre³⁴ [*öcü*], Alevism was not spoken of, and Alevis were seen as great sinners. He believes that because society has become more enlightened, this situation is changing. Alevis became more open about their identities, and commented on Alevis' political position, stating that Alevis are trying to prove that they are important, valued members of society, so they disguised their identity

³² All names of cities, townships and villages are fictitious, except in those cases where I cannot avoid using the real names.

³³ Names in the fieldwork are not real names. I use pseudonyms to protect identities.

³⁴ He meant here that Alevis were seen as creatures that should be refrained from speaking with or deal with.

behind political forces. He said that he acquired Alevism, its traditions, and beliefs, both orally from his grandparents and households, and through written sources over time. He prays, performing *namaz*³⁵ on Fridays³⁶ at his local mosque in the township where he lives. He argues that Alevis themselves also negatively affect the Alevi identity and emphasises the damage caused by the ignorance of *dedes*³⁷. According to Asım, *dedes* are ignorant and do not play their previous roles, and people are not following them anymore.

Regarding problems related to Turkish State policies, Asım argued that the state is neglecting Alevism and Alevis. Atatürk founded *Diyanet*, and it was the correct policy at that time. “The establishment of *Diyanet* enabled us to come to the order that we are living today. If Atatürk had not established *Diyanet*, everywhere in the country would be full of sheiks³⁸”. Atatürk is an essential figure in the reforms, but he admits that these reforms had some deficient aspects, such as ignoring Alevis’ interests during the establishment of *Diyanet*. This neglect is still evident; however, he was also clear that without Atatürk, they could not have reached the present level of progress, by which he meant modern Turkey. From this, I can understand the loyalty and thankfulness to Atatürk while being critical of the negligent state policies in the Republic of Turkey.

The discussion inevitably turned to the mosque in the village. As I learned from my uncle, he led the mosque’s construction; so, Asım said:

Cemevi cannot save Alevis from ignorance. People think that Alevis without mosques are idolaters... One day, 4 or 5 devout Sunni worshippers, which I met at the city mosque and were my patients, visited my office. In our conversation, one of them brought up the question of why there wasn’t a mosque in the Kazana village, and I responded by inquiring if someone had asked the villagers about this. Consequently, these 4 or 5 people inspired the idea of building a mosque with their promises of support; however, this support faded away during the construction process.

Shortly afterward, Asım held a meeting in the village I with approximately 50 villagers to discuss building a mosque. He asked why they should go to the neighbouring village for *namaz* during religious festivals [*bayram*] rather than have their own mosque. He noted that they cannot perform funeral ceremonies because of this. No one objected to the idea of a mosque, and he established a mosque construction association and assigned various tasks. Construction was completed in six months with the financial support of local congregations. 23.000 Turkish Liras were spent on labour, while the building materials were mainly obtained from donations. Asım expressed his gratitude to the former district governor, saying at that time, the district governor eased the construction of the mosque, for instance, by assisting in communications with donors, i.e., by requesting a brick factory to provide the bricks and carpeting the floor. The state’s financial support was insubstantial except for the governor’s efforts to establish links to transport and supply materials. At this point, it is necessary to underline the support given by state officials, such as imams in the process of procuring aid, as well as the support from other villagers and congregations, and the district governor. The officials’ contribution was to launch an appeal for donations in mosques after *namaz*. The imams and former district governor, as facilitators, could appeal to the religious community and the district population for support; therefore, it was possible to raise the necessary funds. The implication was that the state’s strong organisational structure expedited the mosque’s construction. This story underlined the

³⁵ An act of worship in Islam. People pray and bow in mosques by reading verses from the Qur’an.

³⁶ *Namaz* on Fridays are congregational prayers for Muslims that they perform every Friday in mosques.

³⁷ In Alevism, *dedes* are religious service providers and leaders.

³⁸ He meant leader of religious orders.

villagers' positive interactions with Sunnis. When questioned about the allegation of being part of an assimilation practice, Asim said that a mosque in an Alevi village should be interpreted not as assimilation but as a counteraction to atheist allegations. Thus, I came to realise that outsiders might negatively perceive the Alevi identity, e.g., by labelling them as atheists.

Asim ended by saying that the state's policy towards Alevis is to ignore them instead of trying to assimilate. Although he said the state's ideology was negligent towards Alevis, he also asserted that Alevis would never neglect their beliefs or be assimilated. Before I left, he arranged an appointment with the village imam and gave me his telephone number.

After this discussion, I started my journey to the village. After driving for 10 minutes, I saw a signpost near the highway. People in this village are my relatives, so I needed no reference to establish trust. When I entered the village, I saw scenes familiar from my childhood. I visited many times during my childhood, but my last visit was at least 20 years ago. This village is well planned, with orderly roads and houses, and with parallel streets connected to the main road. This main road leads to the village square with its three cafes, the headman's office, a branch office of an Alevi NGO, a market, a mosque, and a building formerly used as the school. This village was, interestingly, near the road, not on the mountain or in another remote location. Asim had told me that the village was previously settled 3 kilometres away, between two mountains near a river, but had to relocate because of constant floods. At the end of the 1950s, villagers and the headman applied to the local authorities to move to another location. In the 1950s, when the right-wing DP participated in Turkey's multiparty elections, the party promised to move the village if they voted in favour of DP. In the 1950s elections, both sides kept their promises, and the village was relocated according to a detailed construction plan.

I immediately noticed villagers sitting on their doorsteps under the shade of the pine trees, drinking tea with their neighbours, and children were playing near their houses. I set down at the village cafe. I introduced myself to some villagers and immediately felt welcomed because of my kinship relations. Several people gathered around my table. Our conversation started about the mosque and the lack of a *cemevi*. I heard memories of the construction of the mosque in 1991, without substantial state support but with individual contributions. They confirmed that Asim had supported its construction. Although Asim told me that the villagers had consented, it was clear that not all were satisfied, and some villagers questioned the need for a minaret because of its symbolism. One villager stated he carried bricks and gravel without pay but did not contribute financially; also, the other villagers stated they helped during the construction with carrying materials but had never been there for namaz and will not go because they are Alevis and do not pray with namaz. One of the villagers stated he cannot complain about the mosque; before, it was difficult to have a funeral ceremony, and without disturbing their beliefs, the mosque is not a threat to them or the village. Another explained the process as follows: "What would you do when that village's headman comes and asks for your help, such as transporting concrete in your tractor? How could you reject this and be impolite?" I also heard mentions of positive interactions with the mosque's Sunni imam.

The villagers in the cafe told me that they do not want a state-funded *cemevi* and did not apply to any state agency for a new building for this purpose because they knew that this would be rejected. Some have reservations about the state's involvement in a *cemevi* and even in financing *dedes*. The threat of state intervention negatively influences their perspective on a state-funded *cemevi*. A member of the *dede* family, Hasan stated that "the fear is that a Sunni hegemonic state-funded *cemevi* and *dede* may carry impositions". Similar sentiments were heard in the village about the state paying *dedes*' salaries, with the fear that *dedes* would become the same as imams who receive sermons, written advisory opinions given by state authorities to be read after the namaz. This concern was that *dedes* could be forced to accept sermons that might be non-neutral, reflect the state's ideology, and increase the state's dominance. These

opinions made it clear that a state-funded *cemevi* met with scepticism and revealed the fear of being overwhelmed by the (Sunni) ideology of the state.

Financial difficulties persist in this village related to building a *cemevi*. One villager asked, “who will build a *cemevi*? No one is in such a financial position”. Another explained that, with the help of an NGO branch office in the village, one of the biggest in the Western Anatolia region, the village’s headman office applied for the restoration of the disused school building for use as a *cemevi*. So, this NGO office can offer guidance related to the places of worship issue. The application was for a multipurpose venue, including worship, cultural events, exhibitions, etc. The villagers all preferred a restored empty building to a state-funded or constructed *cemevi*.

After a while, the villagers left to go about their daily work. I continued to sit with Hasan and a young villager. Hasan told me that in this village, the years of enforced secrecy are still fresh in the elders’ memories. The older generation was faithful to their religious beliefs and tried to maintain their traditions; however, they kept their Alevi identity secret, following the rule, don’t tell if not asked. At this point, Hasan stated that “circumstances and conditions changed for the Alevi people”. He meant that Alevis are more open about their identity today. Hasan confirmed that the young generation does not conceal their Alevi identity like the elders. He told the story of his family’s migration to a mountain peak at the end of the 1950s and from one village to another, a journey made on foot in fear and silence, a real experience and not just an urban legend. They even had to tie the chickens’ beaks and the cows’ and horses’ mouths so they would not be heard. In this way, he emphasised non-Alevis’ prejudiced attitudes. After all those years, he still remembers the story of how his family migrated to their new village, far away from Kazana. A road and pipeline projects were going to be constructed through his family’s village, but:

The other villagers (he meant the Sunni villagers) objected to and protested the road and pipeline project because they did not want it to pass through my family's village (an Alevi village) This resulted in a change of plan; the route passed around my parent’s village, not through it.

Both his words and those of the villager showed how different the Alevi identity was in the 1950s, when they kept things secret, from how it is now, when they are more open.

Before my arrival, my grandfather told me that a *dede* family is living here. *Dede* Bektaş was a well-known person in the region and was also a minstrel. He served as a *dede* in many *cem* ceremonies before he passed away years ago. So, I decided to visit them. When I arrived at *dede* Bektaş's house, I was greeted by his daughter, Meryem, and son-in-law, Hüseyin. They immediately showed me *dede* Bektaş’s voice recordings of musical Alevi folk poems, and we started talking about the village and Alevism. These people are farmers, and they have a son in Germany who is married to a Sunni. Meryem pointed out “our bride is Sunni. We don’t have any problems”. They themselves never felt any assimilation or any attempt to try to convert them. Our conversation turned to the village mosque. The family expressed no discomfort about this. Hüseyin expressed, “people from *Diyanet* came and said that they would cover the expenses of the mosque, and the villagers had not objected”. No one attended the mosque except for the religious festival once a year. However, at this point, Meryem said that *dede* Bektaş was unhappy about having a mosque instead of a *cemevi*. This suggests a change in people’s views in this Alevi village; *dede* Bektaş doubts about the mosque have been replaced by acceptance. Her daughter even thinks that Alevi people should pray in the mosque for the Friday namaz. They are also pleased with the imam, who respects them by reading verses from the Qur’an about the Caliph Ali during their funeral ceremonies. These people also see no danger in religious education from the state and believe that children should know both the Qur’an and

Alevism. Despite the lack of *cem* ceremonies in the village, Hüseyin stated, “Alevism will not disappear, but we will keep it alive by reading about it. Alevism is about taking responsibility for your words, actions, and morals, which means do not steal, swear, or rape. It is standing for rightness, and is also a sect within Islam”. The family understands Alevism as a lifestyle and a sect within the teachings of Islam. They remain faithful to Alevism and have positive interactions with Sunnis.

After hearing about *dede* Bektaş’s family’s appreciation of the imam, I was even more interested in talking with him. Just before the afternoon prayer time, I met him at the mosque, and he welcomed me inside. The medium-sized, modest mosque is at the edge of the village. Even at namaz time, it was empty. He said that no one performs namaz except on religious holidays and infrequently on Fridays. Friday namaz is attended by three to five people, with some non-Alevis from outside the village.

The village imam has served for several years. He disagrees with imposing one type of worship, whether namaz or *cem*, believing that people should pray, not for him or the state but for themselves, whether namaz or *cem*, whether in Turkish or Arabic. He sees worship as a mental exercise that varies among people and believes that religion means integrity and that performing namaz alone cannot be considered worship when other values, such as respect for humanity, are violated. He views Alevism as a lifestyle and a belief system that should be left to the Alevis, and Sunnism should be left to the Sunnis, without forcing people to identify themselves with one defined belief. His expressions and the villagers’ words revealed to me the positive and constructive interaction in the village.

For the imam, Alevism belongs to Islam; this perspective is inconsistent with the idea of assimilation because only if Alevism is regarded as being outside of Islam does the question of assimilation become a possibility. Imam believes that people should be free to determine their own way of worship rather than facing impositions. Alevism is a part of Islam; however, this does not mean Alevis must pray with namaz. The imam continued to express their positive interaction with the villagers, saying that:

In the ceremony of bathing the dead person, which is a Muslim tradition, I perform it for approximately 45 minutes, so the villagers feel and say that I even respect the bodies of their dead... I am glad to be here. I feel a sense of comfort inside when I have a duty outside the village. I can safely leave my family and go to other cities for a few days to attend a seminar. This is humanity, being open-minded, seeing each other’s families as one’s own family, and the philosophy of life in this village.

This was my first chance to hear the point of view of a Sunni imam. He researched Alevism before arriving in the village to understand Alevis from a neutral viewpoint. He stated that “people, (he meant who are not Alevis), ask about Alevis’ lifestyles or parenting. I tell them that it does not diverge from Sunnis”. Referring to the historical background, he said, “I observed the extreme isolation of these people (he meant Alevis and Sunnis) from each other, although this is currently coming to an end”. These words showed me that both sides, Alevis and Sunnis, might see their conflict as caused by historical experiences, and as a result, current Sunni-Alevi interaction is more positive. During our interview, attitudes towards *cemevi* emerged as a matter of question, and the imam stated:

Mosques have eternally pledged a connecting role for society; however, people should leave the place of worship debates in Alevism to Alevis. *Cem* means peacefully coming together, but the matter here depends on whether the *cem* is an act of worship. In this case, *cemevi* can be a place of worship, which is a matter for the Alevi community.

The imam said that Alevis, not the government or other people, should decide their own religious identity. He stated that having a *cemevi* in the village may be considered positive. I asked what he would do if the Alevi community desired to worship by holding *cem* and *semah*, a ritualistic dance performed at the end of *cem* ceremonies, in the mosque. As the competent authority of the mosque, he dismissed this as a divisive issue; it was not the *semah* or *cem* in themselves that mattered, but whether musical instruments like a *saz* or tambourine would be appropriate in a mosque. He concluded that “a separate part of the mosque may be reserved for the Alevi community, rather than inside the mosque, so that the matter would be resolved in this way”. After our conversation, the imam performed the call for namaz prayers [*ezan*] from the minaret; however, no one attended. I left the village that afternoon.

There is a mosque in Kazana, which was built after a local doctor proposed it. Some villagers supported the construction, but none attended namaz or any other ceremony. Whether or not the mosque project was initially welcomed, today the villagers are content; however, the absence of a *cemevi* is another issue. The people have a good connection with the imam, and some say that their relations with Sunnis are developing. They also say that the Alevi identity has become more accepted and more open.

6.3. Yana Village

After my fieldwork in Kazana, I visited a family friend, a well-known Alevi doctor interested in Alevism. He referred me to his home village, Yana, with its big *cemevi* and mosque side by side. He told me about how he guided and sponsored the villagers to build a big *cemevi*. Once again, my family ties and personal interests were driving my fieldwork. During our talk, we realised that the Yana villagers are linked to the same *ocak* family (the Alevi lineages, see Chapter One) as me; therefore, the doctor gave me the telephone number of Veli, the headman of the village. I called Veli, asking to visit the village for my research, and we arranged an appointment for the following day.

When I arrived, I realised that the nearest city centre was just 10 kilometres away. While driving into the village, I realised that Yana’s houses were well-built and the roads were well-laid out. Before I met Veli, I decided to walk around the village and sit in the village cafe. When I sat down, people became interested and asked why I was there. When I told them that I was visiting Veli with the doctor’s reference, Ahmet, a retired teacher, came and introduced himself as the doctor’s childhood friend. Together with Ahmet, several others also came, and we began to talk. When I asked about the income of the villagers, Ahmet said that most people are farmers, greengrocers, civil servants, or retired elders³⁹. After I explained my research and the aim of visiting their village, the first issue they stated was the village’s *cemevi*, constructed under the name of an education, culture, and solidarity association. One villager stated that there is also an old mosque, built by the state. Ahmet continued this story. After the Turkish educational system changed, the teachers’ unused school building and guesthouse were used for other purposes. Daily transport is provided to students to the closest township schools by the state, so the old school building was rebuilt as a cultural centre and a *cemevi*. The teachers’ guesthouse was reconstructed as a mosque. Then, a villager asked whether I had seen the unfinished new mosque construction. This unfinished new mosque construction story attracted my attention, and I asked the villagers to explain.

³⁹ In Turkey before the new code, people were being retired at the age of 45–50; today, people are retired at the age of 65.

The Turkish State authorities had started to construct a big new mosque, close to the old one; however, the villagers terminated the construction. Ahmet stated that:

The construction of the new mosque at the back of the old mosque is only half done. Young villagers impeded the construction and pulled it down. The construction was rapid and looked like a *fait accompli* situation, so the young villagers prevented it. As a result, the constructors had to stop.

I asked why the state authorities had not intervened. A villager said, “what can the state say?” Could they have built the mosque forcibly? ... They cannot do it, but if the current situation continues as it is, one day they will.” There was a consensus that trying to build a new mosque with the state’s support but without the villagers’ consent was not welcome, which is why the villagers reacted.

Ahmet continued with the story of their village. In 1826, after the Ottoman Sultan II. Mahmut, abolished the Janissary Corps, the Ottoman Army had close connections with the Bektashi Lodge, and Alevi-Bektashis settled around the Western Anatolia region. He implies that the villagers believe Alevi-Bektashis have lived in this region for centuries. Furthermore, some ancient Turkish customs are still alive in the village, such as *hak dağıtma* (meaning dispensation of rights in Turkish). Every Thursday, older women distribute light meals and drinks, such as *ayran*, a drink made with a mixture of yoghurt and water, in memory of their dead relatives. It was interesting to hear that the villagers still hold on to their ancient customs. Although such a tradition was kept alive by elders, another villager, Mehmet, stated that younger generations are not as interested, and these traditions may wane. He continued that the young are interested in other things, such as entertainment on television. So, he was a witness to the change in the Yana people’s identity and interest.

Our conversation turned to their relations with other Sunni villagers. Their connection with other Sunni villagers is positive, and they do not have any problems in this region. Mehmet added that even in the 1960s and 1970s, they could drink alcohol outside during Ramadan in taverns in the nearby township; however, after 1979, with the rise of right-wing governments, conservative effects were felt even in this liberal region. People were freer in the area before the rise of political Islam, which, as a state policy, affected people’s relations. However, the division has its roots in the history of Islam, in the time after Caliph Ali lost the caliphate and Alevis held on to the idea that Caliph Ali should remain caliph. Caliph Ali was an honest person, Mehmet says, as a man from the Prophet Muhammed’s family. I began to understand the villagers’ view of the historical roots of the problem; however, today, they have positive interactions with Sunnis.

While we were talking, Veli, the headman, joined us. Veli told me that the village hosts approximately 900 people, down from 1000 after young villagers migrated, and that there are two associations in the village. After drinking our teas, I went with Veli and Ahmet to the *cemevi* building. I saw that this building is big and new. I asked Veli to tell me its story. It was constructed as a cultural centre with a library, offices for the village headman and the village association, a kitchen, and a hall used as a *cemevi*. The building was financed by the doctor, who migrated from the village to a city in Turkey and referred me to his home village, Yana. Other support came from the neighbourhood township district governor’s office, and the provincial administration also contributed to the construction. The village’s association is trying to cover expenses such as electricity and water bills. Although these villagers could not construct a *cemevi* as a legally recognised place of worship, they have good relations with the local municipality, led by the Republican People’s Party [*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - CHP]. I noticed many portraits of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flags in the building, including in the hall used as the *cemevi* for prayer.

Veli said that the villagers' relationships with the imam are good and that they are close and friendly. Only three or four elderly villagers perform namaz (mostly on Fridays), but Veli and the imam respect each other's religious views. At this point, I understood the cooperation between the villagers and the Sunni imam. Veli showed me some posters about a festival they used to organize but have now abolished due to financial difficulties. He stated that:

Previously, there were incomes, so we were active; currently, we are in financial difficulties. People are in danger of becoming enemies due to such difficulties. What happened to these people? I remember the days when we used to join with friends every night and have dinner. Economic problems made people negligent.

Thus, he pointed to the decline in humanism in Alevism (see Markussen, 2005). He believes that without financial problems, the *cemevi* and traditions would continue as before.

Ahmet's view was different, he claimed that damage was caused by people starting to use their prayer ceremonies as entertainment, playing a musical instrument called the *saz* while drinking alcohol. Both agreed, however, that people are not well-informed about Alevism, and this threatens its survival in the next generation. Both blamed the degeneration in identity on Alevis themselves.

After visiting the *cemevi*, we started to walk around the village. Some were sitting near their houses, while others, older women, were knitting, and children were playing in the streets. At another village cafe, we met Ziya, the owner of the cafe. Ahmet said, "Alevism is an Islamic sect, and Alevis are modern, humanist, progressivist, and followers of Atatürk's ideology". This revealed that, for Ahmet, the Alevi identity has religious, political, and lifestyle aspects. In the village cafe, many villagers were sitting around 3-4 tables. Ziya is the son of a *dede*; however, Veli and Ahmet told me he does not act as a *dede*. After my introduction and expressing the recommendation of the doctor, people welcomed me warmly. I sat down and started by saying I was there to discuss their problems. One of the villagers began laughing, saying their *dedes* are dead, but if a visiting *dede* comes to their village, they welcome him. Embarrassed, Ziya said it was his fault that he had not learned the faith and could not perform as a *dede*. In general terms, people were claiming that Alevi traditions were dying in this village. Despite efforts to maintain their customs, especially *musahiplik*⁴⁰; however, traditions are less observed here. A member of another *dede* family, Abdal, said that customs were continuing in the village; however, locals had not given enough importance to these or their beliefs. Another stated *musahiplik* is something even more substantial than a constitution, as a religious practice, and explained that "if someone is immoral, he or she cannot attend the *cem* ceremonies and is banished from the community. Earlier, such events (traditions) occurred in the village, currently we have a *cemevi* but need a *dede*". Abdal stated that no one in their family is performing as a *dede*. When asked why he had not wanted to be educated as a *dede*, he did not respond. These people gave me the impression that they would be happy for a *dede* who could continue their religious rituals, which are not being practised because of their own lack of interest.

Villagers said that previously, every Thursday night, people used to perform secret *cem* ceremonies in the house of the *dede*. After the *cemevi*, they performed *cem* ceremonies in the *cemevi*. However, this ended three years ago. This was because of financial problems, no money to sacrifice an animal or pay the electricity and water bills of this *cemevi*. Several villagers proposed that the Turkish State may fund *cemevis* and *dedes*. It was clear from the villagers' words that economic difficulty is one of the biggest problems, and they do not perform *cem* ceremonies in secrecy anymore. An elderly villager dismissed the issue, stating, "what is prayer? Thanking God is all people can do; they can pray to God at their own houses. Even

⁴⁰ "Musahiplik is a specific, lifelong bond that is concluded between two married couples. It entails total responsibility of each musahip for his or her companions in moral and material regard" (Sökefeld, 2008: 96).

when you are travelling in your car, you can pray”. So, although there was no longer a need to keep their identity and religious ceremonies in secrecy, for other reasons, the number of Alevi who are following their religious rituals is declining.

Before I left the village, a middle-aged man complained that their *dede* was ignorant and had not taught them how to pray. Another elder villager, Mustafa, agreed that Alevism would be more meaningful if *dedes* were educated, and his friend declared, “the state is giving imams licence to perform religious services, the same should be applied to *dedes*”. Some villagers approved of this idea. The state educates imams in Turkey, so to educate *dedes* in the same way as imams means that some of those in this village were requesting state support. There was a general view that because religious high schools [*imam hatip*] in Turkey, faculties of theology in universities, and imams are trained and appointed by the Turkish State, similar applications should be available for *dedes*. Thus, due to the lack of a religious service leader and financial problems, as the above paragraphs detail, the Turkish State’s support would be welcome.

After our talk in this village, Veli and Ahmet accompanied me to my car. They told me that CHP had supported the village’s infrastructure work and renewed the village’s water tank and roads. They showed their appreciation to CHP by constructing a small park named after the mayor. Seeing Atatürk’s portraits, the Turkish flag, and now this park underlined their links to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Republic of Turkey, and the left-leaning CHP.

6.4. Hakah Village

The other research setting was Hakah village, which has a religious significance that I learned from my family. I used to hear from my family that many people visit this village due to its spiritual meaning. It hosts a shrine for a dervish, an important figure for Alevi in the Western Anatolia region. He was one of the followers of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, a 13th-century mystic, saint, and head of Bektashism who disseminated Alevi doctrines and beliefs in the area. People come here from all around the Western Anatolia region to pray and sacrifice animals near the dervish shrine; this is the spiritual meaning of the village. My first motivation for visiting this village was the spiritual meaning of Hakah. While planning my fieldwork, I heard about Hakah from my mother’s aunt. She stated this is a village where Alevi visit to offer prayers in the dervish’s shrine. Some family members had done this, and so I decided to visit. My mother’s aunt gave me the phone number of a *dede*⁴¹, Veysel.

We talked on the phone and agreed to meet near the dervish’s shrine. I started my journey early in the morning, and after one hour, I first saw the village; however, I had to follow the mountain road about 10 kilometres from the main road to reach this village. When I arrived after passing through the forested mountains, I could see the stove smoke that hung over the village. The small, old village houses have small gardens. I realised the remoteness and smallness of the village. The closest township is 45 minutes, approximately 35 kilometres, away. This small village is on the slope of the Western Anatolia region’s mountains. According to state records, it has 35 households with a maximum of 100–150 people. I noticed the village is small; there is an office for the head of the village and a small grocery store. Elders were sitting in the village cafe. Generally, as I experienced in my fieldwork, visitors from outside the village attract people’s attention; however, here, no one noticed me. It seemed as if they were familiar with visitors.

At the shrine, I saw a small area full of cookstoves for visitors to cook sacrificed animals. Some people come in groups, sacrifice animals, eat, and leave, but others may also give the

⁴¹ *Dedes* are important religious figures in Alevism and a key source of information for my research on Alevism as a belief system and culture, not as an issue of ethnicity.

sacrificed animal to the villagers as an offering. Near the shrine, there are ancient trees and ancient graves, evidence that people have been living in this homeland for centuries. While walking to meet with Veysel, I saw the shrine of the dervish. I knew from my studies that the shrine was built during the Ottoman Sultan II. Murat (1421–1451), but the restoration was made by an individual, not the state, in the late 1990s. When I reached the shrine, I saw a Turkish flag with the portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk over the door. As a first step, Veysel invited me inside the shrine. I noticed even here Turkish flags and, again, portraits of Atatürk. When we sat near the shrine, I asked him about the flags and pictures. He was the villager who placed them, recalling the alliance between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Bektashi dervish order during the Turkish War of Independence (see Şener, 1994). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had visited the Bektashi order lodge before the war to gain their support for Anatolia's independence and the founding of a new state (see Şener, 2009). So, Veysel stated that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag are sacred to them, and Mustafa Kemal is the founder of the liberal and democratic Republic of Turkey.

Veysel has always lived in Hakah village, serving as the *dede* for an extended period, and knows every single family. He explained that his family had long been the only *dede* family. This history goes back approximately 850 years. Moreover, today, Veysel takes care of the shrine by ensuring periodic cleaning to keep it in good condition. He alone is responsible for the shrine.

Veysel states that this place is a poor village. Most are elders, and there are no business opportunities. The only source of income is from visitors who come to pray and sacrifice animals near the shrine during the summer; the village's location in the middle of the forest land limits agriculture and thus the villagers' livelihoods. He continued, "this is a poor village. People do not have land to farm. Most of the gardens are 1.000 to 2.000 metres square, which is not enough to earn an adequate income". As he said, the houses have small gardens, surrounded by forest. I saw many cages filled with chickens around the tiny village houses, and Veysel said people sell animals to visitors for sacrifice and prayer, as an alternative source of income.

He also stated that, due to these challenging conditions, young villagers migrate to cities due to a lack of business opportunities in the village. Veysel also complained about poverty and how it affects Alevism in Hakah by changing the villagers' priorities. Many cannot attend or organise *cem* ceremonies due to poverty, as a *cem* ceremony costs at least 2.000 Turkish Liras, which is a relatively high amount. This amount is needed to sacrifice animals in a *cem* ceremony and offer food to attendees as a part of the ceremony.

After one hour near the shrine, our conversation continued at his house. He told me that there is no *cemevi* in the village, and now only a few villagers perform *cem* ceremonies in his home. He was criticising the Turkish State and Alevi NGOs for not giving enough importance to this issue for years. He divided his living room to create a separate hall to perform *cem* ceremonies during the winter. In this part of the house, I again saw the portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It was the second time in this village that I had seen Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's picture in a place where Alevis pray.

The construction of a separate *cemevi* in the village turned out to be a very long story in Hakah. Every year, in August, thousands of people come together at a festival to pray and remember the dervish. This festival is organised by the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, the European Confederation of Alevi Associations, and the village's headman office. During the festival, the guests give speeches in the opening ceremony; the state authorities, such as the governor, promise to build a *cemevi*; however, afterwards, no one visits them or takes any concrete steps to achieve this. As Veysel stated, villagers perform their *cem* ceremonies without any support from the state or other Alevis outside the village, so religious practises continue in the house of *dede* due to economic difficulties. Even under such circumstances, Veysel rejects

the idea of being paid by the state as a religious official and being under state authority. Opposing the idea of being a civil servant that provides religious services, saying, “being paid by the state can give the governments the supremacy to allocate or relocate *dede*, like imams. Being a *dede* and performing the rituals is spiritual and cannot be reduced to a remunerated job”. This showed a concern about being under the ideology of the state and about state involvement in Alevi’s religious identity.

From his perspective, Alevism is a lifestyle and belief system. Veysel, which denotes the lifestyle perspective of humanism, states that whoever wishes to be Alevi or Bektashi may absorb Alevi traditions and believe in them. Alevism is taking responsibility for your words, actions, and morals and religiously following a *dede*. According to Veysel, every Alevi should follow a *dede*, i.e., be tied to a *dede* hearth [*ocak*] (see Dedekargınoğlu, 2010). From his perspective, *dede* hearths are the institutions that determine the rituals of faith, such as the *cem* ceremonies (see Dedekargınoğlu, 2010).

Veysel grew up in the Alevi culture and learned the oral tradition from his father. This made me think about how their belief system is built and kept alive through oral traditions. Veysel is teaching Alevism and rituals to his eldest son and is confident that his son will continue the practises after he passes away. He is retired, but currently, he also runs a small garden near his home. He is married, with one married daughter living in the city centre, his older son, who works in the city centre but lives with them, and his young son, who is in high school.

The *dede* in Hakah stated that such difficulties limit the possibility of continuing the Alevi religious rituals, but he is still optimistic. He accepts that the Alevi have problems; however, he also states that they resisted assimilation for thousands of years and Alevism is something that will not end.

6.5. Conclusion

The concluding section for the Western Anatolia region should be read, taking into account Chapter Five regarding the concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law, as well as the research questions, themes, and observations.

6.5.1. *Alevi Experiences Human Rights Violations, but in Varying Degrees, and They Offer Different Solutions to Their Problems*

Alevi in the Western Anatolia region have different views on human rights and freedoms. We can determine three different stances on human rights. As the first stance, some Alevi experience violations regarding religious life. For example, some from Kazana claim that *Diyanet* does not recognise or serve them; moreover, some, including those from Hakah, argue that Alevi receive no state support to build their places of worship, making them feel discriminated against and neglected. The second stance, held by some other people from Kazana, is that they are not concerned about human rights. As the third stance, some others, such as the ones from Hakah, are in poor economic and social conditions, with high unemployment rates and hard living conditions for which they denied state support. These difficulties cause them to perceive that they are treated as second-class citizens. Although there are different views on human rights, in general terms, human rights violations are experienced in varying degrees.

Moreover, different Alevi in the field offer different solutions regarding places of worship and religious services from *dedes*. Some people, like those in Kazana and Hakah, think that the state should stay out of religious matters. In other words, some are close to the opinion of one Alevi NGO, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation, which is the total exclusion of

the state from religion in line with the Foundation representative, who stated that the state shall be free from religion. For others, however, like those in Yana, the state should take an active role in solving the problems and even address issues such as *dedes'* education and allowances. This idea is closer to the ideology of the Cem Foundation, which wants to receive a degree of state support. Different views on human rights issues can be explained by the themes below that emerged from fieldwork.

Historical Experiences

Alevis used to settle in places far from the city centres because they had to flee from the pressure and violence of the Ottoman Empire, with economically difficult living conditions. Alevis' hard living conditions, as in Hakah, can be explained by the remote locations chosen for settlement due to historical persecution.

Alevis, who have lived in hard economic conditions for centuries, do not have economic welfare, so they have difficulties continuing their religious activities. In other words, due to these historical experiences, Alevis could not reach a certain level of economic prosperity and had to live under hard economic conditions, so they could not reach a certain level of economic income and comfort to open *cemevis* or continue their religious rituals that required money, such as sacrificing animals or organising *cem* ceremonies. For these reasons, some Alevis state that they need the support of the state to open their places of worship. However, Alevis cannot receive this support, as in their first stance, they experience violations, especially in terms of religious life.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

There is a degeneration in the religious identity of Alevism in this region, and this is affecting their understanding of human rights. In explaining their conditions, there is little emphasis on possible violations of human rights, such as the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, or facing discrimination from the state due to their religious identities. So, they do not complain about their situation in a human rights sense and attribute the degeneration of Alevism to the Alevis themselves.

In addition, Alevi NGOs are not active in the region and do not provide sufficient support, as I observed in Hakah and Kazana. NGOs can function to raise Alevis awareness on human rights and freedoms through different activities, such as meetings or litigation. So, NGOs may have important functions in terms of both religious identity and human rights awareness. However, in the Western Anatolia region, due to the lack of support from Alevi NGOs, there is low awareness of human rights violations.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

The relationship between Alevis and Sunnis was characterised by issues such as a distant relationship, a lack of social contact, and prejudice, for example, labelling Alevis as atheists. However, this relationship is now being experienced much more positively and constructively compared to the past. Because of the positive relationships that emerge in this manner, Alevis compare themselves to Sunnis less and less in terms of facing human rights violations. These Alevis do not claim that they are more likely to have their rights violated than Sunnis because they are Alevis. This aspect is also connected to Alevis themselves because Alevis who are less aware of their religious identities, do not discuss their religious rights and the violations they face as frequently. On the other hand, for some Alevis, the state's association with political Islam damages relations with Sunnis. With this approach, i.e., state involvement in religion, Sunnis can become more conservative, and as a result, Alevis cannot live as they wish without the effect of Sunni religion on daily life, and they feel pressure in their daily lives.

Alevis' Relations with the State

The relationship with the state can be summarised from three perspectives. First, some Alevis emphasise that the state exerted direct pressure on Alevis during the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in making Alevis settle at isolated locations, for example, the ones in Hakah. For those Alevis who primarily compare with the Ottoman era, the situation in terms of human rights has improved as most of the oppression in the Ottoman Empire decreased to a certain level. The situation of the Alevis changed with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Alevis, however, are still facing some problems, such as compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons and a lack of places of worship. However, when these situations are compared with the troubles they experienced in the Ottoman period, the hostility from the state seems to have been replaced by a more passive neglect and discrimination, i.e., more hidden, and invisible violations. So, the state currently ignores Alevis rather than oppresses them.

This brings us to the second view, that the state neglects and discriminates against Alevis and does not provide necessary support for their religious demands, as for constructing *cemevis*, as stated in Hakah. In short, although Alevis have problems, compared to the Ottoman period, severe rights violations are not experienced. However; those who feel human rights violations, especially in terms of religious life, emphasise that they are neglected by the Turkish State and do not receive enough support from the state related to their places of worship. In this case, Alevis experience discrimination and the feeling of being second-class citizens.

The final view related to the more recent imposition of Sunnism and the rise of political Islam, as stated in Yana. Alevis who believe the state is trying to impose Sunnism will naturally try to resist this imposition, and concern about human rights violations and hard living conditions in the region will be seen in terms of the need to resist the state.

In conclusion, the changing relationship with the state means that Alevis have different opinions about their human rights and freedoms, while all, to a certain extent, shaping their identities in their relations with the Republic of Turkey based on being discriminated against, neglected, and treated as second-class citizens. Moreover, the changing relations with the state can also be observed in their proposed solutions, which for some mean seeking state support and for others, rejecting such support.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

There are three types of migration that influence Alevis living in the Western Anatolia region: internal, international, and return migration. As the first theme, historical experiences, explains, the oppression by the Ottoman Empire made Alevis settle in more isolated places than the cities. This situation caused two difficult conditions: high unemployment and poverty. Therefore, many Alevis in the region migrate both domestically and abroad to escape these conditions. In other words, negative historical experiences of Alevis are also related to domestic and international migration. This migration results in an increasing interaction with Sunnis. As a result of these positive relations, Alevis thus feel comfortable with Sunnis and do not acknowledge any assimilation attempts towards each other as a result.

Migration also has another effect. When they get stronger economically, Alevis who migrated domestically to the Western Anatolia region support their homelands in the form of supporting the construction of NGOs and *cemevi* in their homelands. Thus, it can be said that Alevis who migrated domestically may be effective in raising awareness of human rights in their own regions. However, despite all these efforts, in this region, it was not possible to observe Alevi NGOs having a significant effect on increasing the awareness of Alevis on human rights. Alternatively, as in Kazana, an emigrated Alevi supported his homeland through mosque construction. As a result, rather than supporting Alevi NGOs or *cemevis*, which provide opportunities for Alevis to raise awareness of their religious identity and rights violations, an internally migrated Alevi may support the construction of a mosque as a return to his homeland.

6.5.2. *Alevi Identity is No Longer Hidden but a Public Identity*

As the introduction section details, after the data I obtained during the field studies, I felt the need to do a more extensive literature review focused on identity. I learned that identity is changeable and never fixed, and thus, as a starting point, I argue that the Alevi identity is also changing and not static, as seen in the increasing sense of Alevi community. The observations below detail the changes in the Alevi identity.

Fieldwork data shows that one way the Alevi identity has changed is that Alevis are now more open about their identities, which they used to hide. In the past, identities were hidden, understood from the desolate settlements, for example, as Hakah, and from their stories of ancestors hiding themselves from Sunnis, told in Kazana. In the past, Alevis concealed themselves while being perceived as oppressed by the state and unwanted by Sunnis, but recent stories and observations show that this situation has changed in the Western Anatolia region. The Alevi identity is no longer a hidden but a public identity, and this is one of the changes in the Alevi identity. Subsection 6.5.3 below details the five themes that explain this change.

6.5.3. *The Religious Dimension in the Alevi Identity Is Not Being Practiced as Before; But Alevism as a Political Identity and Part of a Lifestyle Identity Keeps Its Vitality*

As the third observation, in the Western Anatolia region, there is no single definition of Alevism, which is defined as having religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions. For some, Alevism is a sect of Islam, as in Kazana, but for others, this is less important, as in Yana. Some add political meanings, as in Kazana and Yana. This is associated with loyalty to the Republic of Turkey, to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and to a left-wing political party, namely CHP. Those in Yana and Hakah define Alevism as both a part of Islam and a lifestyle, using the traditions of the ancient Turks. However, the trend in the Western Anatolia region is that the religious rituals and those who are continuing them, are gradually decreasing, while the political meaning and lifestyle dimensions continue to thrive. In other words, the religious dimension of Alevi identity has become less important when compared to the past. However, the political and lifestyle dimensions of Alevi identity become more important.

These two changes in the Alevi identity have different explanations. The themes below are effective in understanding how the Alevi identity became more public and less hidden and how the religious practises are decreasing, unlike the political meaning and lifestyle dimensions.

Historical Experiences

Alevis, who were affected by historical experiences of hiding their identities from Sunnis and the state and who settled in remote places, no longer feel the need to hide their identities. The state pressure is less than it was in the past, and the negative interactions of the past with Sunnis have gone, so there is no need to hide their identities.

Such historical experiences are also effective in changing the religious identity of Alevism. Due to the hard economic conditions of the past, the priorities of Alevis have been economic survival, resulting in a decline in the practise of their religious rituals such as *cem* ceremonies. However, the vitality of their political identity continues and may be witnessed in their legacy of gratitude and bond to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republic of Turkey. Historically, in this regard, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who enabled them to live in a modern state and ended the pressure in the Ottoman Empire, is an important figure. We can observe the vitality of this political identity in the words of Alevis and symbols, such as displaying Turkish flags and Atatürk posters in sacred *cemevis* or dervish tombs.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

In the Western Anatolia region, a *cemevi* in Yana has been established without being hidden. Festivals are organised to promote Alevi culture, such as in Yana and Hakah. So, both religiously and socially, in the Western Anatolia region, the need to hide their identities has disappeared.

However, there is a decline in people practising the Alevi religious dimension or performing Alevi religious rituals, which is being caused in part by the Alevis themselves. The inadequacy of *dedes* negatively affects the survival of religious rituals. Uninformed *dedes* have lost their religious authority to a certain level, and young people no longer see them as religious authorities. In addition, the younger generation is generally less interested in religion, and they consider the rituals of Alevism as entertainment, such as playing *saz* or drinking alcohol.

In addition, NGOs are important to build *cemevis* and keep religious rituals alive. Alevis establish NGOs or ask for help from a countrywide Alevi NGOs to open *cemevi* under the name of a cultural centre. For this work, NGOs collect voluntary donations. However, these NGOs are partly lacking in the Western Anatolia region. This lack means that it is difficult to find funds to operate *cemevis*. Despite these problems, Alevis try to follow their ancient lifestyle in the region. The most obvious example of this can be understood from their efforts to maintain some ancient Turk traditions inherited from their ancestors, such as *hak dağıtma* in Yana.

Relations among Alevis also have another aspect in the field. Alevis could be described as a community in themselves while they are living in many different locations. Although, the sense of unity in the Alevi identity has decreased in some places, like Yana, again due to economic difficulties, in other places, for example, Kazana, there is a strong sense of unity. The most obvious example of this is in-group support, such as the construction of mosques that they almost never use. In the Western Anatolia region, Alevis as a community may be understood in terms of mutual support and becoming people who show resistance. So, the Alevis here built a mosque as a group but also do not use it, and form resistance against using the mosque as a place of worship, which makes the Alevis united and show resistance as a group.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

Because Alevis have become more public, their relationships with Sunnis have also improved. Unlike in the past, Alevis do not hide their identities in their relations with Sunnis. In fact, Alevis even make marriages with Sunnis and they do not hide their identities in these marriages.

Another aspect of the relationship between Alevis and Sunnis is related to the change in the Alevi identity. More contact has removed Alevi-Sunni prejudice against each other. As a result, the Alevi identity is more recognized by the Sunnis they meet. However, this brings another problem because, with these developing relations, Alevis encounter Sunni religious beliefs more often. Thus, while Alevis are abandoning the rituals of their own religious identity because of the reasons in the second theme, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, there is a growing tendency for Sunni religious rituals to be included in Alevis' own religious practices. There are two reactions to this. Some oppose examples of the symbols of Sunnism, such as the minaret of the mosque in Yana, while others, due to these more positive relations, as seen for example in Kazana, adopt Sunni rituals or at least more positive attitudes towards them. This latter group is more likely to not follow Alevi religious practices.

Alevis' Relations with the State

The open oppression of the Ottoman Empire has given way to a state that follows a policy that nevertheless neglects and discriminates against Alevis. As the pressure on Alevis weakens, they can establish NGOs, although they are often few (there is only one in Yana), that support the *cemevis*. Alevis also organise festivals like those in Yana and Hakah. Alevis are now more

public about revealing their identities and even expressing demands for state support for their places of worship more publicly.

Although relations with the state improved, different problems emerged, such as the *cemevi* issue and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons that impose Sunnism. In this direction, Alevi emphasise that existing *cemevis* do not qualify for state support but also face the additional problem that the issues related to human rights in the first observation also affect their religious identities by denying them the support needed to construct their places of worship. So, in this way, the religious dimension of the Alevi identity is not being practised because of the lack of functioning *cemevis*.

On the other hand, the vitality of their political identity is maintained through relations with the Republic of Turkey. Almost all emphasise their attachment to the Republic and its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is associated with the decrease in Ottoman oppression to a certain level. In this respect, changing relations with the state transformed political identities towards a leftist position supporting Atatürk's reforms. Despite giving support to reforms promised by the right-wing party DP briefly in the 1950s, they still have a strong attachment to leftist political ideology. For example, in Yana, they emphasise the support from CHP municipality and their connection with CHP. Turkish flags and Atatürk posters in Alevi sacred places and houses throughout the Western Anatolia region symbolise their continuing attachment to the Republic of Turkey and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

With internal and international migration, the Alevi identity becomes more visible to Sunnis and others in Turkey and abroad. Neither Alevi nor Sunnis hide their identities. With internal migration to townships and cities, Alevi leave their isolated homogenic places and connect much more with Sunnis. Those who migrated abroad sometimes achieved this rapprochement by marrying Sunnis, which was virtually unthinkable in the past. They no longer face the former levels of hostility as a result. In other words, with the increasing internal and international migration, the interaction between Alevi and Sunnis increases, and the Alevi identity becomes more public. Alevi who migrate back (return migration) or support their homelands also reinforce the tendency towards having a public Alevi identity. Thus, return migration also relates to the second theme, the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs on open identity. The clearest example of this is when those who have reached a certain economic status are able to return to their villages and fund *cemevi* construction there.

Internal and international migration may also have a negative effect, with a decrease in the young population in villages and increasing interaction with Sunnis, to the detriment of their religious rituals. In fact, as a result, Alevi migrate to other cities and abroad to escape the hard living conditions because of historical experiences, as the first theme details. The increase in migration, due to historical experiences of poverty, means an increase in relations between Alevi and Sunnis, enabling Alevi to get closer to the Sunni religious rituals. Additionally, internal migration to cities and townships, while bringing a certain amount of economic prosperity, also brings exposure to relations with Sunnis, increasing sympathy for Sunni religious rituals, and as a result of return migration, spreading this sympathy into their homelands, as happened with the construction of a mosque in Kazana. Although return migration is a factor that is also effective in making Alevi build *cemevis* in their villages, as in Yana, these actions alone are not sufficient to counter the other factors that make Alevi not follow their religious rituals as before.

CHAPTER 7 The Northern Anatolia Region

7.1. Introduction

After my field studies in the Western Anatolia region, I continued to research and read about Alevism and Alevi in Turkey. During this time, I read and looked for a place to continue my field studies in Turkey to collect more data from different parts of the country. In my studies, I read a book called *Hamdullah Çelebi'nin Savunması*⁴². Hamdullah Çelebi, the head of the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli dervish lodge [*postnişin*], was born in the Central Anatolia region in 1767. The abolishment of the Janissary and closure of dervish lodges (see Chapter One) followed the trial of Hamdullah Çelebi and his eight followers before a special court administered by the Ottoman Sultan II. Mahmut (see Özmen & Koçak, 2007). All nine were sentenced to death, but Sultan II. Mahmut commuted the death penalty to exile; Hamdullah Çelebi was exiled to the Northern Anatolia region (see Özmen & Koçak, 2007). This book is about the trail of Hamdullah Çelebi and his defence in court. During his judgment, Hamdullah Çelebi faced heavy accusations but did not give up his defence, and even today, this determination has a special importance for the Alevi-Bektashis. As a result, he was exiled to the Northern Anatolia region, and died there. So, as a religious leader, he influenced the Alevi living in the north and continued his religious conversations and duties until his death.

I continued to research the importance of the Northern Anatolia region for Alevi. I learned that this region's religious and historical importance dates to political tensions and Alevi revival movements. The Babai Revolts [*Babai Ayaklanması*] were named after the uprising started in 1240 in the territory of the Anatolian Seljuk State⁴³ by Baba Ilyas Horasani and his follower Baba Ishak. Baba Ilyas's influence on the Turkmens was quite high. At that time, he was seen as the person who would save the Turkman people from state oppression, and during this revolt, the importance of Northern Anatolia was undisputed. For example, Hacı Toğrak Bey, the governor of a city in the Northern Anatolia region was among those affiliated with Baba Ilyas, and the same city in the Northern Anatolia region, was the centre of this movement (see Turan & Yıldız, 2008: 16). Moreover, there are numerous *ocak* families (see Chapter One) and religious leaders' and dervishes' mausoleums in the Northern Anatolia region, making this an essential region for the Alevi religious identity (see Yıldız, 2011). I also learned from my studies that in some areas of the region, Alevi traditions continue to some degree (see Yıldız, 2011). Thus, I decided to continue my fieldwork in the Northern Anatolia region to research Alevi, who interpret Alevism in religious terms, and decided to visit the region in the summer of 2011.

7.2. A Famous Alevi Minstrel's Family in Fide Township

Before I planned my field studies and after researching more about this region, I told one of our family friends that I was planning fieldwork in the Northern Anatolia region. I knew that his family was from this area. While we talked, he told me that one of the most respected and well-known minstrels in the region was his grand-grandfather. I asked him if it was possible to meet his family members living in Fide township, and he arranged a meeting for me. After driving for 11 hours from my hometown to Fide, I arrived at the hotel. Early the next morning, I called one of the family members, *dede* Himmet, and introduced myself. We decided to meet the next

⁴² Written by Ismail Özmen, published in 2007 by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism Publications.

⁴³ A state founded in 1075 in Anatolia, it was a Sunni Islamic state based on the Turkish-Iranian tradition.

morning. When I arrived at Himmet's house, I was surprised to find many people in the garden. Himmet welcomed me and told me that they are relatives. People came here from a village to serve food as an offering and pray. Himmet's house hosted people attending their great-grandfather minstrel's shrine, which was nearby in an adjoining garden. That was the main reason why people were praying in Himmet's garden. After Himmet introduced me, we sat near the shrine with some other family members. After I detailed my research and reason for visiting them, some other family members joined us. Himmet started by saying that all these people in his garden live in their family village, 10 to 12 kilometres from Fide. I asked if there was a *cemevi* or a mosque in their village. They told me that Mehmet, the *dede* of the family, and some other villagers tried unsuccessfully to construct a mosque, founding an association for this. It was interesting to hear Alevis themselves attempt to build a mosque in their village. I was curious about this story and asked Mehmet the reason for such an attempt. He said, "sometimes we have funerals, and people from outside the village also attend our funeral ceremonies, and this can't happen without a mosque". When I asked why they had tried to construct a mosque and not a *cemevi*, most family members said the matter was not whether to build a mosque or a *cemevi*. The aim was just to have a place to worship that they could use. At this point, Himmet said:

Who knows, we could have used it as a *cemevi*... I don't understand this issue. Some of the Alevis do not want a mosque; some of them do. Here, there is a mosque where all my family members' funeral ceremonies have taken place in the township. All my parents' funeral ceremonies happened in mosques; why shouldn't I want a mosque?

Another family member stated the matter is not the mosque per se, but the construction of a mosque in Alevi villages by the force of the state. A retired military officer, Hayrettin, suggested that state-imposed mosques are assimilating Alevis, with the aim of transforming Alevis into Sunnism. The villagers reacted against the distribution of free books about Sunnism at mosques, setting up Qur'an courses in Alevi villages, and sermonising according to Sunni beliefs in mosques. Such applications are considered to cause disharmony. Another villager from a neighbouring village said that, in his village, there is a mosque, which is attended by most Alevis for namaz on Fridays. He stated a *cemevi* and a mosque were constructed in another area in a two-story building; the mosque was on the upper floor and the *cemevi* was on the ground floor. This building was constructed ten years ago. According to the villagers, this building shows that people can live with a mosque, even if they themselves have little to do with it.

Himmet and others answered my question about their relations with Sunnis positively. They claimed that there were no longer any problems, but also that there were some critical discourses against Alevis. Even in the 1970s, the township was divided into two. Alevis were confined to one part of the township; however, today, such separation is over. One of the villagers said, "television is affecting people". He meant that people started to gain knowledge through technology, so the division decreased. Himmet thinks Alevis should be open about their identity to avoid criticism for being secretive. These people made me understand that the Alevi identity was changing in the region. They even made efforts to construct a mosque in their village. Their problem starts, however, when the state tries to impose the Sunni belief system.

The villagers' debated how people are not being hired at the state level because they are Alevis, which they described as facing discrimination. Hayrettin alleges that in the last few years, Alevis have not been promoted in their jobs. He continued that "there were many people, civil servants, from Alevi districts. In the last five years, we have not heard of any Alevis who got a promotion".

Our other issue was the assimilation of Alevis. People here believe that Alevis could not be assimilated in Turkey. However, according to Hayrettin, Alevis' challenges never ended, and "everywhere in the country, Alevis face difficulties and segregation, even on television. I wonder how Alevis will survive". Hayrettin believes that modern Turkey, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is making progress. He stated that "if Alevis were not in this country, this country would be governed by Sharia, like Iran, a country governed by Sharia law". The idea of being a force against Sharia reminded me of the statement promoted by the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation representative because, for him, a part of Alevism is being against Sharia.

Hayrettin continued by criticising Alevis, the *dedes'* ignorance, and the half-built *cemevi* constructions in some locations. He gives an example of a *cemevi* construction in an area where Alevis live in the majority and says that economic difficulties blocked construction; only the building's unfinished structural frame is standing. Another villager complained that "can't these people construct a temporary *cemevi* and perform *cem*?". They believe that the Alevi religious practises in that village will probably come to an end. Another issue for these people was the lack of unity among Alevis. In contrast, they believe Alevis residing in Europe are united and preserving their traditions. An Alevi living in Germany emphasised how impressive the *cem* ceremonies are in Europe. He said Alevis should live in solidarity, because this is important to increase the funds Alevis need. The villagers criticise the Alevis for failing to keep their Alevi religious rituals alive and believe that this may affect the region's Alevi identity.

After my lunch with these villagers, Himmət accompanied me into the minstrel's shrine. The minstrel's tomb is approximately 2 metres high, and there is a huge Turkish flag covering the grave. On the walls, I saw photographs of the minstrel, pictures of Caliph Ali, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Moreover, there was a symbolic picture of *zülfiķar*, the sword of Caliph Ali, and again, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's portrait in the background. When I saw these symbols, I remembered Hayrettin's words about being bound to the modern Turkey that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded.

In this family, I heard many different identifications. People were identifying Alevism with other concepts, and their awareness of other Alevis in the world is also available. Moreover, they also exchange stories about the discrimination they experience, but also criticise the Alevis themselves.

7.3. Fide Township

The next morning, I drove to the *cemevi* in Fide township. I knew this *cemevi* from my previous research done in earlier research settings. The *cemevi* was located near a dervish shrine and established under an Alevi NGO's authority, supported by people living in the township. I called the NGO representative and *cemevi* administrator, Mesut, and introduced myself. We decided to stay near the *cemevi*, which is a medium-sized, single-story building. On the *cemevi* walls, I saw pictures of Hac Bektaş-ı Veli and Caliph Ali, as well as portraits of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and a Turkish flag. During my visit, I also saw people offering food to others while praying, which is an Alevi tradition. After lunch with Mesut, he asked me to visit Satı, one of the *dede's* of the *cemevi*, so we walked there. While walking to *dede's* house, I saw an old mosque and asked who had renovated the old mosque in this Alevi neighbourhood. This visit to Satı became an exercise in snowball sampling. Satı welcomed us, and we started to talk about the *cemevi*. Mesut said that the *cemevi* functioned for 20 years. Satı stated that the building was constructed with the support of CHP municipality and Alevis' contributions. They also added that NGOs and Alevis, the people living in the area, cover all *cemevi* expenses, such as electricity or water bills. However, the municipality tries to provide support by repairing the building whenever needed. This illustrated that Alevis finance their own places of worship, unlike Sunni mosques.

I asked about the old mosque, and Satı said it was renovated with the support of an Alevi from Fide township, who was assimilated for the benefits it brought him. In the beginning, I couldn't understand this, but later, he explained that to find jobs or similar benefits, people are abandoning their Alevi identity. Therefore, Satı made it clear that local Alevi may put aside following their Alevi religious rituals for such reasons.

Satı believes that the state has some assimilation policies, namely compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons and *Diyanet*. However, Mesut recalled that in the 1980s, Alevi and Sunni were clashing. Satı said, “with the police officers' help, fascists had attacked us, and in those days, we had two fears: one of the Turkish State, and the other of fascists”. Although people in the region had experienced such conflicts in the past, today they have unproblematic relations. Satı and Mustafa explained, in this region, the relations between Sunnis and Alevi are trouble-free.

Our conversation continued, focusing on Alevi traditions and *rituals* in the region. Satı said, “during the wintertime, people perform *cem* ceremonies in the *cemevi* approximately for 12–13 weeks in a year”. However, some practices, such as *musahiplik*, had lapsed. Satı asserted that degeneration in Alevism is happening, and that educating the next generation about Alevism is essential. He complained that the media is distorting *cem* ceremonies and the fundamentals of the ceremony. He said, “even in *semah* there are politics ... changes in *cem* ceremonies (the ones broadcast on television) are made consciously by some people ... *dede's* role shall not only be leading religious ceremonies but also training the young generation...”. According to Satı, education and training people related to their beliefs should not be carried out by the state, but for Alevi, this should be done by qualified *dedes*. He believes Alevi themselves should educate *dedes* to guarantee the future of Alevism and pointed out the changes in the Alevi religious identity, and the role of young people in the future of Alevi identity.

Satı argued that the state should not get involved in *cemevis* because the state can impose its hegemony on it. According to Satı, *dedes* could become civil servants, like imams, and thus, their freedoms may be restricted, saying, “Alevi customs continue, but we don't have freedom. Someday, if someone complains that we infringe on the law by performing *cem*, the authorities can even act against us”. He believes *cemevis* should have legal status⁴⁴ and indicated that they feel as if they are doing something illegal by performing *cem* in *cemevis*. At this point, Mesut expressed, “without giving *cemevis* a legal status, Alevi cannot manifest and live their beliefs. We cannot perform our funeral ceremonies as we wish. These places should have legal status”.

Satı also believes that Alevi are prevented from becoming high-ranking state bureaucrats and that “Alevi people are going to mosques to pray *namaz* and fast in Ramadan so that their children can find jobs”. People in the region believe that the state would not employ them, so some Alevi are motivated to follow Sunni religious practices. For Mesut, Alevi families' religious attitudes are negatively affected by such difficulties. Moreover, they have some concerns because of the lack of legal protection and status. Satı was worried about the state's involvement in *cemevis* and Alevism. Our conversation moved on to coercion. Mesut said that, particularly in Ramadan, Alevi face pressure that affects their daily lives; during Ramadan, most cafes and restaurants are closed until the end of fasting at sundown, which is a Sunni religious ritual. Mesut continued by saying:

If there is freedom of religion and belief, everyone would and should open their shops, and people who do not wish to fast in Ramadan could eat and drink. In the industrial zone of the region, companies generally close their staff canteen, so if you are an Alevi and not fasting in Ramadan, you are forced to fast.

⁴⁴ The Turkish State does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship (see Chapter One). For example, in the Law on the Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs No. 633, mosques and masjids were declared as places of worship in Islam. So, today, *cemevis* do not have any legal status.

He believes this is a method of assimilation into Sunni traditions. Mesut also added that others in Turkey are experiencing similar situations, but this is their experience in this region. These words showed me that he has some ideas about other Alevi's experiencing similar problems in the country.

For these people, the Sivas massacre was a turning point, after which Alevi's rose. However, Mesut self-criticised Alevi's by saying, "to become more organised and rise up because people have been killed". At this point, Satı said, "Alevi's do not know how to stand upright..." He expressed that Alevi's problems stem from historical events and that fears and oppressions are coming from the past. According to Satı, Alevi's were ignorant of how to demand their rights. He also expressed that these situations change with technology because knowledge is now more accessible. According to Mesut, Alevi's are more knowledgeable, raising awareness of their identity and rights.

We continued to talk about the problem, and Satı said, "Alevi's were being assassinated, but now it's Alevism itself". According to these people, *Diyanet* should be closed because Alevi's are paying taxes but getting no benefits from *Diyanet*. Mesut argued that they had kept their religious values alive with their means, so they did not need *Diyanet*. Satı stated that there are mosques in Alevi villages, as in this region, but still no one performs *namaz*, and this is considered a waste of money. For Satı, this money should be spent on veterinary, agricultural, and health services in Alevi villages. He added that in Alevi villages, the state demands that, to receive such service, initially, a mosque should be built. Thus, mosques are imposed on these people. He gave examples from his own family's village, where children were sent to mosques for Qur'an courses, and added, "yes, they shall learn the Qur'an, but not with the wrong method". Satı and Mesut believe that the state education system may be trying to assimilate Alevi's, citing the increasing number of vocational religious high schools and Qur'an courses.

During our conversation, the issue came up of: what is Alevism? Satı emphasised, "taking responsibility for your sayings, actions, and moral values [*eline-belien-diline sahip olmak*], being human, honest, and following human rights and freedoms". For Satı, everyone can be Alevi; Alevism is not lineal. No one can be Alevi - Muslim without following the moral values that are also a part of Alevism. Satı references the Qur'an as an integral part of *cem* ceremonies; however, he declared that Alevi's give it different meanings and understandings than Sharia. He accepts that some parts of the Qur'an are God's words; however, "since Islam had been distorted, Alevism is outside today's Islam". Satı evaluates the Alevi identity as the core of Islam, in contrast to today's degenerated Islamic understanding. These statements once again reminded me of the words of the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation representative. In our interview, the representative stated that in addition to being against Sharia, Alevism is at the centre of Islam and means treating people as you would like to be treated, being sharers, and practising benevolence.

I was also interested in Alevi's shift to the right-wing party, Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950s, so, asked about the situation in the region and their views. Satı explicitly said, "in those days, the family of the head of the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli dervish lodge [*postnişin*] asked Alevi's to vote DP and Alevi's followed that call". Satı denied that Alevi's are followers of a right-wing party and said, currently, "we gained local governance once in this township". He was referring to CHP, and this part of our talk reminded me of the political dimension of the Alevi identity. During our conversation, I asked about the portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag on the walls of the *cemevi*. Satı stated the importance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republic of Turkey for Alevi's because both mean the end of the Ottoman Empire and its oppression. He also cited Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's visit to the Bektashi lodge before the War of Independence, stating:

As I read in some books, during his visit to gain support for the war, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk promised to found the Republic, give freedom, and give rights to women. At those dates, some of the Bektashi lodge members said that a hundred years ago, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli also stated giving rights to women, so it was believed that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk may be a transfiguration of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli.

So, with these words, I realised the particular importance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the modern Republic of Turkey for these people.

After having our teas and desserts, served by his wife, I thanked Satı, and we walked back to the *cemevi* building with Mesut. We visited the dervish shrine near the *cemevi* and sat in its garden. Mesut said that he also called one of his friends, Kadri, a researcher on Alevi troubadours and a teacher living in the region. Kadri had visited nearly all the Alevi villages in the area during his research, and this was an excellent chance to gain data from someone who knew the region so well. Kadri arrived at the garden and, after introducing himself, started by saying that the pressure both during the Ottoman Empire period and the conflicts of the 1970s affected Alevi's beliefs.

Kadri observed Alevi villages that were becoming Sunni, and this process deepened over time. He believes that here, the lack of awareness of Alevism endangers Alevi traditions and beliefs, and the state's religious authority, imposed in mosques by imams, negatively affects the Alevi identity. According to Kadri, such state institutions function for Sunni citizens; however, these institutions may cause undesirable outcomes. At this point, Mesut recalled the time before the 1982 military coup. He said the township was divided along political lines, between the left and the right. He is doubtful about the effect of such state interventions, and has concerns for the coming decades. Sunni and Alevi citizens' interactions appear to be positive and even friendly; however, people here remember the 1980s with sorrow. In Kadri's and Mesut's statements, it was clear that the Alevi identity is being negatively affected both by state policies and by Alevi themselves.

7.4. Zirve City

After deciding to go to Northern Anatolia, the first thing I did was look up the Alevi NGOs in the area and find their contact information on their websites. I called some of them. One of the NGO's that answered my call was in the city centre at Zirve. So, after staying one more night in the Fide township, the next morning I left. When I arrived at the Zirve city centre, I saw a river flowing and houses settled along its banks. Zirve welcomed me with its beautiful nature and unique waterfront.

The first person and NGO that I was going to visit was the branch office of the Cem Foundation. I arranged to meet the representative, Ali, at his workplace early in the morning. Ali is a craftsman and has a small shop in the city centre. After I entered the shop and introduced myself, Ali welcomed me and offered tea.

Although I was expecting Ali alone, I saw two middle-aged men sitting near his table. One of them, Rıza, introduced himself as another craftsman, and Sırrı, as a *dede*. Although unplanned, this seemed like a good chance to get data also from people living in the district. Rıza was enthusiastic and said, "I have seen various events. I have a shop here, so I cannot talk because talking about these issues someday could ruin my business and cause me trouble". At first, he was fearful of being blacklisted and remained silent. He said that if he lived in a small community, he would be able to talk openly, but because he lives in the city, he could not. He meant that he is doing business in the city, and he does not want to lose customers by talking openly. After I and Ali assured him that the data would be anonymous, Rıza started to talk,

saying that he used to have a dairy farm, and when people found out that he was Alevi, they called him and said that he made perfect cheese, but asked if he started work in the morning with the words used by Sunnis: in the name of God the merciful and the compassionate. He continued by saying that one day, while he was selling milk to one of the clients, the client asked him where he bought the milk. He said “my answer was from a village in this region. My customer immediately asked me to stop providing the milk because that village was an Alevi village”. Rıza said that he stopped pouring the milk and angrily responded “yes the villagers and I am Alevi, but the cows are not”. He also said that some people used to refuse to shake hands with him because he is Alevi. He believes these are the malevolent people. According to Rıza, Alevis reject mosques and praying in mosques, as this is a wrong practice. Rıza showed me that he wants to remain silent because he experienced negative interactions with Sunnis. He was illustrating how Alevis in this small city feel the threat of being blacklisted and try to hide their experiences, but he is also critical of the Alevis themselves.

Although Sirrı stated negative interactions, today, people in villages live in peace without any problems. They consider that separation between people is pointless because they are all from the same origin, Central Asia; however, disunity began with divisions in Islam. Sirrı finished this topic by saying, “we are not doing anything wrong; we believe in God, in the Prophet Muhammed, and that the divisions between Alevis and Sunnis are caused intentionally and wilfully.” So, the people I interviewed expressed their different views on the Alevi identity and pointed out that the problem was not interaction between people but rather Turkish State policies.

Sırri continued by saying that the current situation is due to the policy of *Diyanet*, and this location was selected as a pilot region for the aim of assimilating Alevis, so the government and *Diyanet* build mosques in Alevi villages. Ali and Sirrı argued that placing mosques in Alevi villages is not a suitable policy and that *Diyanet*, as an institution with thousands of employees, does not teach religion appropriately. They added that *Diyanet* rejects any argument that is contrary to its formal ideology. Sirrı asserted that “*Diyanet* is like cracked glass and represents a repressive regime. This crack is widening because their policy of pressure is not working, so now they are becoming more aggressive. Can you believe that in Zirve, we visited most of the Alevi villages, and nearly 90% of them have mosques?” These people believe that *Diyanet*, funded by their taxes, should be shut down because it violates their rights and freedoms.

There is also a mosque in Sirrı's village, an Alevi village; however, no one attends the daily *namaz*. Many imams are appointed, and as Sirrı stated, “once they have served their purpose, they pass on to other duties in the Turkish State”. In the Turkish administrative system, civil servants can be reassigned from one sector to another, so imams, as civil servants, can be reassigned to other state missions, such as the Ministry of Education. This conversation gave me the impression that in this region, many Alevi villages have a mosque. As Ali noted, especially in the last decade, a significant increase has been witnessed. There were many issues that people in this office wanted to discuss, such as government policies. Ali continued by giving the example of a mosque in Kara village, an Alevi village in the region. The headman of Kara village complained about a planned mosque construction in the village; however, Ali said the villagers believed that other services would come to their village. The villagers agreed to support the mosque's construction in exchange for additional benefits; now, however, the state shows regret. These examples showed the unhappiness with governmental policies.

Sırri argued that their problems started in the Ottoman Empire, and Alevis have never received the public services they needed, such as water, roads, or schools. The supreme power, i.e., the Turkish State authorities, caused the conflicts. He pointed out that assimilation, which originated in the Umayyad dynasty period, is continuing in this region.

Sırri also believed that Alevi NGOs had given Alevis the chance to struggle for human rights and freedoms. Alevis' problems, he stated, have their roots in history; however, today, through

their meetings and protests, Alevi NGOs help these people understand that their issues are related to human rights and freedoms. For Sırrı and Ali, the Sivas massacre was a trigger for the setting up of Alevi NGOs. Sırrı also here linked the issue to Alevi migrants in Europe encouraging their counterparts in Turkey to establish Alevi NGOs. Sırrı was one of these people; since the 1980s, he has lived in Austria and identified Europe as a place where Alevi are in union. However, for him in the 1990s, the organisational structure of Alevi in Europe began to disappear, and as the power of associations weakened, other ideological trends, such as socialism, came to dominate Alevism. Sırrı reflected that ideological Alevism gradually emerged in Europe and that political ideologies were introduced into Alevism, saying that “there shouldn't be Alevism according to different ideologies. This divides and weakens us”.

The general attitude of the people in this shop was to support the separation of the state and religion; the state should not be a part of people's religion or beliefs in the way that the Turkish State represents Sunnism. They said that Alevi, especially the young generation, feel Sunnism and the effects of oppression. They believe that the state influences the younger generation through compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. So, according to these people, the ideology of the state has a negative effect on their identity.

Ali started to talk about their experience related to compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. One day, in these lessons, a teacher in one of the schools in the area asked if there were any Alevi children in the class. After a child responded and stood up, the teacher asked about *cem* ceremonies, whether they perform *namaz*, and whether her father ever goes to a mosque. The teacher continued, emphasising that *namaz* is a religious duty for all Muslims. The next day, the girl told her family about this event, which was like an interrogation, and the girl's father came to see Ali. Ali and Sırrı went to the school to speak with the teacher and school principal about why the student was questioned in front of the other students. Sırrı told the teacher to treat Alevism with due respect. They said that the matter was settled amicably after both parties agreed that this was an inappropriate practice. Ali believes that lessons on religious history, teaching other beliefs such as Christianity, Muslimism, and Alevism, should be in the curriculum. He considers that such knowledge can be taught if competent teachers are allowed to explain Alevism. According to Sırrı, however, none of the current Turkish education system's teachers can do this. Sırrı said that “even Alevism could be an elective course, but there is no guarantee that such lectures would not contain false information”. These people claimed that there is currently no teacher qualified to teach Alevism, and they do not think that a graduate from the faculty of theology of the universities has the required knowledge. According to Ali and Sırrı, Alevi cannot gain suitable knowledge and information on Alevism in schools. While they do not believe that there is an ulterior motive behind this, they say that merely presenting Alevism as it is currently done cannot solve the issue. In this view, without changing the current education system and introducing competent teachers, the religious lessons issue will continue. They argue that if compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in schools are to continue, Alevism should be taught by teachers with the required knowledge; otherwise, the lectures should only be about the history of religion. This part of our talk reminded me of the views of the Cem Foundation representative about the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, i.e., that people should be given the opportunity to learn their faith, and educational institutions should teach the Alevi-Islam faith, as practised by the Turkish people throughout history.

When our conversation came to debates on Alevi places of worship, Sırrı said, “Alevi should perform *cem* ceremonies every Thursday night; but until now in the region, Alevi have performed *cem* only four times”. As the NGO representative, Ali said that they organised *cem* ceremonies in sports saloons and wedding halls because the NGO still does not have its own *cemevi*. They said that Alevi in this region can only hold their funeral ceremonies in mosques and pointed out that they cannot even perform their funeral ceremonies according to their beliefs. For Sırrı, imams' treatment of Alevi by asking the community whether the deceased

was Muslim is reprehensible. At this point, Ali explains that they attempted to establish a *cemevi*. The appropriation of the land, 700 square meters, was aimed to be obtained nearly 18 months ago from the municipality, but many other formalities still need to be fulfilled. Ali believes that the municipality's procedures could have been completed within two days. Sirri claimed that there was another problem in the *cemevi* project. He summarised the issue as follows:

One and a half metres of the land that the NGO wants to rent from the municipality to build the *cemevi* is owned privately. According to Turkish legal procedures, the land title deed must belong 100 percent to the municipality before the NGO can start the construction. One of the owners of the land objected, and it became unfeasible for the NGO to rent the land from the municipality. While difficulties between the title deed and the landowner continue, disapprovals were voiced in the city council regarding the renting decision. Eventually, a solution was found by removing the one and a half metres of land from the project, and the NGO was able to rent the municipality's land for 29 years.

However, the legal basis was to construct a culture centre, not a *cemevi*. Ali added that, “as well as the procedural difficulties, there will be financial problems”. The NGOs *cemevi* project awaits the municipality's decision, and at the time of writing, the municipality had not completed the formal procedure. Ali's and Sirri's words showed the complexity of building a worship place in the region for Alevis. While the governing right-wing party municipality attempted to make land available for the construction of their places of worship, other members of the city council and the owner of a small piece of land objected. So, the relationship of these people with the state authorities and others living in the region may be regarded as having both negative and positive aspects.

It was Ramadan month when I was there, so all the city's restaurants were closed, and I could find no place to eat until the breaking of the Ramadan fast. My experience recalled the question, what do Alevis, who are not fasting during Ramadan, experience in the region? Ali and Sirri confirmed that the restaurant shut down until the breaking of the Ramadan fast; however, today, the pressure is less than it was in the past. Nevertheless, the situation is still worse in Ramadan because “you cannot eat, smoke, or drink as Alevis normally do”. Thus, local pressure remains to some extent; however, coercion at the state level is much more significant.

For Sirri and Ali, *Diyanet* should not take any single religious viewpoint, or, in other words, the state should treat every belief system equally. However, Ali emphasised that “the recent government has not caused the problems; they come from history”. Sirri agreed that the problems that they face are “the results of all governments, not only today's”. He likened the problems that they are experiencing to a lake and many rivers, which represent the different governments' policies filling this lake. For him, there was no chance of reaching a concrete solution. Sirri believes that the answer lies in the right of citizenship, Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution, which must be implemented. Ali said, “the right is always there, but it should become operational”. In this respect, I remembered the words of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation representative, who also stated that Alevis' problems are related to Turkey's policies, and their issues, such as compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, come from the constitution. So, in general terms, they concluded that Alevi's problems result from historical experiences, and solutions may come from applying the constitution.

After thanking Ali and Sirri, I planned to leave the shop to visit another NGO in the city; however, Ali asked if I would be interested in visiting an old Alevi settlement with another *dede*, Hızır. I accepted and left the shop after arranging to meet with Ali and Hızır the next morning. This visit was going to be another snowball sampling exercise.

7.5. Tepe Township

Early the next morning, I returned to Ali's shop. While I was waiting for him, he called, asking me to come to the NGO office in the city centre. The office was just a small flat in a large apartment building, untidy, with only a few chairs and a table. He showed me some photographs of their meetings with other members of the NGO. He opened a file and showed me the statistics about Alevi settlements in the region that the NGO had prepared, showing that approximately 30% of villages in the area are Alevi settlements.

After half an hour, we learned that Hızır was ready and waiting for us in front of the apartment. Ali introduced me to *dede* Hızır, a retired civil servant from the family line of a dervish whose shrine is in Tepe township. Hızır is the direct descendant and last representative of this dervish. Driving through Tepe township, Hızır was excited about my visit and tried to tell me everything about the township during our journey. Hızır said that this dervish was the founder of the township and had settled here in the 1230s. This dervish was a follower of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli.⁴⁵ He explained that Tepe township has 700 to 800 inhabitants, and the primary sources of income are agriculture and animal husbandry. Tepe township is located on a plateau above a high mountain, and the area is known for its high literacy rate and has a primary school. After 10 minutes of these explanations while driving from the city centre, Ali asked me to turn right. I was surprised when I saw that this led towards a large mountain. I asked Ali to drive because we would pass through a narrow, winding mountain route. I soon realised that this township was an Alevi settlement, located far from the city centre in a remote mountainous area. Hızır told me that the township has two parts, one on the high ground and the other on the lower slopes.

When we arrived near the lower slopes of the mountain, which was one part of Tepe township, Hızır insisted on visiting the newly constructed mosque, built in 2008 with the support of people living in other parts of the region, as well as Europe, and believers from other mosques; however, people from Tepe itself gave very little help. The mosque was a clean, new, medium-sized building. There was a giant chandelier in the middle, the walls were decorated with Arabic verses, and there was a room for the Qur'an course. Hızır wanted me to compare it with the *cemevi* in the Tepe township. While we were visiting the mosque, we saw the imam, and Hızır and the imam greeted each other and began to talk. Hızır said that originally there was no place called a mosque in Islam; it was simply a praying room [*mescit*], not a mosque as people understand it today, but this changed after the Umayyad dynasty. He also said that there was no *namaz* as they are performing it today but instead there was *salat* in the Qur'an, which means bowing in front of God, but again, this had degenerated. Hızır also expressed that he was unhappy with the recent funeral ceremony that the imam performed because he did not conduct the ceremony respecting Alevis' beliefs. Imams are educated in religious vocational high schools of the Turkish State, which give one-sided education, only teaching Sunnism. However, the imam disagreed with him and said that there is no discrimination based on religion. At this point, Hızır asked the imam, "if there isn't discrimination in religion, why don't you come to *cemevis*? In *cemevis*, people commemorate the caliphates, the God, and read verses of the Qur'an". The imam answered that they also love Caliph Ali, who performed *namaz*. However, Hızır argued that it was not the same as *namaz* as it is performed today. I listened carefully to the conversation, which was beginning to sound more like an argument. For the first time, I was observing a *dede* and an imam in a discussion. At that point, Ali intervened and suggested we continue to Tepe township. This conversation was interesting to see a *dede* and an imam argue

⁴⁵ The early Turkish saint and the 13th century Sufi.

face-to-face about their differences and beliefs. This interaction was not as positive as I imagined. The dialogue was very tense and showed me how they might come into conflict over their beliefs. This conversation also showed that the issues that Alevis and Sunnis argue about today have their roots in past events and experiences, among other things.

While continuing our trip to Tepe township, Hızır said that *cem* ceremonies and Alevi tradition are not continuing as in the past and that the new generation is not interested in Alevism anymore, especially after migrating for work from the township. When we reached the peak, approximately 1000 metres above sea level. The township is middle-sized. At the entrance, the dervish's shrine with a *cemevi* welcomes the people. On the other side of the shrine and *cemevi*, there is an old mosque, constructed during the Ottoman period. Hızır said that there are people also going to the mosque and the *cemevi*. When we entered the yard of the *cemevi*, I saw some people sacrificing animals and preparing food as an act of worship. We were welcomed by a middle-aged *dede*, a former mayor of Tepe, Muharrem, who was taking care of the *cemevi*. The building is a complex with a hall used for praying, the *cemevi*, a dining hall, a library, a kitchen, and the shrine of the dervish. There is even a room with beds reserved for people who wish to stay at the shrine for the night. The inhabitants founded an association to construct the *cemevi* and the municipality provided the construction machines. When we entered the *cemevi* I saw many prominent pictures of Caliph Ali and photographs of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Water and electricity expenses of the *cemevi* are covered by the inhabitants and visitors' donations, not by the state. We started talking about the new mosque, located on the slope of the mount, and Muharrem said:

After hearing about the new mosque plan, I disapproved and said other services were more urgent, such as sewerage, before a mosque. As the mayor, I presented a sewerage system plan to the state planning organization, but it was rejected... The authorities completed the mosque within two years; however, the sewerage project has been waiting for a decision for six years. The state is supporting the mosques; the mosque construction association of this township received money from the Directorate General of Foundations under the name of a donation, and I signed it.

At the opening of the mosque, the president of *Diyanet* and members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly were there. Muharrem was unhappy about the mosque's construction. He declared that the state authorities had broken their promises about other public services. Tepe is a significant place for Alevis and a notable centre for Alevism. It is a very old settlement with a dervish shrine. For them, building a new and such a big mosque in Tepe meant capturing the Alevi stronghold in the region. Muharrem said, “this is the policy. By the promises and commitments of the state to provide services, mosques are being constructed in Alevi regions”. The mayor of Tepe township is a member of the Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP], right-wing ruling party. Muharrem stated the reason for voting AKP is not ideological, but rather due to promises of benefits from the ruling party. Ali said that, “the current issue in this region remains the same, if you want public services in an Alevi village, you must accept a mosque, but even after the mosque, the services are still not being given”.

So, I heard in this township how the state does not meet local requirements and the complaints about state policies. People do not have much interaction with outsiders. They live at the peak of a mountain and have some infrastructure problems in the township, and they believe that, as an Alevi settlement, these are not going to be solved.

7.6. Back to Zirve City Centre

As I stated in the introduction section, before I arrived at Zirve, I learned from my research that this location hosts many dervish shrines. There are numerous sacred places, and one of these dervish shrines has a newly constructed *cemevi*. So, after my Tepe township visit, I arrived back at the city centre and planned to stay in a hotel for a night before visiting a dervish shrine and a newly constructed *cemevi*.

I arrived at the dervish shrine at midday and saw that the *cemevi* was constructed near the city centre. I visited the old, small dervish shrine near the *cemevi* building. The walls are neglected, and even some plaster has already fallen away. There were people washing dishes in the garden after sacrificing a lamb and offering the meat to people. Near the shrine, there is a large area with cookstoves and a kitchen. An older woman sitting near the shrine invited me to have a cup of tea. She was curious about why I was there, and after our short talk, she said that there are 99 saints' [*evliya*] tombs in the region, so this region has great religious significance. This was supported by the research that I had done. I heard from this old Alevi woman that Alevis give spiritual importance to this location.

After finishing my tea, I went to the *cemevi* and introduced myself and my research to Kemal, the senior administrator, and asked if he was available for a short interview. He welcomed me inside and started to talk about the *cemevi* construction. An NGO founded in 2005 constructed this *cemevi*. Kemal said the construction was completed by 2010, 18 months after it started. The money needed was collected from both Alevi and Sunni citizens. The *cemevi* has a large hall to perform *cem*, a room used as an office, a dining hall on the ground floor, a kitchen, storage rooms, study rooms, a morgue, and an area for funeral ceremonies. The total cost was approximately 400.000 Turkish liras. Substantial debts remained, but Kemal is optimistic and opposes any appeal for direct central government funds. He explained that the city municipality also sponsored the building by providing metal and cement. The various sources of support given for the construction showed the generally positive relations and interactions among Alevis, Sunnis, and the local municipality in this region.

Kemal said that Alevis in the city had not performed *cem* ceremonies for years and that previously they prayed in their own houses. He said that after the *cemevi* starts to function, people must work as volunteers for a while before becoming paid workers. After our walk through the *cemevi* building, we sat outside, where several other elderly men were seated. I introduced myself to one of the *dedes*, Hasan, who told me explicitly how these people see the state. When I asked about the state's attitude towards financial support, such as excluding *cemevis* from the exemption of electricity and water bills permitted for mosques, Hasan said, "the Turkish State takes Alevis' taxes but does not give them their rights".

People here highlight the continuation of the state's assimilation policy and its applications, such as building mosques in Alevi villages. Hasan thinks that some Alevi areas are going to become Sunni within 15–20 years. They are concerned about the future; if Alevis do not follow *dedes* and no one becomes *dede*, Alevism will not continue.

Kemal gave compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons as an example of assimilationist policy. He said that with the new education system, schools in their area were converted to religious vocational high schools, which teach according to Sunni Islam beliefs, and Alevi children have no choice but to attend these schools. He told me a story of an Alevi village. Before the state appointed an imam in one of the Alevi villages in the region, a *dede* used to perform the religious duties in a 200-year-old mosque. Although the imam of the mosque respected Alevism and the Alevi villagers' traditions, e.g., in funeral ceremonies, later, a new mosque was planned in this village, with a *cemevi* near it. Kemal said they applied to the

mufti's⁴⁶ office to build a mosque and a *cemevi* at the same time. The mufti's office responded that the mosque should be constructed before the *cemevi*. As a result, people have withdrawn their project.

Kemal also gave another example of state neglect. To restore the Alevi dervish's shrine, near the *cemevi*, their NGO applied to state authorities; however, no one responded. The association decided to use their means and applied for permission to a state institution responsible for the renovation of historical places. The state institution declared that the renovation plans were inaccurate and refused to permit such a renovation. The NGO provided a revised plan, but they are still waiting for an answer. Kemal stated that “there is an Islamic-Ottoman social complex [*küllüye*] applied for renovation after us, and now it is under restoration”. The examples show their feeling of being neglected and discriminated against by the Turkish State, and they point to these as examples of how the Turkish State tries to assimilate Alevis.

Kemal also mentioned how Alevis are no longer adhering to Alevi traditions. He said, “earlier, a few people were going to court; problems were being solved in *cem* ceremonies, unlike today”. He believes that *cemevis* were first introduced during the Caliph Ali period, and Alevis are continuing the same practise today. Thus, not accepting *cemevis* as places of worship is unjust because he believes that they originated from the Prophet Muhammed period. So, he believes that they are continuing their ancient beliefs; however, some have been lost, and the problems are rooted in the history of Islam and the Turkish legal system. Kemal emphasised that the problems were not between Sunnis and Alevis in the region but with the state administration. He suggests that the solution was to grant the Alevis their rights.

7.7. Dereli City and Çatı Village

While in Zirve, I studied and learned that a *cemevi* is functioning in Dereli city. I obtained Eren's phone number from the internet, as the head of the *cemevi* and Alevi NGO branch office in Dereli, and scheduled an appointment. After driving for half an hour from Zirve, I was in Dereli's city centre. About 130,000 people live in the city of Dereli, which is small compared to other cities in Turkey. I stayed a night in a hotel, and early in the morning I met Eren at the *cemevi*.

The high-rise *cemevi* building in the city centre has five floors, one of the biggest I saw during my visit. The refectory and sacrifice area are on the ground floor. The first floor is a large prayer hall where *cem* ceremonies are performed. The second floor has an administration office, a classroom, and a conference hall. There are many sayings of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli displayed on the walls of the *cemevi*. Most rooms and corridors are covered with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's portraits and the Turkish flag.

Eren started by saying assimilation comes from history and cites the example of the change in the name of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli. We begin to talk about this. He explained that saying *hacı* means hajji, one who visited Caaba⁴⁷, which is one of the pillars of Sunni Islam. He asked, “how and when can Bektaş-ı Veli have gone to Caaba?”. He is of the opinion that his appellation was originally *hace*, which means a knowledgeable person or teacher, and that putting *hacı* in front of Bektaş-ı Veli's name was intended to give the impression that he also performed rituals of Sunnism.

Eren stated that his activist character appeared in his primary school years when his teacher hit him for being left-handed and used to tie his left hand to make him right-handed. He finished,

⁴⁶ A state official who represents *Diyanet* in provinces and districts, manages religious services and institutions, regulates, and supervises the services of religious officials.

⁴⁷ The most important mosque in Islam, located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holy place of Islam, is the qibla for Muslims in the execution of prayer.

smiling, that “I never learned to use my right hand and continued as a left-handed person”. He believes the purpose of such a punishment related to Turkey's political conflicts, civil unrest, and rightist-leftist conflicts, which were ongoing during his primary school years in the 1970s. Eren continued by describing the events he experienced when his father sent him to a Qur'an course, where he was insulted by the imam and called the son of *Kızılbaş*. For this reason, whenever the imam gave a call for *namaz*, he was excluded. Such degrading experiences were the reasons he gave for his activist personality of today, explicitly stating that his experiences and negative interactions shaped his activist Alevi identity.

Eren represents the only functioning Alevi NGO in the city, a branch office of a country-wide NGO. Following the Sivas events, in 1993, the Dereli branch office started its activities. The *cemevi* was founded under the name of this NGO. He began to talk about the story of the *cemevi*, now in operation for two years. Alevis themselves had covered the *cemevi* construction's expenses. The NGO bought 500 square metres of land, but the building permit was only for 130 square meters. The municipality strictly forbade the NGO to exceed 130 square meters, otherwise, the construction would be demolished. He believed the limited construction permission was deliberate and said, “we couldn't build our place of worship on our land as we prefer”. In his opinion, the construction permission procedure was hostile and related to the mosque, just 500 metres away. He showed me the mosque from the window, which faces the *cemevi*. Eren alleged that the mosque was built in the middle of the main road. He said they were very dissatisfied with the very limited building permit for their *cemevi*, but the construction of a mosque was permitted in the middle of the main road. Eren complained about the electricity and water expenses of the *cemevi*. As the authority of the *cemevi*, he asked, “I am not going to the mosque, so why do I have to pay the water expenses of the mosque with my taxes?”. Eren stated that the water expense of the *cemevi* is one of the highest tariffs due to its lack of legal status. His petition to the municipality requesting the *cemevi* be accepted as a place of worship has received no response. Eren said Turkish State authorities, particularly the municipality of Dereli, do not support them, so they depend on donations and NGO financial support.

Eren also criticised Alevis, saying that “Alevis started to fast in Ramadan and sent their children to Qur'an courses... Until now, Alevis considered themselves to be Alevis, so what happened to being Alevi? The reason for such a change is due to not having a job or food”. He believes that Alevis began to behave like Sunnis to find employment because even the city municipality is not hiring Alevis, or at least not those who have a with their Alevi NGO.

In his opinion, unemployment is the reason for Alevis migrating to big cities. Referring to the right to work and equal opportunity to work, he asked, “isn't this a human rights violation?”. He believes that Alevis struggle to survive in this location, and when they find a job, they give up practising their Alevi rituals. He thinks that migration to cities from their motherlands can hasten assimilation. These words summed up how, from his point of view, Alevis are facing discrimination and the Alevi identity is changing. Eren noted that they feel the pressure, particularly during Ramadan, and that when Sunnis fast, even Alevi traders must close their food stores, and in Ramadan, you have no chance to eat or drink in public, even if you are unwell and need food. Eren said that “Alevis are finished. The coming generation has two options: being one of them (Sunnis) or forgetting their Alevism”. This is how he described the pressure felt by the people in Dereli.

We kept talking to Eren in the *cemevi*, near the picture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on the wall. He explained how Alevis were killed during the Ottoman Empire and stated that today, Alevis deal with degeneration and assimilation, or, in other words, attempts to absorb Alevis into the Sunni population. Accordingly, Alevis' problems are not new but come from history; however, the method of assimilation has changed. He stated the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons as an example of an assimilationist application. Eren believes that religion

lessons should not be a part of the educational system. This idea reminded me of the propositions of two nation-wide NGOs, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation, and the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation. These two NGOs also declare that the state should not teach religion to children and that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons should be removed from the Turkish education system because these lessons are part of a state policy rooted in Turkish-Islam synthesis and Islam's Sunni-Hanafî branch, i.e., it is part of an assimilation policy.

Eren adds that Alevi desire to live in human dignity and humanity in Turkey. From his point of view, state policies were always discriminatory, and this became clear during the Sivas massacre, when the state could not (or did not) prevent the massacre. For Eren, “there isn't equal citizenship for Alevi in Turkey. We want to live as humans. We want the state to treat us as equals”. Eren considered that the Turkish State should not have an official religion to prevent the exploitation of religion for pressurising communities. The Turkish State, he argued, is violating their rights with such applications, and neglecting Alevi. Mosques are being constructed in Alevi villages in the region, and he gave a township as an example where both a mosque and a *cemevi* were constructed, but only the mosque received state financial support and services. According to Eren, Alevi beliefs, rituals, and traditions could scarcely continue under such circumstances; the state does not give equal service, and Alevi are not being treated equally.

Eren illustrated the degeneration of Alevism with an example from an Alevi village near Dereli's city centre, where a funeral ceremony was performed according to Sunni Islam rites during the day and Alevi rituals were performed for the same person at night. He asked, “what kind of Alevism or Sunnism is this?”.

According to Eren, Alevism is a lifestyle with its own values, such as respecting the environment and all life and promoting equality between men and women. Eren rejects the idea of Alevi Islam. He believes that accepting the concept of Alevi Islam means putting aside secularism, democracy, republicanism, and human rights; furthermore, he states that “under this system, good Alevi are considered those that perform *namaz* and fast in Ramadan”. Alevi identity will thus come to be defined as following Sunni rituals. So, Eren's view on the Alevi identity is that it is becoming more perceived as a lifestyle than a religion. He concluded by stating, “how can we be supporters of right-wing politics? But let's say we are rightists; you still cannot come to a certain (higher) level because you are Alevi”. For Eren, Alevism may also be understood from a different, i.e., non-religious perspective; however, he believes that the main issue at the state level is not caused purely by politics but only by the fact of being Alevi and the problems that this entails.

Eren said people face similar problems in every part of the region and was aware that those across the whole country face similar complications. Eren offered to take me to a small village, Çatı, near the city to show me the difficulties involved in constructing even a tiny *cemevi*. During our conversation in the car on the way, he said the NGO proposed building *cemevis* in neighbouring cities and districts, including this small village that we were visiting. The village is divided into two neighbourhoods: the centre, where the Sunnis live, and the less developed Alevi part.

After driving for 15 minutes from Dereli, we reached the Sunni part of the village, which has a big mosque, regular roads, and infrastructure. Later, we drove to the Alevi part. This part was not well constructed, and we had to follow a muddy road to reach the *cemevi* construction. As we arrived, Ali, the head of another NGO established to construct this *cemevi*, welcomed us. Eren said that the Sunni part of the village had good roads, but the Alevi part of the village was left to its fate, and that the Turkish State claims that there are insufficient funds for the Alevi part of the village. He asked, “isn't this discrimination?”. When I looked at the *cemevi* construction, I saw that it was not more than 75 square meters. The roof was not yet constructed

due to a lack of resources. Eren said, “donations from the NGO members and villagers are used to construct this *cemevi*”. Ali explained that “we collect 50 Turkish Liras every month from the villagers to finish this *cemevi*. There are also some donations from outside the village”. Ali said there are 23 households in the Alevi neighbourhood, with approximately 120 people. Ali and Eren said that the Alevi population is decreasing due to migration in the region. When I asked if they had requested municipality support, Eren considered this pointless; therefore, they were constructing their place of worship through their efforts. He said the authorities would not reply to any of their demands because “there isn't such a place called *cemevi* for them”. This is how they expressed their feeling of being excluded in this region.

I drove back to Dereli's city centre with Eren, who asked me if I now understood their situation in the area. It was obvious that the problems of the Alevis continue both in Dereli city and Çatı village, and the Alevis have some difficulties in enjoying their human rights and freedoms.

7.8. Conclusion

The concluding section for the Northern Anatolia region should be read, taking into account Chapter Five regarding the concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law, as well as the research questions, themes, and observations.

7.8.1. Alevis Experiences Human Rights Violations, but in Varying Degrees, and They Offer Different Solutions to Their Problems

In the Northern Anatolia region, almost every Alevi talks about human rights and shows awareness of human rights violations. Alevis cite human rights issues, but the focus of these varies. Human rights violations in terms of religious life mostly focus on problems related to *cemevis* and on compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. Alevis in this region emphasise that the Turkish State does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship and gives them no legal status or financial support, unlike mosques. So, in this region, Alevis express an increasing feeling of being neglected and discriminated against by the state. Some others, for example in Dereli, also complained about the lack of social services from the state, such as infrastructure, because of their Alevi identity. Thus, the state does not only discriminate against and neglect Alevis in their religious life but also by denying them social services. Some, e.g., in the minstrel's family, also highlight that Alevis are facing discrimination by the state in business life. Others, as in Zirve, particularly emphasise that they are subjected to discrimination by fellow citizens.

Alevis have various proposals for their problems. Some, as in Fide, argue that the state should not be involved in religious matters. These proposals are close to the opinion of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation, which supports the total exclusion of the state from religion. On the other hand, others, as in Zirve, argue that it is possible to make compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons more acceptable, for example by hiring properly trained teachers. This proposal is close to the opinion of the Cem Foundation (see Chapter One). Thus, the themes below are useful to explain such differences in the Northern Anatolia region.

Historical Experiences

While Alevis in the region state that their problems have existed since the Ottoman Empire, they also faced problems in the Republic of Turkey, especially during the civil unrest years in the 1970s and 1980s, and they particularly remember the Sivas massacre. The Northern Anatolia region is historically and religiously important for Alevis, as the beginning of the

chapter details, and the past is still remembered; these problems are not at all new. Moreover, historical experiences like the Sivas massacre served to enlighten Alevi in the region over human rights issues and increased the numbers of Alevi NGOs. So, the violations of rights remembered in the region are often seen as part of a historical process, and memories of such negative experiences raise Alevi's human rights awareness and make them cite human rights issues, but to varying degrees.

The Influence of Alevi Themselves and Their NGOs

Alevi's internal relations have also affected Alevi's awareness of human rights and violations. It is believed that some in their community do not have enough knowledge about their rights, and this affects Alevi awareness of human rights and violations. On the other hand, as stated in Fide, access to information has become easier over time, especially by using technology, and this may help to overcome this ignorance. In this way, it is revealed that in the Northern Anatolia region, using technological developments by Alevi is important in bringing enlightenment about human rights. Secondly, there is also a link between the Alevi NGOs and their historical experiences, e.g., Alevi needed to become more organized after negative experiences, such as the Sivas massacre, as people in Fide states. So, there is a connection between the first theme, historical experiences, and Alevi NGOs, and this link contributes to awareness of human rights. In this respect, in the Northern Anatolia region, the Alevi NGOs are important for the Alevi's human rights aspect, i.e., by voicing the demands of the Alevi on compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, as in Zirve. Alevi NGOs are active in the region, both in trying to make Alevi continue their religious rituals and raise their human rights awareness. As a result of the functioning Alevi NGOs, there is a greater awareness of human rights violations based on their religious identities. As Alevi become more aware of their religious identity, they are also more aware of the violations they are exposed to related to this identity.

Alevi's Relations with Sunnis

There are also variations in Alevi's interaction with Sunnis across the Northern Anatolia region. Some describe their interaction as more positive than in the past and think that Alevi should not reject Sunni religious rituals such as *namaz* or mosques, as members of the minstrel's family state. Others, however, still remember negative experiences in the past, as in Fide. Likewise, as shown by the dialogue between the *dede* and the imam in Tepe, there can be serious arguments. Problems persist at some points, such as the Sunni pressure, especially in business life; e.g., the enforcement of fasting during Ramadan, as in Dereli and Fide. Despite these views, overall, it can be concluded that relations with Sunnis are generally unproblematic. This increasing interaction also affects Alevi's views on human rights. Such relationships make it easier for some, as in Tepe and Dereli, to compare their situation with that of Sunnis, e.g., not receiving social services or state support for their *cemevis*. So, when the interaction with Sunnis increases, there is more opportunity for Alevi to observe violations of rights, discrimination, and being neglected and treated as second-class citizens, which are related to their relations with the state.

Alevi's Relations with the State

The relationship of the Alevi with the state has been subject to continual change. This change may be understood from two perspectives. Alevi in the region are aware that the oppression during the Ottoman Empire, i.e., the oppression, decreased to a certain level with the Republic of Turkey. Secondly, their problems related to freedoms and rights, and their relations with the state took on a different dimension with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. While they used to encounter public severe rights violations in the past, in recent decades of the Republic of Turkey, the issues have been more about discrimination and hidden and invisible violations through neglect. Alevi also point to their relationship with the state as bringing a

feeling of insecurity, which is a view heard for the first time in this region, as in Zirve. This feeling is increased by the state policy that does not legally recognise *cemevis* under Turkish law. The great importance of legal recognition lies in the protection given to places of worship under Turkish law. Alevis do not feel that they have the same protection and opportunities as Sunnis. So, although relations with the state changed after the end of the Ottoman Empire, problems remained in the Republican period. Another factor affecting relations with the state is business life and being denied social services. For example, Alevis face unemployment due to their identity. Another example was the unrestored tomb of an important dervish in Zirve, despite repeated demands.

Another dimension of Alevis' relations with the state can be observed in how Alevis were forced to act in ways that conflicted with their identity. Alevis had to develop different methods to overcome discriminatory state policies. For example, some, as in Tepe, had to accept the construction of a mosque, even though it was unused, in their settlement in return for infrastructure services from the state. Although they were generally leftists, they voted for the ruling party, which is a right-wing political party, in order to receive state services. However, this tactic did not work. This situation shapes the relations of Alevis with the state and on-going human rights violations, discrimination, neglect, and denial of services. So, in the Northern Anatolia region, the relations of Alevis with the state are not limited to the recognition of *cemevis* or compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

There are three types of migration that influence Alevis living in the Northern Anatolia region: internal, international, and return migration. Alevis in small cities, townships, and villages move to big cities in Turkey and internationally, to Europe. The search for employment and a better life are the major causes of this high migration rate. Some, however, can regularly visit their homelands in Turkey or return permanently after retirement.

Migration abroad, return migration, or visits from Alevis who live abroad have a big effect on their unity, especially when it comes to forming NGOs. Alevis in Turkey learned how to organise and operate NGOs from those living abroad and returning, which is affecting awareness of human rights. The second theme, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, also details the role of Alevi NGOs in raising human rights awareness. NGOs are structures that increase awareness about their human rights violations. In this respect, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, international migration, return migration, or periodic visits to Turkey, and human rights are all interrelated.

Another aspect of migration related to human rights is believed to be the deliberate denial of employment, especially by the state, and thus being forced to migrate, which is evaluated as another right violation, as said by those in Dereli. These people argued that Alevis were deliberately left unemployed, denied the right to work and equal opportunities, and were forced into internal migration. In other words, the fourth theme of Alevis' relations with the state relates to the search for employment and being forced to move to big cities, i.e., internal migration.

7.8.2. *Alevi Identity is No Longer Hidden but a Public Identity*

Alevis in the Northern Anatolia region no longer hide their Alevi identity and voice their Alevism and Alevi identity publicly. In the past, these rather isolated Alevis used to hide their identities; however, this situation has changed and they are not doing it anymore. So, the Alevi identity in the Northern Anatolia region emerges as a public identity.

7.8.3. The Religious Dimension in the Alevi Identity Is Not Being Practiced as Before; But Alevism as a Political Identity and Part of a Lifestyle Identity Keeps Its Vitality

There is no single definition of Alevism in the region. Alevism is defined as having religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions. While for some, Islam sometimes plays a central role in the religious dimension, others, for example, in Dereli, reject this idea of making Alevism the centre of Islam. In the Northern Anatolia region, the political dimension of Alevism is manifest in political terms, such as being leftist. Moreover, Alevis describe their political identity as anti-Sharia, as being among the founders of the Republic of Turkey and followers of the values of the modern Republic of Turkey, and they show their attachment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Alevism as a lifestyle in the region is expressed in such ways as respecting the environment, promoting gender equality, and being responsible for your words, actions, and moral values. However, Alevis in the region have not sustained their religious rituals as much as in the past. On the other hand, the political and lifestyle dimensions are more evident.

The themes below are useful to understand these two changes in the Alevi identity in the Northern Anatolia region.

Historical Experiences

In the north, Alevis feel that their problems in Turkey are not new but have a long history, and in such a negative atmosphere, Alevis used to separate themselves from Sunnis in separate locations, even within the same township, as in Fide. However, such a situation no longer exists, and there is no need to hide or live separately. Also, for Alevis, changed conditions after the Ottoman period, a certain level of decrease in oppression and severe rights violations, and distance in time from negative historical experiences in the Republic of Turkey have all caused Alevis to live their identities more publicly. So, historical experiences like the Sivas massacre, which made Alevis more organised and helped establish NGOs, also contribute to greater openness. Through these NGOs, Alevis have found the courage to express their demands from the state, initiate lawsuits against the state, and set up and operate *camevis*. In parallel to these, the Alevis perform their religious rituals, revealing them more publicly.

Even though historical events helped the Alevis become more organized, these events have had more negative effects on their religious identity. The pressures experienced in this region during the Ottoman period and the civil unrest in the 1970s and 1980s caused, to a certain degree, the Alevi religious identity to lose vitality. Many Alevis in the region set aside their religious rituals, and some even began following Sunni religious rituals. From this point of view, oppression in the past is linked to the Alevis' religious identity, as the first observation shows. However, the picture for political identity is rather different. The attachment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and to modern Turkey, which is the political dimension within the Alevi identity, is related to the decrease of oppression at a certain level that took place in the Ottoman period. The contribution of Alevis to the foundation of the Republic of Turkey shows the influence of historical experiences. Because the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey shaped the political identity of the Alevis in terms of being followers of Atatürk's reforms, supporters of CHP, the political party he founded, and attached to the constitutional values of modern Turkey. Such a vital political identity is evident from the Alevi words and the symbols they use, e.g., the photographs of Atatürk and the Turkish flag hanging on the walls of their *camevis*.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

The Turkish State does not support *camevis* in the area, in contrast to Sunni mosques. This means that Alevis have to build and run their *camevis* on their own. Alevis are organising *cem* ceremonies, although on a smaller scale than in the past and without hiding their identities. These activities take place with the financial support and guidance of Alevi NGOs. In other

words, Alevis, who face problems such as discrimination and negligence, as the first observation details, and do not receive support from the Turkish State, establish places of worship by their own means. So, the problems with the state and about human rights, as the first observation discusses, and their self-support as a community, through establishing NGOs that were encouraged after the historical experiences, are all related to making the Alevi identity public.

Alevi NGOs are important in trying to keep the Alevi religious identity vital because of their role in *cemevis* and *cem* ceremonies. But despite all these efforts, religious rituals are not being performed as they used to in the area. One of the reasons for this is the Alevis themselves. For some Alevis, as in the minstrel's family, the unfinished *cemevi* constructions in the region affect their religious identity because they are seen as a failure. Negligence or financial difficulties can both explain this situation. Secondly, ignorance among Alevis, especially among *dedes*, is an obstacle to maintaining their own religious rituals, which are part of their religious identity. There are two issues related to *dedes* in the region: the first is the lack of knowledgeable *dedes* to perform *cem* ceremonies, and the second is *dedes* who are unable to transmit their religious values sufficiently. However, ignorance is not only related to *dedes* but also to all Alevis. In other words, Alevis do not have enough knowledge about their own religious identity. In addition, the impact of Alevi youth failing to follow the Alevi religious rituals is clear in the Northern Anatolia region. Alevi youths practise religious rituals for their own or others' entertainment in the media, especially the rituals that are part of religious ceremonies such as playing the *saz*, a stringed instrument, and performing *semah*, the ritualistic dance of the Alevis, as stated in Zirve. Appearing in the media helps Alevism appear more as a public identity, but it is also believed to degenerate Alevi religious values. Moreover, Alevism as a lifestyle retains its vitality in Alevis' practices, e.g., taking responsibility for your words, actions, and moral values; being human; being honest; respecting people's rights and freedoms; etc.; and political identity, such as following Atatürk's reforms and being a supporter of CHP.

Relations among Alevis also have a community aspect in the Alevi identity. Alevis unite and support each other in the face of the state's negligent and discriminatory policies regarding their places of worship and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In other words, Alevis' relations with the state, as first observation related to human rights violations details, brought unity. They come together to build and support their *cemevis*. Alevis talk about other Alevis' situations abroad, in Europe, even though these are not known to them personally. So, Alevis are aware of each other's problems and situations, and this creates a bond, a sense of community, with each other, even though they never meet face to face.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

It is not possible to explain the relations of Alevis with Sunnis from a single perspective. Although for some, the negative relations and violence of the past are still fresh in their memories, it can be said that generally Alevi-Sunni relations are positive or at least neutral.

In their relations with Sunnis, Alevis try to be more open about their Alevi identity, believing that negative experiences from the past will not be repeated. They believe that unless the Alevis express their identities publicly, they will not be truly understood. So, the negative historical experiences and relationships with Sunnis are interrelated in making the Alevi identity more public.

The increased interaction between Alevis and Sunnis also affects the Alevi religious identity. People who interact with Sunnis are more vulnerable to pressure from Sunnis and the threat of discrimination by their fellow citizens, as in Dereli and Zirve. The pressure that they experience to fast in Ramadan is an example. As a result, Alevis may have to follow Sunni religious rituals or act as Sunnis. The discrimination that the first observation details in terms of human rights

and relations with Sunnis is also related to the decline in the number of Alevi following their religious rituals.

On the other hand, some Alevi have positive relations with Sunnis, and this positive interaction results in more positive views towards the Sunni belief system and practices, and Sunni mosques can be accepted as places of worship for some Alevi. For example, the minstrel's family gives examples of their members' positive attitudes towards mosques. In this way, the Sunni values are more easily accepted as a part of Alevism. As a result, the growing interaction with Sunnis and Alevi's ignorance of their own religious identity raise the issue of the future of Alevi identity, as the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs theme above details.

Alevi's Relations with the State

The changed relation between Alevi and the state after the establishment of the Republic is also effective on the Alevi identity. Oppression by the state as in the Ottoman period decreased to a certain level in this region after the foundation of the Republic, so they had the opportunity to express their identities in the public sphere. For example, Alevi NGOs work actively in the region and are trying to build *cemevis*, organise *cem* ceremonies, and defend the rights of Alevi, such as in the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, as in *Zirve*. In addition, Alevi can convey their demands to the state, e.g., requesting the state to restore their important religious places and dervish tombs, as in *Zirve*, and for the development of the infrastructure in their settlements, as in the *Tepe*.

When historical experiences and Alevi's relations with the state are analysed together, the negative experiences in the past, including the oppression of the Ottoman Empire, the civil unrest years, and the Sivas massacre in the Republic of Turkey, had a negative impact on the religious dimension of Alevi identity. The pressure and negative experiences in their relations with the state in the past led some Alevi, as said in *Fide*, to give up practising their rituals that are a part of the Alevi religious identity, and even follow Sunni rituals.

Although the oppressions and severe rights violations decreased to a certain level under the modern Republic, Alevi are still deprived of the state support given to places of worship. The first observation related to the human rights situation details this situation. In this perspective, *cemevis*' lack of economic support and legal status makes it difficult for Alevi to continue their religious rituals without the legal status or funding of *cemevis*. The idea that Alevi are assimilated by the compulsory religious culture and ethic lessons, in other words, the imposition of the Sunni faith on the Alevi, shows the influence of the state on the Alevi religious identity. So, there is a connection between the first observation related to human rights and Alevi's religious identity.

The support given since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, especially to Atatürk's reforms and constitutional principles, influenced Alevi's relations with the state and political identities. This political dimension still maintains its vitality in the region; Alevi see themselves as one of the founders and protectors of modern Turkey through their words and symbols, particularly the Turkish flag and Atatürk posters in their houses and *cemevis*.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

Migrated Alevi returning to their homelands permanently or periodically, together with internal and international migration, are influential on the Alevi identity.

In terms of international migration, Alevi moving to Europe inspired Alevi in Turkey to get more organised by founding NGOs. Those in the north believe that Alevi in Europe transferred the notion of organisation through NGOs to Alevi living in Turkey. So, the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs, as well as Alevi who migrated to Europe, re-

migrated, or periodically visited their homelands in Turkey, has been influential in making the Alevi identity more public.

Another effect of migration on Alevi identity is on the religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions of Alevi identity. However, it is necessary to examine the different aspects of migration. Interaction with Sunnis increases as a result of internal migration to cities. Following the internal migration, Alevis feel more pressure or discrimination from Sunnis, especially in business life, to the extent that some Alevis even abandon their religious rituals and follow Sunni rituals, or at least pretend to. In some locations, as in Dereli, internal migration is also seen as a result of a deliberate policy of denying employment, as indicated by the title Alevis' relations with the state in the first observation related to human rights details. The unemployed find a solution in internal migration to big cities. Facing the threat of being discriminated against in city life, Alevis are not able to practise their religious rituals. Alevis who migrated to Europe showed and taught unity and the value of being organised to the Alevis in Turkey during return migration or regular visits to their homelands. The effect of NGOs on the Alevi identity is related to *cemevis* and *cem* ceremonies, as the theme on the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs discusses. So, there is a relation between international, return migration, or regular visits and the second theme the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs. However, despite all these efforts in the Northern Anatolia region, the religious dimension of the Alevi identity, in terms of practising Alevi religious rituals, is in decline due to the factors that the themes above detail. Moreover, Alevis in Europe interact with different political ideologies, such as socialism, as said in Zirve, and some argue that such ideologies affect the Alevi identity by promoting Alevism as a political ideology. So, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs is also interrelated with international migration through the tendency to adopt political ideologies into Alevism.

The next chapter, Chapter Eight, contains details on the fieldwork done in the Central Anatolia region.

CHAPTER 8 The Central Anatolia Region

8.1. Introduction

Although the capital city, Ankara, is in the Central Anatolia region, in this fieldwork I deliberately avoided starting with Ankara because I targeted locations outside the cosmopolitan areas because big cities are idiosyncratic locations (see Chapter Two). My previous studies, family ties, and the religious importance of places in the Central Anatolia region were again guiding me. Moreover, snowball sampling had directed me to visit a township, and I remained in this region of religious significance.

8.2. Sarı Township

My first destination was a location that is religiously important for Alevis, and I knew that there were old Alevi settlements in the Central Anatolia region. One of my family friends, Ezel, always talked about his pride at being from a township that was opposed to the government for decades in the Central Anatolia region. Ezel also often repeated that in Sarı township, there is an NGO that has branch offices both in Turkey and in Europe. When I researched this location, I found that this township was governed by an ideologically socialist party, and people here had voted in opposition to the governing party for decades (see SeçimHaber.com). Although the metropolitan municipality and other local municipalities in this location were governed by AKP, this township was interesting because it was the only place in the region governed by one of the opposition parties. Researching the human rights circumstances here could be interesting and important, so I asked Ezel to be my reference person before going to the township. He told me that his daughter Ümmühan and son-in-law Cemal would welcome me.

While travelling towards the township, I could see the landscape changing. The greenery of nature gave way to yellow fields. This geography was more infertile than the northern part of the country; however, when I arrived in Sarı, after a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Dereli, the landscape suddenly changed—looking at Sarı from a hillside gave the impression of an oasis in the middle of a desert. I saw large green trees in the township and buildings that were properly constructed. I called Ümmühan, and we met at their house. Ümmühan and her husband Cemal live in Germany, but were in Sarı visiting their hometown and relatives. Cemal was going to accompany me on my visit, which began at the municipality building.

When we arrived, I learned that the mayor was out on official business, but I had the chance to talk with Mehmet, one of the municipality's senior administrators. A worker was sitting near Mehmet's table. After I introduced myself and the research, the worker said ironically “the Turkish State is giving us our rights”. This light-hearted sarcasm was followed by an explanation of how the state is not granting Alevis rights. Mehmet said that the population is 2,580. Since 1993, an annual cultural festival has been organised in August to liven up and spread the Alevi traditions. Mehmet said migration from Sarı to Europe and Ankara is high. At this point, Cemal added, “once people in the township reach their teenage years, migration begins”.

Cemal said a family from Germany built a *cemevi* in the township in 2007. The family met all the expenses of the construction. However, Mehmet said they, as their municipality, had supported the construction and waived the water charges. Mehmet added that they also apply the same policy to the mosque in the township; they waive the water charges. Mehmet said the *cemevi*, which is not a legally recognised place of worship, had to pay its electricity bills, unlike

the mosques. Although Mehmet pointed out the unequal treatment of the state, he said, interestingly, that the Alevi inhabitants in the township also welcomed the mosque. He illustrated this by saying that during a religious festival [*bayram*], after *namaz*, people in the township provide donations to cover the mosque's minor expenses. The inhabitants showed no discomfort about the presence of the imam of the mosque. Cemal said, "the imam is also working in the township. For example, when you need help for something, like in your construction, he works for extra income". In this township, it was clear that there are no negative attitudes towards the mosque or the imam, and all have good relationships.

As Mehmet said, they perform *cem* ceremonies once a year. I asked why so infrequently, and he told me that this is a tradition from the Ottoman period, and they are following it. According to Mehmet:

Cem ceremonies are not only for a religious purpose, especially in the period of Yavuz Sultan Selim, the Ottoman sultanate, but Alevis were also under pressure, so they started to become closed communities. In that period, *cem* ceremonies were held once a year to solve social problems, like a court. So, this is how it shall be.

So, Mehmet showed that the Alevis felt threatened and thus held *cem* ceremonies only once a year, and this tradition continues.

Mehmet continued, "*dede's* started to change the religious ceremonies and transformed these ceremonies into a commercial event. Besides, there were political clashes". He explained that the Alevis themselves were degenerating Alevism, and political clashes in Turkey (see Chapter One) were one of the reasons why the Alevis do not follow their religious rituals. There is no *dede* family here, so *dede's* came from outside. Mehmet said that this region was assigned as a municipality after 1965. There are many inhabitants from the township who researched Alevism, and he continued, "Alevism is a lifestyle in this township, however, not with many religious motifs".

Mehmet accused the Turkish State of using compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons to assimilate children and denying financial support to them, like in other townships in the region. As in every school in Turkey, these lessons are taught in the school of the township. Mehmet remarked that these lessons have an impact on the children's belief systems and conflict with the knowledge from their families. From his perspective, Alevism is being taught in textbooks as a more Islamic concept, except for Alevism, which is more about lifestyle. He emphasised that Alevism is taught at home to counter the knowledge conveyed in the schools. As Mehmet said, the new education system introduces elective courses on Prophet Muhammed's life and the Qur'an, which, in his opinion, may contradict Alevis' culture and belief system. So, for Mehmet, these lessons are one of the state applications for assimilation.

The municipality's funds remain deficient, so the NGO established by the people of Sarı supports them. Mehmet said donations are important financial resources for the township. These supports may also be used to cover some municipality expenses or even fund festivals. The people from this township who migrated to Ankara and Europe also founded the NGO's branch offices in Ankara, Germany, and the Netherlands. He noted that the governorship always rejects their requests; however, "the state shows that they are interested even though they do not give support". For Mehmet, the reason for being rejected is the township's socialist and leftist tendencies.

After my talk with Mehmet, Cemal accompanied me into the township. While driving, I noticed that it was located on a broad plain. The houses in the clean and tidy township are large and spread over a vast area. We arrived at the *cemevi*, which was closed, but we saw six older men sitting near the garden of the *cemevi*. Cemal introduced me, and they asked who I was and what my purpose for visiting was. Three of these elders are retired and living in Europe. One

of them, Hünkar, from Germany, started to tell the history of the region. I asked about the shrine of a dervish near the *cemevi* and was told he was the founder of this settlement. His family settled in the region in the 16th century and was joined by seven or eight other families. As Hünkar said, all the people in the township are descended from these families. Hünkar gave me the impression that these people had lived in this region for centuries and felt that they belonged to this land.

Our conversation continued about the mosque in the township. None of the elders know when it was built. People suggest that this mosque used to be a madrasah and a small mosque before Turkey's foundation. Restoration of the mosque was carried out in 1953 and again in 1993, when the minaret was built. Another elder, Doruk, said only a few people from the township attend *namaz* on Fridays and at *bayram*. When I asked if they perform *cem* ceremonies weekly, Doruk said they could not perform *cem* ceremonies for many years because *dedes* have given up. He stated that for *dedes*, financial matters become more important, implying their key role in Alevism. He remembered that approximately 20 years ago, villagers used to perform *cem* ceremonies in all streets of the township every Thursday, saying “people do not have any enthusiasm to perform *cem* ceremonies as in the past”.

Our conversation ended with questioning their relationship with the Turkish State. Doruk explicitly said, “since 1968, leftist parties have won the elections in this township, so because of this, the state is not giving any support or service to this township. This location was always leftist”. Thus, in this township, Alevis identify themselves more in political terms and feel neglected by the state because of their political affiliations.

8.3. Yenice Township

After spending half a day in Sarı, I continued to drive through the southern part of the Central Anatolia region. I had already planned fieldwork in Yenice. This location had an air of mysticism, hosting many shrines and dervish lodges, and was home to one of the most important mystic saints. Before I arrived, I had already made an appointment with Mansur, the mayor, and Meral, a woman representative of a well-known NGO in the area. I found their contact information on the internet and called them. Both welcomed me and said that they would be happy to help with my research. Late at night, I arrived in the Yenice district and checked into a hotel for two nights.

8.3.1. The Mayor and People in the Township

Early in the morning, I visited the mayor in his office, as agreed. It was clear that my visit would be short due to Mansur's heavy workload and preliminary preparations for the traditional festival. After I had explained my research, his first words were about the problems they face as a municipality. He complained about the lack of services and budget from the state and said the state does not support *cemevis*. Although he accepts that Alevis have problems, he argues that these originate from the Ottoman Empire. and:

There are three breaking points for Alevis. During the Fatih Sultan Süleyman⁴⁸ period, the first breaking point happened. Alevis faced increased pressure and assimilation. The second one was during the Yavuz Sultan Selim⁴⁹ period when

⁴⁸ Ottoman Sultan during the years 1520-1566.

⁴⁹ Ottoman Sultan during the years 1512- 1520.

Alevis were massacred, and lastly during the II. Mahmut⁵⁰ period, when the Bektashi lodges were closed to end the janissary system. In 1834 even a mosque was constructed here.

Mansur accepts that the problems have their roots in historical experiences, and these experiences changed Alevis' identities, such as the assimilation in the Fatih Sultan Süleyman period. When I asked about the Republic period, Mansur said:

The Republican period is the time when Alevis could breathe. Thanks to Atatürk during the Republic period, Alevis understood that they were human beings and the state was subjecting them. However, *Diyanet*, which Atatürk founded, was not like today. At that time, the ministerial level of the Ottoman religious administration was abolished, and *Diyanet* was founded; however, today *Diyanet* is not as it was founded.

He explicitly showed gratitude to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republic of Turkey.

Mansur rejected the idea of positioning Alevism outside of Islam and criticised these views. He disapproved of identifying Alevis as the minority, regarding the Alevi identity as a part of Islam. This Alevi-Islamic understanding is one I had heard before; the Cem Foundation also supported this idea, holding a more Islamic understanding of Alevism. According to the Cem Foundation, the Alevi identity must be understood in Islamic religious terms, although it has a different understanding of Islam (see Cem Vakfi History).

Mansur said, "if Alevis are going to be considered outside Islam, they will be a minority according to the Lausanne Peace Treaty". Mansur also holds a similar idea to the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation about being a minority. According to Alevi-Bektaşî Federation, Turkey has a problem with equal citizenship, and the NGO rejects being identified as a minority because, in Turkey, the term is used to refer to non-Muslims.

Mansur ended our conversation due to his duties and advised me to visit some elders and gave me the address of a shop where I could meet Ali, who administers one of the *cemevi* in the township. The address was just across from his office. When I arrived, I saw an elderly man, Mesut, sitting alone. After I introduced myself and said I was there on the mayor's recommendation, he called Ali. After a few minutes, Ali arrived, and I introduced myself and the research. We started to talk about the *cemevi* that he administers, and he told me that they are the branch office of a prominent Alevi NGO in Turkey. The small *cemevi* has only a place to cook and a guest house. He said, "during the construction, the state had not given any support; only the local municipality provided some construction equipment and covered 10% of the expenses". Ali explained that the *cemevi* survives on donations, and although the people in the township do not feel pressure directed by the state, people here cannot access services from the state. Ali summarised his views, saying "we are like the doomed people". The people in the township claimed that the state was neglecting them and denying them their entitlements.

When I asked if there were a lot of Alevi villages in the region, he listed the names of Alevi and Sunni villages. According to Ali, the Sunni villages are in better condition when compared to the Alevi ones. I learned from my previous works, before I arrived in Yenice, that one of the closest Alevi villages to this township is Çifteli. While I was talking with Ali, Mesut found an old newspaper and showed me a piece about the government's road construction plan for Çifteli village. Çifteli village is divided into two zones. One was the deserted old settlement; the other was the new part where villagers moved and settled. The government repaired the old zone road but not the new zone road.

⁵⁰ Ottoman Sultan during the years 1808- 1838.

Mesut and Ali said that most of the people in this township are retired, others are farmers, artisans, or owners of souvenir shops near the shrine. While we were talking, a woman, Şengül, came into the shop. After Mesut introduced me, I learned that she was one of the former chiefs of a district [*muhtar*] in the Yenice township. Şengül started to talk about Çifteli, and in her opinion, the road construction plan meant that “the government is saying if you are not one of us, leave”. She criticised the government's policies of neglecting Alevis in the township, and their reactions to the Turkish government’s decision about closing the local courthouse.

She said a group of people from the township protested the government’s decision to close the courtroom in Yenice and got in touch with Abdullah Gül, the president of the Republic of Turkey, at this time. As a result, the courtroom was saved and still functions today. Şengül said this is an example of being neglected and discriminated against by the Turkish government; however, there were some positive interactions with the state. When I asked if this was the only event they experienced, Şengül gave another example, the state authorities cut off the electricity using the pretext of the municipality's debts. She said, “every municipality is in debt, so cutting the electricity of the township was an intentional application in Taşçılı city⁵¹ and four other Alevi townships had also experienced the same events”. Taşçılı is far from Yenice; however, Şengül knew that other Alevis, whom she had not met face to face, experienced similar problems in other parts of the country. Şengül defined herself as “democrat, a secularist, a progressivist, and a follower of Atatürk”. Şengül thus defined the various attributes of the Alevi identity.

8.3.2. *The Woman Representative of an NGO*

In the afternoon, I visited Meral in her NGO's office, as we had arranged. We sat in the NGO's garden, where some children were playing, and next to our table, a man and woman were reading newspapers. Tea arrived, and I detailed my research. Meral introduced herself as the administrator of the NGO and started to talk about herself and the NGO. The NGO aims to research, protect, and produce publications on Alevi culture and support children's education in the region by giving free additional lessons, such as in the Turkish language. Meral grew up in this township, and after working all around Turkey, she retired and moved back. She said, “we come back here to die”. What she meant was that the historical, spiritual, and mystical associations of Yenice make some come back to their homeland, showing how they feel bound to this township.

Meral said the young generation needs to be shown more attention and interest. Her first remarks were about the young Alevis, children, and the importance of education. She complained that although there are young Alevis in Yenice, no one is taking care of them. She emphasised the importance of knowledge and education, but it should be correct information, and she said that in Yenice, young Alevis should be educated with the right knowledge. She illustrated the current ignorance by saying that although Yenice is one of the most important sacred places for Alevis, there isn't a guide in the township to explain people the dervish lodge. People, even Alevis, do not understand Alevism as well as they should. According to Meral, if young Alevis do not show interest, their beliefs may degenerate, and this ignorance will damage the Alevi religious identity.

We started to talk about human rights, and Meral asserted that the highest authorities of the state violate their rights. According to her, human rights violations in Yenice had not started recently, but the Ottoman Empire was the breaking point for Alevi-Bektashi's. She illustrated this issue as “the fight between darkness and light”. Meral was trying to say that the light side is the Alevi-Bektashi lifestyle, and the dark side is the Sunni conservative lifestyle in the

⁵¹ A city 200 kilometres away from Yenice.

Ottoman period. Meral noted, “the problems are about lifestyle, not politics or beliefs”. She believes that there is an assimilation policy and even the Alevi-Bektashi philosophy, and that Yenice township itself is being affected.

Meral claimed the closure of the dervish lodges and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's lodge was not a result of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's policy. She stated:

Atatürk banned the dervish lodges, but this was to make the state free from religion. The Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli lodge was closed in the II. Mahmut, Ottoman period. Atatürk should not be blamed for this. There is even a statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's lodge. Why? Atatürk promised to establish the Republic. The Republic is suitable to the Alevi-Bektashi philosophy, and that is why the Alevis and Bektashis supported Atatürk.

Meral invited the man, Ahmet, and woman, Ayşe, who were reading newspapers in the garden of the NGO office. Ahmet is the representative of another NGO, founded to spread and protect Atatürk's ideology, and Ayşe is a teacher originally from the township, now living abroad. After they joined us, the issue of Alevi rituals in the region arose. They criticise many *cemevis* all around the area and Turkey. Ahmet showed some cell phone videos he recorded from a *cem* ceremony in a *cemevi*, showing women wearing headscarves (as the Sunnis do), which, he said, is not an Alevi tradition. He noted that some Alevis perform *cem* ceremonies following the Sunni belief traditions by covering their heads as Sunnis do, praying in Arabic, and separating males and females.

For Meral, the idea of mass-building *cemevis* that are not suitable for *cem* would create disintegration in Alevism; many small buildings constructed under the name of *cemevi* cause degeneration, assimilation, and exploitation of people's faiths. Meral believed that people could perform their *cem* ceremonies anywhere. She said, “in Yenice, there are 16–17 small *cemevis* that perform *cem* ceremony in different ways and only during the festival period”. From this perspective, for her, places of worship are indeed a human rights matter; however, the desire to construct multiple *cemevis* in all locations is like building mosques on every street in Turkey. They believe that Alevis, themselves, may also degenerate and change their own religious identity. It was clear from their words that institutionalisation and solidarity in Alevism are essential, and it was also interesting to hear different views about the need for more *cemevis*.

Ayşe continued by saying, “other parts of the country are not like Yenice, because assimilation attempts cannot succeed in the Yenice region”. This young woman believed that being in Yenice saved Alevis from being assimilated, in contrast to other regions of the country. According to her, any attempt in Yenice, a key location for Alevis, would cause a reaction from other Alevis around the country. This showed awareness of other Alevis in different parts of the country. Meral supported Ayşe, saying that the Turkish State authorities know that there will be a reaction if they attempt to assimilate in this region. Ayşe continued by saying, her brother, a successful graduate student from the faculty of law, aims to be a judge; however, he started at a great disadvantage as an Alevi from the Yenice township. Ayşe remembers how she used to be insulted and disrespected in her high school years due to being from Yenice township, illustrating the adverse relations between Alevis and the state and what it means to be discriminated against.

Ayşe also pointed out the importance of solidarity in Alevism and assumed that neglecting to teach Alevism to the younger generation would result in a lack of awareness, saying “Alevis are not fanatic people and have no institutions to send their children to teach the Alevi faith, so assimilation and negligence are increasing”. At this point, Ayşe criticised the Alevis themselves as one of the factors that negatively affect their identity.

Ayşe believes that Alevi are easily deceived. Meral agrees, saying the younger generation is interested in Alevism, but only when problems are reflected as a social matter. Meral believes that Alevi can be directed towards violence by provocations, and this will create further inequality. She said that “some Alevi are already ready to rise, react, and protest”. She warned the Alevi community not to adopt such a violent position.

According to Meral, compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are not a new issue but a historical problem. She still remembers that after her religious education teacher learned that she was from Yenice township, he called her, ironically, the “pearl of the school”, and the whole school turned their back on her. However, both Ayşe and Meral stated that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons could not indoctrinate their children with Sunnism in this township. Meral believes this is because of the possible reaction from the inhabitants, and so, according to them, teaching Sunnism had not succeeded in the school of Yenice.

Additionally, Ayşe believes children in the township are not appropriately educated, which is deliberate, and cited this as another example of human rights violations. As a result, Meral said she decided to start offering free Turkish grammar and language courses in Yenice. However, she remembers that only three students joined, and later these too withdrew. She said that families preferred to send their children to the Qur’an course at the mosque, for which financial incentives were given. She complained that “this is how *Diyanet* in Yenice township is functioning”. She asked the imam to tell these children that they could also attend the Turkish grammar and language courses in addition to the Qur’an course, but believes the students were never given this choice. She discussed this issue with Turkish State authorities but was not allowed to tell the children about the course. Meral said, as a result, only two children attended the Turkish grammar and language courses, and only one other followed them. She gave this as an example of how *Diyanet*, as a state institution, is causing difficulties in this region, and sometimes how the apathy of Alevi themselves is degenerating Alevism.

According to Ayşe, problems increase after people migrate to big cities, and Meral confirmed the high migration rate in Yenice township. Meral considered that migrating to big cities increases Alevi's awareness of their rights and freedom but, at the same time, weakens the younger generation's faith. Meral continued by talking about the media's influence and the Alevi identity, which have both negative and positive effects. For both women, the media may be provocative, causing polarisation and encouraging violence. Meral said that last year in the township, someone alleged on social media that one of the senior security officers in Yenice insulted Alevi, and people started to gather to protest him. However, later it was understood that this was just misinformation and a provocation. However, media and technology were considered to have positive impacts, and these women believe that this may allow Alevi to gain a better understanding of their faith and of human rights. So, technology and migration are affecting Alevi's identity in different ways. The Alevi identity can be affected by new technologies, and there is a definite potential for provocation. As a result, Alevi's sensitivity to being insulted persist.

Meral also referred to the EU, saying that “the EU and Alevi have affirmative relations”. She believes that the EU will continue to support their projects and their struggle to exercise their rights. She criticises the lack of support from the Turkish State, and welcomes EU support; however, she also questions the sincerity and objectivity of the EU. She said, “if the EU evaluates Alevism as a different religion, this can create arguments in Turkey, such as that Alevi have different ethnic roots”. She prefers to separate the religious and ethnic arguments because she believes that the latter will deepen polarisation. Meral believes “Alevi living in the EU are groups who are faithful and aware of their religious values, rights, and freedoms more than the ones here in Turkey”. Meral's observations, experiences, and research made her aware of Alevi living abroad.

Meral believes that although the state is carrying out some unlawful actions, Alevis should struggle through legal means. She hopes “the time will come and everyone will live equally”. She knows that Alevis won many court cases; however, she says the government is not implementing these court decisions and described their situation as an NGO as being besieged and helpless. Before our interview ended, Meral summarised her views as follows: “We ask for human rights, not Alevis', Sunnis', or others' rights”. Meral was generalising their matters as human rights problems and explicitly voicing that, in this township, people did not feel as if they were equal citizens of the Republic of Turkey.

8.4. Çifteli Village

After our talks with the elders and Meral in the township, I found the Çifteli village headman's, Cengiz's, telephone number from the internet. I told him that I heard about the road issue while I was interviewing elders in Yenice on the mayor's recommendation and requested a meeting. He told me that he would welcome me in the office in the morning.

Early in the morning, I drove for 10 minutes to Çifteli village. When I entered the village, I saw the asphalt road, which people were talking about in Yenice. I was a little surprised because, although this road was a new one, there weren't any inhabited houses nearby. Instead, there were only ruined houses. This first location of the village was abandoned. While I was driving into the village, the road suddenly became an unpaved track. After a few kilometres, I saw new houses and the headman's office. I learned that this village has three parts: the first is old and abandoned, and the other two are newly established. I saw Cengiz waiting for me in front of the door and he invited me to his office where five elders welcomed me. I had no idea about these elders. The headman told me that he asked some elderly villagers to be in the office for the interview, and they were there voluntarily. After I summarised my research, Mustafa, one of the elders, asked who I was. I introduced myself and my *ocak* family. Mustafa started to talk about the village, saying that the old abandoned part was the first settlement, and no one knows how old it was. However, he talked about a well-known and important Alevi religious dervish who named their village, so this place had existed for approximately 700 years. It was clear that these people have a strong feeling of belonging to the land.

According to Cengiz's records, there are only 266 people, all elderly, living in Çifteli, and their income is from farming. He said, “we are encouraging the young generation to migrate so they can have an adequate standard of living. The capacity of our land is limited, so if youth do not migrate, destitution can occur”. Cengiz has two children who have migrated to the city centre. He said, “I will do everything to make the third one also migrates from the village”. He does not believe that there is any future in this village. When I asked if this situation affected the Alevi rituals and traditions in the village, Mustafa said they could not continue their traditions any longer, and he remembered previously how his family used to perform *cem* ceremonies. So, it seems that rituals and *cem* ceremonies ended here many years ago, and migration is one of the factors.

An essential issue for these villagers was the degeneration of Alevism, exemplified by people coming to Yenice township for the festival, performing *cem* ceremonies, and taking advantage of believers by selling animals to believers for sacrificing and leaving the township until the next festival. In Çifteli, there is no *cemevi*. The old mosque was constructed many years ago. Cuma, one of the elders, said, “in the 1950s, the headman founded an association that managed to restore the mosque, and the state appointed an imam ... In our tradition, imams hold the funerals”. This was an interesting statement to hear from such an old Alevi in an ancient village. I asked if they would prefer to have a *dede* instead of an imam. A middle-aged villager, Savaş, said “no”. Whispering, Cengiz answered, “great! Let's come to this point. If we are

Alevis, why don't we want a *dede*?" Savaş explained that the reputation of *dedes* had declined, especially after the internal disputes in this region. Cuma said that there were *dedes* previously serving in the area; however, because they sought economic benefits and became corrupt, the *dede* institution lost its reputation.

The elders said that they have close and good relations with Sunnis in the region. Cuma said their problems originated from the Ottoman Empire with Ottoman sultan, Yavuz Sultan Selim; however, Cengiz once more recalled the high migration rate and said, "here in the village, there aren't any people following their faith". For Cengiz, their religiosity has been precluded because of economic difficulties. Cuma asserted that "Alevism means being secular, democratic, republican, and a follower of Atatürk's policies". Savaş recalled that this village was even a place that Atatürk visited, and he rested, and had lunch here. Cuma said they tried to restore the house that Atatürk used for his stay; however, they failed. Once more, Alevis in this village showed me that historical experiences are regarded as the roots of their problems, and I also saw that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is an important figure, and that the Alevi identity may have different definitions.

I asked their ideas about state involvement in religion. Cuma said this does not disturb them, but "exploitation under the guise of religion is unacceptable... I am not against Ramadan; however, I am against offering people food during the fast with our money". I asked about the situation in Muharrem⁵² and he replied that the state never helps or provides support. Meanwhile, Barış, a middle-aged villager, said, "state pressure on Alevis continues... the state does not employ Alevis". He claimed that his son was discriminated against during an interview for a post in a state bank and argued that discrimination against Alevis originates from the Ottoman Empire. Cengiz stated, "almost everyone has such experiences in the village". He said the bureaucracy in Turkey, the senior state authorities, and even some members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly prevented the local state agencies (such as the special provincial administrations) from supporting them. The road construction was given as an example of this.

When I asked about how they see themselves in Turkey, Cuma said, "we were always second-class citizens, never first-class citizens..." People in this village are interpreting their circumstances in terms of discrimination and second-class citizenship. Rıfat, one of the elders, said, "other villages are under pressure", showing that although he does not personally know these other Alevis, he is aware that there are Alevis in Turkey in the same position.

The elders said their grandchildren are attending the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, but that does not bother them because the culture in their houses takes precedent. However, Rıfat said they have concerns about the recently-introduced elective courses about Islam and the Prophet Muhammed. Cengiz considered that these additional elective lessons might have a strong influence over Alevis in big cities, like Ankara, where exempting children from these lessons would create problems in terms of polarisation in schools from the perspective of children.

Rıfat said that "we are not even in the new constitution", referring to the constitutional amendment in 2010, which did not recognise Alevis' places of worship. He noted that "*Diyanet* should give us our *cemevis*; recognise *cemevis* as places of worship.... The state recognises mosques, synagogues, and churches. Why not *cemevis*? Who am I? A human, created by God". So, the state policy of not recognising *cemevis* as places of worship, is another matter that makes these people feel discriminated against. Rıfat stated that they live in solidarity with the other villages, while Cuma said, "the state should not discriminate against us as Sunni or Alevi". For him, the matter is not being Alevi or Sunni, but being human. Cengiz's ended by saying, "I am talking on behalf of this village. We don't know our Alevism or Sunnism".

⁵² The month when Alevis fast to remember how Yazid I, the Caliph of the Umayyads, killed Hüseyin and his followers in the desert of Kerbala.

After this meeting and saying my thanks to everyone for the opportunity to be interviewed, I left to go back to my hometown, which is approximately 800 kilometres away from Çifteli village.

8.5. Conclusion

The concluding section for the Central Anatolia region should be read, taking into account Chapter Five regarding the concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law, as well as the research questions, themes, and observations.

8.5.1. Alevis Experience Human Rights Violations, but in Varying Degrees, and They Offer Different Solutions to Their Problems

In the Central Anatolia region, there are different experiences with human rights issues. Firstly, some Alevis, as in Yenice, state that they have been subjected to certain violations, discrimination, neglect, and attempts at assimilation related to their Alevi religious identity, especially by the state policy that does not legally recognise *cemevis* as places of worship and the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, which impose Sunnism. Another human rights issue highlighted is that the state neglects Alevis' economic interests by denying employment based on identity. Again, some Alevis, such as those in Çifteli, state that they do not receive social services in their settlements. Additionally, some in Sarı and Yenice also state that they were exposed to discrimination and neglect due to their political and lifestyle choices. On the other hand, others, particularly in Yenice, do not claim to feel the assimilation policies of the state as much as Alevis in other parts of the country. Despite all these differences, there are relatively high levels of awareness of human rights and their violations, discrimination, and being neglected by the state across the Central Anatolia region. The variations in perspectives on rights violations across the region are also reflected in the different solutions that are proposed. Some argue that the state should be separated from religious affairs; others, as in Çifteli, argue that the state can be involved in religious affairs if it does not abuse religion, use it for its own benefit, or discriminate based on religion or belief. The themes below explain such differences in the Central Anatolia region.

Historical Experiences

Alevis in the region refer to the past, especially the Ottoman period, when discussing their problems. Likewise, after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the years of civil unrest were also problematic due to political conflicts; however, in general, Alevis state that they no longer experience the intensely negative experiences of the past.

There is a relationship between the lands where their ancestors lived for centuries in the Central Anatolia region, and the feelings they have related to human rights issues. The places where their ancestors settled centuries ago inspire loyalty and increase their sense of belonging to these places. Moreover, in these lands, which have religious and historical importance, Alevis are the majority. In Yenice, assimilation policies of the state or human rights violations are felt less compared to other places, because Alevis are in the majority, Yenice is historically and spiritually important for Alevis, and the state will try to avoid strong reactions from Alevis across Turkey. In other words, Alevis state that assimilation policies and human rights violations are counterbalanced by the religious and historical importance of their locations. So, while Alevis' sense of belonging increases when the lands are historically and religiously important, this is considered to reduce the impact of such policies.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

In general, all Alevis state that they are exposed to violations of their rights due to their religious identities. However, the different perceptions of human rights violations are also a reflection of the different dimensions of Alevi identity. Alevis may also emphasise that the state follows discriminatory policies against Alevis because of their political identity, as in Sarı, where they support a socialist political party. Additionally, in Yenice, Alevis also see violations of their rights as related to the lifestyle dimension of identity, such as being modern and opposed to the conservative Sunni lifestyle. So, this shows the connection between how Alevis themselves perceive their identities and how they experience and evaluate human rights violations in different terms.

Obtaining information about human rights and freedoms, for example, by using technology also affects Alevis' understanding of human rights and violations. When Alevis gain knowledge about human rights in general, their awareness of human rights related to their specific problems also increases. Another issue is the activity of the Alevi NGOs in the region. These are making efforts to overcome the discrimination and rights violations, so the activities of NGOs in the region increase Alevis awareness of human rights and violations related to their religious identity. In this respect, Alevis and their NGOs influence how they see violations of human rights from different points of view.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

Sunni-Alevi relations are not often stated as negative in general. Positive relations are declared in some places, such as Çifteli. Additionally, in some locations, there is an increasing interaction between Alevis and Sunnis. Alevis, who interact with Sunnis, can better compare themselves and reveal their more unfavourable conditions in terms of human rights, especially in terms of being exposed to discrimination and being neglected and denied social services. So, this increased interaction means more opportunities for comparison with Sunnis in terms of human rights.

Alevis' Relations with the State

The negative historical experiences of the Ottoman period are no longer experienced in this region; however, the modern Republic of Turkey is seen as a period of opportunity to achieve freedom and rights. However, after its establishment, Alevis faced different problems, e.g., related to *camevis* and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In other words, the severe rights violations were replaced by discrimination and hidden and less visible violations through neglect. So, the relations of Alevis with the state vary in severity across the region, ranging from being neglected, facing discrimination, to being treated as second-class citizens. Moreover, the changing relations of Alevis with the state can also be observed in the solutions they propose. While some think that the state should avoid involvement in religious affairs, such as compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons and education as in Sarı, which is an opinion close to the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation. Others, like those in Çifteli, believe that state involvement in supporting religious activity is acceptable if it avoids discrimination. Such an idea is closer to the ideology of the Cem Foundation, which supports state involvement in religious affairs under certain conditions.

The relationship with the state differs in places with religious and historical significance for Alevis, as the theme of historical experiences discusses. However, these Alevis are also subject to discrimination and negligence by the state. From this perspective, there is no simple, straightforward relationship between the state and Alevis in this region. So, as the theme historical experiences explain, Alevis in these regions reveal that the structural characteristics of locations may also be effective in shaping relations with the state and perceptions of human rights violations.

The discrimination from the state because of their identity is not just about their religious life. Alevis emphasise that they are also discriminated against, especially in the business life. At this point, it is stated that the state tends not to recruit because of their Alevi identity. Some Alevis consider that they are discriminated against, neglected, and denied services due to their political views: socialist or leftist, as in Sarı; or due to their pro-modern anti-Sunni conservative lifestyle, as in Yenice. So, different dimensions of the Alevi identity are also related to relations with the state and bring different perspectives on human rights violations.

The attitude of the state, which is to discriminate against and neglect Alevis, has pushed Alevis to become more organised under Alevi NGOs to solve their problems. The problems between Alevis and the state are creating a demand for active Alevi NGOs, as the theme the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs details. So, Alevis' relations with the state intersect at this point with the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs. As a result of the increasing number of active NGOs, some Alevis, as in Yenice, are becoming more aware of their rights and freedoms.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

In the Central Anatolia region, Alevis describe migration to big cities from their remote locations, both as internal migration and as international migration to Europe. However, some migrate back to, or periodically visit, their homelands. Internal migration is encouraged in some places, as Çifteli, due to economic difficulties.

There is a link between different kinds of human rights violations and both internal and international migration. Internal and international migration drives Alevis to establish their own NGOs and *cemevis* when they visit or return to their homes, like in Yenice. Alevis who return to regions where they feel a strong sense of belonging may become involved in raising Alevi awareness about human rights and freedoms and provide services such as supporting children's education. So, internal, international, and return migration also relate to the theme of the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, considering the impact of Alevi NGOs on human rights issues.

As a result of internal migration, Alevis' interaction with the state increases. In city life, Alevis face more human rights violations. For example, Alevis began to observe that the state is reluctant to employ Alevis, so they face economic discrimination by the state, as in Yenice and Çifteli. Moreover, Alevi children are more affected by the assimilation policy in cities due to the state's compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In cities, exempting children from these lessons is believed to create polarisation in schools, as the section about Çifteli details. So, internal migration means greater awareness of human rights but also more problems. This shows that the theme Alevis' relations with the state also relates to internal migration and Alevis' awareness of human rights violations.

8.5.2. *Alevi Identity is No Longer Hidden but a Public Identity*

In the Central Anatolia region, in the light of the fieldwork data, the first conclusion related to the Alevi identity emerges as a more open and less hidden but public identity. So, the Alevi identity is a public one in the Central Anatolia region.

8.5.3. *The Religious Dimension in the Alevi Identity Is Not Being Practiced as Before; But Alevism as a Political Identity and Part of a Lifestyle Identity Keeps Its Vitality*

According to the field work, there is no single definition of Alevism in the Central Anatolia region. Alevism has religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions. In terms of religious identity, Alevism is interpreted as a part of Islam, as in Yenice. In the Central Anatolia region, there is

no doubt over whether Alevism is related to Islam; a generally accepted idea is that it is a part of Islam. As a political identity dimension, Alevism is associated with being leftist, or socialist, as in Sari. In more general terms, in the political dimension, Alevism is defined as democratic, defending the republic, secular, leftist, socialist, and following the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The dimension of Alevism as a lifestyle is perceived as being modern and enlightened. In other words, with the establishment of the Republic, Alevis became accepting of the modern, western, lifestyle rather than the conservative Sunni Islamic lifestyle of the Ottoman period, as in Yenice. However, Alevis in the region do not continue their religious rituals, one of the fundamentals of their religious identity, as they used to. On the other hand, there are vibrant political and lifestyle dimensions here.

The themes below are useful to explain these two observations about the changes in the Alevi identity.

Historical Experiences

From a historical perspective, the Alevi identity shifted to a much more public identity after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, because Alevis state that the oppression and violence they faced, especially during the Ottoman period, decreased to a certain level with the Republic. In this respect, Alevis in the region have the freedom to operate many *cemevis* and organise country-wide festivals in which they emphasise their Alevi religious identity as a public identity.

Alevis are aware that their problems are centuries old, and this resulted in suppressing the Alevi identity. For example, according to the mayor of Yenice, amongst others, the breaking points occurred, resulting in suppression and assimilation throughout history. Alevis who still remember this, as in Sari, believe that they consequently practise the requirements of their prayers less frequently in terms of religious rituals. The Republic means freedom and modern living in conformity with the lifestyle of Alevism. The support given to Atatürk, the constitutional principles such as secularism, since the establishment of modern Turkey meant the survival of the political dimension that comes from the history.

Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

Alevi NGOs are making the Alevi identity more public through activities such as trying to increase Alevis' rights awareness, operating *cemevis*, and organising festivals and *cem* ceremonies. Alevis' problems with the state, as the first observation discusses, mean that the number of Alevi NGOs and their activities increases, thus making the Alevi identity more public.

Again, it can be said that changes in the identities of Alevis are also related to Alevis themselves. The ignorance among Alevis, particularly about the religious dimension of Alevism, and young Alevis' loss of interest or their lack of knowledge are negatively affecting the religious identity, as in Yenice. The ritual of sacrificing animals, which is one of their religious rituals, especially during festivals, has become primarily a source of income, and religious identities have degenerated due to economic concerns. The excessive number of *cemevis* and the exploitation of *cem* ceremonies for entertainment also contribute to this problem. Thus, it is emphasised that there will be no unity or institutionalisation in the Alevi religious identity; as a result, it is therefore believed that the Alevi identity will be assimilated more easily, especially with state policies such as compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In other words, the issue of assimilation in the first observation, which is a human rights issue, together with Alevis ignorance, degeneration, and a lack of unity and institutionalisation is a major reason for the current state of religious identity.

Problems with *dedes* are another factor in the change in Alevi religious identity. *Dedes* remains ignorant and, some believe, corrupt, turning the *cem* ceremonies into commercial

events for material benefit, setting aside religious values as in Sarı and Çifteli. The corruption breeds mistrust of *dedes*. This situation causes Alevis to shift towards the Sunni belief system and traditions. Another problem is the absence of *dedes* in some locations, such as Sarı, which breaks the continuity of the religious rituals in the Alevi identity. Although there are problems with following the Alevi religious rituals, the Alevis themselves state the vitality of lifestyle and political dimension in their Alevi identity.

Another issue related to the Alevi identity in the Central Anatolia region is the idea of Alevis as a community. Although Alevis do not live together in a single location, they have shown awareness of their counterparts across the region and beyond. Alevis in Central Anatolia show that they can be a community in terms of being aware of each other's problems. Alevis in the Central Anatolia region emphasise that the problems they experienced in the Turkish Republic are the common problems of all Alevis. In this respect, the increased awareness of the problems, as the first observation shows, especially under the theme of Alevis' relations with the state, together with the activities of Alevi NGOs, strengthens Alevis' feeling of having to face their problems as a community.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

In the Central Anatolia region, in general, there was no negative relationship with Sunnis. It can be said that positive relations have developed with Sunnis in general, as in Çifteli and with the imam in Sarı. In this positive relationship, Alevis interact with Sunnis without feeling the need to hide their identities.

Relationships developed positively with Sunnis also affect the religious identity of Alevis. These positive relations, as in Çifteli, mean that some elements of the Sunni religious identity, such as the presence of mosques and the performance of prayers, are viewed positively. Such a situation can be interpreted as Alevis not practising their own religious identity but rather welcoming some Sunni religious rituals. It is also claimed that ignorance within Alevism, of their religious identity leads to the following Sunni religious rituals. So, decreasing knowledge about their Alevism facilitates assimilation. In other words, Alevis' ignorance about their religious identities, which is related to the theme of the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, as well as the increased interaction with Sunnis, can also lead to not practising their religious rituals.

Alevis' Relations with the State

The changing relationship of Alevis with the state from the Ottoman period to the Republic of Turkey also means that Alevis can live much more publicly without the need to hide their identities. The most obvious example of this is the NGOs and their *cemevis* and festivals, without the need to hide their identities. In other words, as state pressure decreases and relations with the state change, there is more opportunity to publicly live out their identities. So, in relation to the first observation related to human rights, with the shift from open human rights violations to much more hidden and invisible violations through neglect, the Alevi identity has become more public.

Another dimension of the changing relations of Alevis with the state is related to the decreasing influence of the state, i.e., assimilation policies are felt less in regions such as Yenice. The religious and historical importance of the regions affects relations with the state, as the historical experience theme details. This reveals how changes in the relation of Alevis with the state from the past to present affect the Alevi religious identity.

Cemevis are not officially supported, and there are no *cemevis* that have the same legal status as Sunni mosques do, where Alevis can maintain their religious identity. So, due to state policy, the *cemevis* required for the vitality of the Alevi religious identity cannot be active, and thus the continuation of the Alevi religious rituals cannot be ensured.

In the Central Anatolia region, compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons have a different effect on the Alevi identity because they encourage active opposition in Alevi's homes. Alevi children experience a dilemma between compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons at schools and their own religious beliefs at home. This situation raises concerns about the future of Alevi religious identity, as in Çifteli. In response to this state policy, Alevi have made efforts to transfer their lifestyle to their children. Thus, Alevism as a lifestyle continues to be vital in the region in connection with state policies and human rights, which the first observation details.

The changed relationship with the state directed Alevi to establish a strong attachment with the modern Republic of Turkey. In other words, the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the new state shaped and strengthened the political dimension in the Alevi identity, i.e., being leftist and having a strong attachment to the values of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his reforms, and constitutional values such as secularism.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

In the Central Anatolia region, the various types of migration, i.e., internal, international, return, and seasonal visits to homelands, each have a rather different effect on the Alevi identity. Alevi who migrated to Europe perform Alevi religious rituals more than the ones in Turkey. In these conditions, international migration enables Alevi to live their identities more publicly and freely in Europe. Furthermore, the economic conditions of Alevi are improved by internal and international migration. Alevi who have migrated support their settlements with their economic prosperity. For example, this support can be observed in the form of building or supporting a *cemevi* in their homelands, and such a situation contributes to displaying a more public identity through their places of worship.

Additionally, Alevi became more organised and established NGOs after internal and international migration and were thus able to support their homelands. These supports are generally provided as a result of return migration or through periodic visits to their homelands. As the second theme, the influence of Alevi themselves and Alevi NGOs, details, Alevi are becoming more public by establishing *cemevis*, organising festivals, etc. In this case, the second theme, the influence of Alevi themselves and Alevi NGOs, also relates to the various forms of migration.

Internal migration was believed to be effective in the Alevi religious identity. NGOs and *cemevis* are supported by those with economic well-being as a result of internal and international migration, and these NGOs and *cemevis* allow Alevi to reinforce their religious identity by organising *cem* ceremonies. So, from this perspective, the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs and the different types of migration are related to the vitality of religious identity. However, these efforts could not prevent Alevi from not practising their religious rituals in the Central Anatolia region because of the effects of other factors.

As the theme of Alevi's relations with the state in the first observation explains, the fact that Alevi don't get services from the state makes their lives both economically and in terms of infrastructure. This causes migration to big cities within the country. This internal migration is also believed to affect religious identity in their settlements. Because the population declines as a result of migration, it has been stated that the decreasing population and the continuation of Alevi rituals are related. It becomes difficult for Alevi in big cities to practise their religious rituals due to city life conditions, e.g., changed priorities and decreased interest in the religious identity dimension. Thus, there are clear connections among relations with the state, as the first observation details, internal migration, and the loss of vitality of religious identity. In summary, internal migration affects religious identity both in the cities and in the home settlements.

There is also a link between internal migration, Alevi's relations with the state, and the first observation related to human rights. For example, Alevi who migrate to big cities have no

alternative but to accept that their children attend compulsory religious and ethics lessons, even though their children might face the risk of not learning the Alevi religious rituals and identity but being assimilated.

After I finished my fieldwork in Central Anatolia, I went back to my home city. However, an important Alevi religious leader, Oğuz, who lives in Yenice, was not available for an interview during this fieldwork in 2011. As a result, in 2014, I arranged a meeting with him.

The next chapter, Chapter Nine, details the interview I did with Oğuz and the fieldwork done in 2014 in Ankara as a result of snowball sampling.

CHAPTER 9 Fieldwork in 2014: The Central Anatolia Region

9.1. Introduction

It was important to interview Oğuz because he is an opinion leader in Alevism and an important Alevi religious leader. I contacted one of my lawyer friends, who made an appointment with Oğuz and gave me his telephone number. Once more, I was on the road, this time to meet Oğuz in Yenice. Moreover, in this fieldwork, snowball sampling had directed me to visit the capital city of Turkey, Ankara.

9.2. Oğuz: An Important Alevi Religious Leader

After driving for 10 hours from my hometown, I arrived in Yenice township. I stayed for a night in a hotel and called Oğuz to remind him of our meeting the next morning. We met in his garden and started to talk. After I got his full permission to use this interview in my research, he spoke about the ongoing changes in Alevi rituals in the region, such as the funeral ceremonies, which most Alevis perform as if they were Sunnis. He believed that “some people only know that they are Alevis but do not follow the requirements and traditions of Alevism”, implying that Alevis themselves are responsible for the decline in the number of Alevis following their religious rituals. However, he considered that “Alevism is still alive in the northern part of Anatolia”. So, he showed me that he was aware of Alevis in other parts of the country, and I made the correct decision by visiting the Northern Anatolia region.

He pointed out that in this township, NGOs, or activists “cannot function as they should, and the reason is the high migration rate”. Oğuz considers migration from the township to cities as facilitating Alevi assimilation. He specified that young Alevis' religious backgrounds could weaken, and they may shift to Sunnism and attend Qur'an courses, etc., and “this is a great danger for our future”. Although Oğuz agrees that there is a relationship between migration and change in the Alevi religious identity, he also pointed out that migration and technological developments may have a positive effect. He said, “young Alevis do not attend *cem* ceremonies a lot; however, they know how to research”. Especially in cities, after migration, young Alevis are becoming more aware of their rights and freedoms. For Oğuz, access to knowledge increases awareness of human rights. He stated that while migration might promote Alevis' connection with the outside world, it “decreased the homogeneity and interdependence of the people in the Alevi community”. From a broader perspective, he believes that Alevis living in the EU will contribute and said, “in some European countries, Alevism is addressed scientifically and academically. Alevism is taught in schools. In the future, in Turkey, Alevis may face erosion; however, the movements in European countries may prevent this erosion”.

Oğuz referred to the fact that Alevis want to live in a state that follows secularism, which is a constitutional value written into the Turkish Constitution, and declared that “we are a community that defends secularism”. So, he regarded the Alevis as a community and expressed their commitment to the Republic of Turkey's constitutional principles. Oğuz rejects the label of minority, explaining that Alevis as a community existed in the foundations of both the Republic of Turkey and the Ottoman period. He said “the answer will be very different when you say who is the real owner (referring to the country) ... We are only numerically minor”. Oğuz was expressing that Alevis had lived in these lands for centuries and were the core element of the states founded in Anatolia.

Oğuz smiled when our conversation came to the state and religion. He believed that the state is interfering with people's beliefs, citing the example of the shrine of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, which is a museum run by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. However, he recommended that it continue as a museum but that the administration should be given to the local municipality. He said, “the Turkish State seized our holy place, our place of worship, the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli dervish lodge, and we are paying money to enter the shrine”. He describes the restoration of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's shrine and stated that:

Just a few years ago, some parts of the shrine were renovated. There is a small room in the dervish lodge called *çilehane* (place of seclusion, where a dervish goes for a period of seclusion and fasting), which is the shrine's core place. In this place, dervishes spiritually tried to reach God. The dervishes were sparing in eating and drinking, so they could concentrate on the idea of God. After the state's restoration, a sculpture was placed in a sitting position reading the Qur'an on a bookrest. What is that symbolic Qur'an reading doing there? As with churches and mosques, *cemevis* should be recognised as places of worship. For example, the Turkish zoning code reserve locations, free of charge, as places of worship. The expenses of places of worship, such as electricity and water, are met by *Diyanet*. However, *cemevis* are not subject to either of these benefits. But this is not our leading issue; we want separation of state and religion. We want a real secular state.

He used the example of Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli shrine restoration to show how Alevis face a new method of assimilation, which he calls “scientific assimilation”. Oğuz is trying to say that the state is attempting to assimilate Alevi religious beliefs with Sunni values in a structured and observable manner, and even Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli is being depicted as a person who pretends to follow Sunni teaching. So, he claims that, in some cases, the government neglects Alevis' religious demands and tries to assimilate them by various methods. Oğuz once again promotes secularism, the constitutional principle, as the solution, and shows commitment to constitutional values.

During our conversation, he said, “in our town, there are many *cemevis*; however, they are not in good condition. Some of these *cemevis* are only operating during the summer, during the festival, and others are only for animal sacrifice”. He is concerned that this creates divisions that may damage the Alevi identity.

The other problem that Oğuz emphasised was the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in Turkey. “Although knowledge about Alevism is introduced in the lessons, who teaches these lessons? The teachers that are graduates of religious vocational schools [*imam hatip*]”. He remarked that this education is meaningless when such teachers, who are educated according to Sunni Islam, are teaching Alevism to his grandson. He continued that “the only thing that we can do is go and talk with the schools. The only way for us is to raise objections to the lessons; however, none of our objections have met with any response”. Oğuz added, “when I meet with families, I advise them (especially the mothers) to learn the Alevi belief system and teach Alevism to their children”. He considered that the state policy of teaching religion is one of the most dangerous threats that can assimilate Alevis.

Oğuz believed their problems would be solved soon because there have been many ECtHR decisions. He considers that Alevis' issues will result in solutions, not only for Alevis but also for all other belief holders, and said that:

When young people are taken away from us, the chances of assimilating Alevism scientifically will be easier... We are in a period when we must change some things... We will not be able to experience our old Alevism. For example, in the

past, Alevi were not allowed to marry other believers; today, this is not applicable anymore.

Before we ended our interview, he asked if I had visited any *cemevis* in Ankara. I told him that I hadn't arranged such a visit, so he referred me to one of the biggest *cemevis* there. He called the head of the *cemevi*, Haydar, and asked if he would be available in the coming days. After Haydar answered affirmatively, I was given his telephone number and started on a new journey to Ankara. After Oğuz advised me to visit Ankara and the *cemevi*, I also arranged two other visits, one to a *dede* and another to a jurist family living in the city.

9.3. Ankara City and One of the Biggest *Cemevi* in the City

After driving for five hours, I reached my friend's house in Ankara, where I would stay for two days. The next morning, I went directly to the *cemevi* that Oğuz recommended. This was a large, four-story building. I went to the administration office and asked for Haydar; however, he was not there. While I was waiting, I decided to explore the building. I saw that the four-story building had a praying room, a conference hall, education rooms, a dining hall, a slaughterhouse, a place for funeral services, and administrative divisions. While I sat outside Haydar's office to wait for him, a man in his 50s introduced himself as one of the *dede*'s of this *cemevi*, Fehmi, and asked the purpose of my visit. After I introduced myself, we had a short conversation.

Fehmi was critical of Alevi, and was talking about the *cemevi*-mosque project that had not succeeded in Ankara, which Chapter One details. He said, “we violate our rights ourselves. How can a *cemevi* and mosque appear side by side while there is a conflict that started centuries ago?”. Fehmi identified himself as a supporter of reforms introduced after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. He said most expenses of mosques, such as electricity and water bills, are covered by the state; however, there are not only financial benefits but also legal ones. Even in cities' construction plans, some parcels of land are reserved for worship places, if it is for a mosque. He expressed how he feels discriminated against and neglected due to state policies and legal regulations in the Republic of Turkey. He also said his experiences showed that most Alevi, especially the younger generation, are losing their strong ties to Alevism in cities such as Ankara. He declared that people in small locations are more interested in Alevism. For Fehmi, the loss of interest in the younger generation and children is because of state pressure. Fehmi said, “the state has its mosques, opportunities, and imams. Alevi are being repressed, especially in villages, so Alevi families, especially children, and young members migrate to cities such as Ankara and lose their interest and awareness in Alevism”. For Fehmi, although the Alevi religious rituals are being practised in villages, he believes that obtaining equal citizenship in Turkey is the answer to all these problems.

We were about to end our conversation when Haydar arrived and invited me to his office. He started to talk about the *cemevi*, which has some financial problems, and struggles to support their religious activities. The *cemevi* expenses reach 10.000–12.000 Turkish Liras every month, including employees' salaries and rent expenses, and locals cover this without any support from the state. After the local municipality constructed the building, the NGO administering the *cemevi* rented the building. There are some municipal units in the building, so the municipality pays some expenses such as water and heating.

Haydar said that they try to follow Alevi religious rituals by holding *cem* ceremonies every Thursday night, which about 150 people attend. However, he pointed out how migration affected Alevi's religious identity and said:

This district is a migration-receiving region. Most of the people are from the working class. The biggest problem in this region, as in other big cities, is struggling to survive. Conditions in cities are causing this; for example, distances are far, people must wake up early, go to work, and return late.

Haydar said that in Ankara, there is a fear of being blacklisted. He explained that the short message service is used to announce their *cemevi* activities; however, many have withdrawn from or refrain from joining this group messaging service. He clarified that “people are worried about being blacklisted and choose to opt out of the service... Alevis, especially those in cities like Ankara, are worried about not being hired.” These people also fear that employers would not hire their children if they learned their Alevi identity.

Haydar stated that Alevis' problems had historical backgrounds and said, “the process started with the Ottoman period and continued with the law that closed the dervish lodges during the Republican period”. Although Alevis' problems are not new, he declared that in the Republic of Turkey:

As a state policy, imposition, differentiation, and negligence begin with our birth by writing people's religion into their identity cards ... The state should leave religion to the people themselves... The school system starts, and when you begin to grow up, social pressure begins; for example, people feel obliged to send their children to Qur'an courses.

He said that some people living in districts where Alevis are numerically a minority abstain from revealing their identity and even try to look like Sunnis. He declared that “the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are assimilationist policies of the Turkish State”; however, in cities like Ankara, people do not complain.

Haydar continued to talk about Alevis' problems, and detailed the difficulties they experienced in funeral ceremonies. “According to the Turkish legal regulations about the funeral services of army personnel, only mosques are accepted as places to perform funeral ceremonies”. He thinks this ignores other beliefs and religions and said imams are given some duties in city cemeteries. In the Turkish system, imams are appointed to sign official documents before burial can take place, a kind of permission to bury the dead in cemeteries. Haydar said that they do not approve of this practice, and when Alevi funerals arrive at the cemeteries from *cemevis*, sometimes imams refuse to sign such papers. He stated that they do not listen to imams and conduct their funerals, and he added that “we must conduct our funerals when imams are not in the cemetery. Even most of the time, municipalities do not want to allow funeral coach services if the funeral ceremony is going to be in a *cemevi*”. He declared such situations are experienced in big cities but not in smaller locations, such as villages. Haydar took the debate one step further and said that “in the future, maybe we will open Alevi cemeteries”. While we were talking, he received a phone call, asking to hold a funeral ceremony in the *cemevi*. Haydar said, “if you will take your funeral to a mosque and then bury the person, please do not have the ceremony in our *cemevi*”. Haydar was unhappy about the difficulties they experienced in funeral ceremonies, which made them feel discriminated against.

There is a mosque near the *cemevi*, so I was also curious about their interaction with the people there. He bluntly stated “we do not have any kind of communication”. He wanted to talk about another event that they experienced during the month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, where mostly Alevi believers pray and mourn for Caliph Hüseyin's martyrdom, and at the end, Alevis cook a dessert called Noah's pudding, and offer it to people around them. He said that the municipality distributes food every night during Ramadan fasting at the breaking of the Ramadan fast [*iftar*], so he also asked for the same service for Alevis

during the month of Muharram. However, the directors in the municipality answered negatively, but suggested the municipality could distribute Noah's pudding. Haydar smiled ironically when telling me about this event and said “we of course rejected such a meaningless offer”. Haydar clearly showed me that he was feeling neglected due to such practices.

The most challenging issue for the *cemevi* is not being recognised as a place of worship and not having any legal protection. He said “we are not recognised as a *cemevi*, we are just a cultural centre, that’s all”. While we were talking about the *cemevi* problem, a man from the district, entered the room. Haydar invited him to sit, and after a while he said “the Turkish zoning code reserve locations for places of worship, but you can only construct mosques, they won’t allow you to construct a *cemevis*”. Haydar recalled the court decisions, which decided *cemevis* should be recognised as places of worship, and said that the state is not implementing these court decisions, expressing their situation in terms of human rights discourses.

We started to talk about Alevis' human rights and freedoms in Ankara. Haydar said that:

Some young Alevis think socialist and revolutionist movements mean struggling for Alevism; however, such a way of thinking results in the deaths of young Alevis in mass protests. Young Alevis should know that Alevism rejects violence. The danger is mixing politics and Alevism while demanding rights and freedoms.

He hopes the younger generation will be more interested in Alevism; however, he also said that “young Alevis show interest in political debates. They are struggling with the state. Fighting with the state is not a solution because violence would come back to Alevis, like a boomerang”. For Haydar, young Alevis are being channelled into political debates by the social media, which leads to political polarization. He said such a position will give people the idea that “Alevis are communists, atheists, or lead to other movement discourses that may marginalise Alevis”. He also remarked that the Alevi philosophy is about respecting human rights and said that media could create polarisation, which increases young Alevis' awareness of human rights but in the wrong direction.

9.4. Dede Kazım in Ankara City

I was in Ankara on the strong recommendation of Oğuz, so I decided to continue my fieldwork there, and after completing my interview in the *cemevi*, I called the Cem Foundation's Ankara branch office. I introduced myself, detailed my research, and asked for an interview. The officers at the branch office told me that I should talk with Kazım, a well-known *dede* in Ankara. They gave me his telephone number, and I called him. I told him that I had received his telephone number from the Cem Foundation's Ankara branch office and would like to interview him, and we arranged an appointment for the next day.

Next morning, I reached the building that Kazım directed me to. After we met, I learned that one of the flats in this apartment was used as the office of the Cem Foundation's Ankara branch office. I already knew Kazım by name from his discussions on television channels and from books and articles about Alevism. In the office over tea, Kazım told me that he has been living in Ankara for 50 years and that his lineage goes back to Çorum and Malatya, cities in the Central Anatolia region. He started by stating that most people talking about Alevism, especially the institutional authorities and most of the *dedes* in Ankara, do not understand Alevism and its rituals. He believes that in Ankara, only three *cemevis* were functioning as they should. Kazım said Alevis themselves may abuse *cemevis*, as in Ankara, because *dedes* are not educated and knowledgeable enough. For Kazım, the young generation should be taught Alevi beliefs;

otherwise, they would lose them, and the religious identity of Alevis may change due to Alevis themselves. Kazım also evaluates Alevis problems as a historical process and said that:

When we look at the last 100 years and even go to the Committee of Union and Progress⁵³ period, the Alevi society has been rejected, denied, and even tried to be consciously dissolved within the nation-state's understanding. The revolutions in the Republican period were like adding insult to injury. I do look at Atatürk from a positive perspective. I call these added insults the side effects of medications that are taken for healing. We should have tried to eliminate these side effects, but they didn't. Monistic policies have also affected Alevis. Both Alevis and Sunnis have lost their identities. Alevis and Sunnis do not follow their rituals. In many places, including Ankara, Alevism is finished.

Therefore, Kazım said the Republic of Turkey was a healing process for Alevis; however, state policies negatively affected the Alevi identity. He said that when he asks people in cities like Ankara, “what is Alevism?”, they answer modernism, human rights, and equality. Although he acknowledges such features in Alevism, he asked, “if the same values are also found in a Sunni, will we call that Sunni an Alevi?”. These questions and explanations emphasised the importance of considering the Alevi identity in religious terms, and he rejects an Alevism that does not involve religious values, such as God. He said Alevism involves both religious and lifestyle perspectives. For Kazım, Alevism starts with Caliph Ali; it is a belief system and cannot be considered separately from Islam. He identifies Alevism with specific features but accepts that “Alevism involves religious, social, and cultural factors”, so the Alevi identity that Kazım defined involves many different features.

He summarised Alevis' problems as three-fold: places of worship; compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons; and the exclusion of Alevis from public life. Kazım believes the current situation is temporary, and everything will change within time; however, some policies negatively affect Alevis rights and freedom. He said that his grandchildren will have to attend the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons and accept that children may face some problems. Kazım points out that Alevis living in urban areas have weak religious ties. He said, “I wonder if my grandchildren will have any religion or belief except Alevism”. He points to these situations as being one of the main problems in Ankara and all around the country. Kazım was talking on behalf of other Alevis and generalising the situation in Turkey.

According to Kazım, one of the main problems in Ankara is misinformation; in other words, “the search for information and knowledge has been made easier with new instruments such as social media; however, misinformation has increased”. He believes the young Alevis must avoid such misinformation that may affect Alevism and their identity. Ankara's other problem is the decline of religiosity, and he said, “the solution is having places of worship, *cemevis*, that function properly but not under NGOs”. Kazım believes the *ocak* family system may save their religious identity and has proposed that every *ocak* family should have their *cemevis* and perform their religious rituals according to their culture. According to Kazım, thus, Alevism should be institutionalized, Alevis are not aware of their religious beliefs, and he acknowledged that, in Ankara, one of the reasons that the Alevi identity degenerated was Alevis themselves.

According to Kazım, Alevis must know their religious values to claim their rights, and he links this with the influence of the EU, stating “the first Alevi group who claimed human rights and freedoms were the ones in the EU”. In terms of human rights, the EU and the ECtHR have a significant role for Alevis; however, “none of the political parties (both of those that Alevis are supporting) have done anything for Alevis' rights and freedoms”. I understood that

⁵³ A political movement organised by the Young Turks.

international organizations, such as the EU, may be useful in supporting Alevis' human rights claims, and he showed awareness of Alevis living in Europe, whom he referenced as being part of the Alevi community.

We also discussed the relation between migration and Alevism. Kazım believes there is a connection between migration and degeneration in the Alevis' religious beliefs. He believes migration to cities has a negative impact on the Alevi identity and that the village elders are more knowledgeable. In cities like Ankara, Alevis are directed to politics and think Alevism is a political ideology, leading to the decline of religiosity. He agreed that in cities, Alevis have begun to claim their human rights and freedoms; however, from a political standpoint, he disapproves. He said, "after Alevis migrate to cities, disorder in Alevism starts". Thus, with migration, the Alevi religious identity is changing, and being directed towards politics.

Before we ended our interview, I asked about Turkey's human rights and freedoms. He doesn't believe that the current system protects human rights in Turkey, but he considered this a temporary process. He said, "the role of the state should be to facilitate Alevis' religious beliefs. Why the state intentionally not doing this? Because human rights are not granted in Turkey". Kazım accepts that Alevis have human rights problems, but he generalises this as a widespread problem in Turkey, not only affecting Alevis. Kazım considers the Alevis to be only numerically minorities but not legally minorities and declares that the Alevis demand equal citizenship.

9.5. An Alevi Jurist Father and Son

The same day I called Çelebi, a lawyer, and asked if he would meet in the afternoon. He invited me to his father's house. When I arrived, Çelebi was waiting for me. I already knew Çelebi from my professional life, and he introduced me to his father, Arif. After we had our tea, Arif introduced himself as a retired judge and a writer. He showed me his books about the Alevi culture, and he told me he had lived in Ankara for decades.

Arif said that the oral tradition in Alevism is important because it is the only way to pass on Alevi culture. He defined Alevism as "unlike Arab Islam... The heart of Islam, Prophet Muhammed, Caliph Ali, and the Qur'an". Arif evaluates Alevi identity as a belief system inside Islam. Çelebi added, "not only Islam; it is an Islamic belief system that also connects Turkish Shamanist and even Christian elements... also, Buddhism affected Alevis. For example, taking responsibility for your words, actions, and morals comes from Buddhism". These people defined the Alevi identity as a syncretic belief system and lifestyle, which showed me that they regard Alevism as influenced by other cultures and belief systems. Arif started to talk about their problems, explaining that:

After Turkmens settled in Anatolia, the breaking point (the killing of Alevis) began during the period of Sultan Yavuz Sultan in the Ottoman Empire... The second division was under Ottoman Sultan II. Mahmut, after he abolished the Bektashi dervish lodge and Janissary. Unfortunately, the third breaking point for Alevis was experienced during the Atatürk period with the law closing the dervish lodges. Our dervish lodges were closed; however, Sunnis saved themselves with *Diyanet*. What happened is that the Alevis stood back and, as a result, were assimilated.

Arif was critical of Law No. 677 of 1925 that regulates the closure and prohibition of all dervish lodges [*tekke*] and *zawiyas*; however, he thinks that if Atatürk had lived longer, he would have solved this matter. In this view, Alevis' problems have historical causes.

Arif continued by saying, “today, Alevis are facing assimilation...”, and Çelebi added that in cities and Alevi villages in Anatolia, assimilation may happen rapidly. He was aware that other Alevis living in Anatolia face similar issues. Arif said, “in Ankara, Alevis are disconnected from each other, and their belief system weakens. For example, in Anatolia, there are *cem* ceremonies that are different from each other”. While Arif was disturbed by these differences, Çelebi believes that this is “what keeps Alevism alive”. The father and the son had dissenting opinions about this issue. Arif felt that city life is negatively affecting Alevi traditions and rituals, but Çelebi believe that these practises cannot continue as they were centuries ago; in city life, no young Alevi would want to attend *cem* ceremonies that last for several hours.

Although they hold different views about migration and the Alevi identity, they agree about the *dedes*’ degeneration and ignorance. Çelebi considered that “after Alevis migrated to cities, they learned how to live their Alevism, becoming more organised and politicised in the face of the state’s policies and rights violations”. For Arif, migrating to cities has some positive influences on Alevis, and they use the human rights language; however, Alevis’ religiosity is weakening. Çelebi regrets that Alevis are directed into politics when NGOs get involved in political discussions and ideologies. He said, “whenever I tried to promote religiosity in Alevism, the NGOs allege that I am a reactionary”. Çelebi expressed his view that “we are making similar mistakes as Sunnis with politicising religion”. He rejects the idea of making the Alevi religious identity subservient to politics. The family members showed me that the Alevi religious identity in cities such as Ankara may be affected by politics, an explicit reference to changeability in the Alevi identity. The Alevi identity was not defined as a stable identity but was reshaped by different factors.

We continued to talk about human rights and Alevis in Turkey. Arif and Çelebi argue that the state is violating their human rights. Arif said the principle of secularism is not functioning in Turkey and Alevis ask for equal citizenship, but the state is not treating them as citizens “or, in other words, humans... although there are court decisions, *cemevis* are not recognised as places of worship, how can I trust such a state?”.

The family members added that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are also causing problems and are policies of assimilation. Çelebi said, “we are a *dede* family but I cannot even teach Alevism to my family”. Arif said these lessons are creating polarisation between Sunnis and Alevis. Çelebi has a son in secondary school who attends the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. When I asked if they had ever asked for an exemption, Çelebi said, “why should I put my son in a difficult position?”. So, none of the family members asked for an exemption, but they said they created “a self-defence system; whenever a potential assimilation practise targets our children, we try to teach about, and remind them of our Alevism”. Çelebi spoke against the religious lessons in schools, and he guides his child to read and learn about Alevism. Both described how they did not feel like equal citizens in Turkey and how they face human rights violations in daily life.

My next question was about state and religion. For both, the relationship between the state and religion should be defined by secularism. They assert that *Diyanet* should be closed; however, Arif said, “if you cannot close *Diyanet*, make it a scientific institution”. At this point, Çelebi said, “*Diyanet* is a discriminatory institution. It should be closed, and religion should be left to religious orders, but the state should have a control mechanism, not be the decision-maker.” Arif and Çelebi consider that *Diyanet* is a problem and reject the state's involvement in religion, showing adherence to secularism, a constitutional value of the Turkish Constitution. Their ideas reminded me of the statement promoted by the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation and the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation representatives because these representatives believe in a strict division between the state and religion.

We continued to talk about Alevism, and Arif said:

In the western part of Turkey, Alevism finished. Let me tell you why. *Dede's* are coming from far away; from cities like Malatya, *dede* institutions are not available. Like the folk poems, the Alevi oral traditions carried to the eastern part of the country are in the Ottoman language, so no one understood anything. The essence of Alevism is the oral tradition.

Arif believes Alevi traditions can be transferred orally, and this is the basis for the future of the Alevi identity. Çelebi stated:

The European countries are one step further than us. In Europe, Alevism keep Alevism alive. They are more enlightened... However, in European countries, it is wrong to impose Alevism as a separate religion. The perception of Alevism without Islam and Caliph Ali will harm us.

In this respect, I understand that Arif and Çelebi are aware that other Alevism live in Europe and other parts of Turkey, and they see the EU as an effective institution regarding Alevi identity.

9.6. Conclusion

The concluding section for the Central Anatolia region, 2014, should be read taking into account Chapter Five regarding the concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law, research questions, themes, and observations.

9.6.1. *Alevism Experiences Human Rights Violations, but in Varying Degrees, and They Offer Different Solutions to Their Problems*

In general terms, all Alevism state that their rights are violated by the state, that they are discriminated against, and that they are neglected; however, the 2014 fieldwork provides some different perspectives on the violations of rights. The state's failure to support *cemevis*, give them legal status as places of worship, or provide financial support, as well as compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, appear as the general problems. However, some other matters, such as facing assimilation through efforts to change the Alevism religious values, such as the restoration work that represents Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli reading the Qur'an like Sunnis, are also cited as another policy that aims to assimilate Alevism. Other topics are the results of city life and the state's exposure of Alevism to discrimination and ignorance, such as Alevism's experience of funerals in Ankara. The differences over human rights-related matters in this region are seen in the suggestions for solutions. Some claim the role of the state should be to facilitate Alevism's religious beliefs as the *dede* in Ankara, a position like that of the Cem Foundation. The Cem Foundation states that under certain conditions, the problems can be resolved with the support of the state. Others share the opinion of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation and the Alevi-Bektaş Federation, which proposes that the state should be completely separated from religious affairs, as stated by Oğuz.

These differences, as stated above, can be explained by the following five themes.

Historical Experiences

Alevism state that their problems, such as discrimination and violation of their rights, are not new, but come from the Ottoman period. Alevism who remember and are aware of historical experiences are also more aware of the problems with the state, which also come from the past.

As a result, those with an awareness of such historical experiences also have an awareness of human rights and violations, as the *dede* in Ankara illustrates.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

Alevis themselves and their NGOs are another factor that increases human rights awareness. Those who have knowledge and awareness about Alevism, especially about religious identity, generally consider that human rights problems are related to religious identity. So, when their knowledge of their Alevi identity increases, so does their awareness of human rights matters relate to religious life.

Alevi NGOs are institutions that contribute to solving Alevis' human rights problems in Ankara. The result of Alevi NGOs' efforts depends on how active they are. In other words, when Alevi NGOs are active, the awareness of Alevis on human rights and possible solutions increases. However, another issue that affects human rights awareness is ignorance. For example, the project involving mosques and *cemevis* side by side in Ankara is regarded as causing difficulties regarding the status of *cemevis*. However, some Alevis point out that, because of ignorance, some were willing to accept this project. So, ignorance is negatively affecting how Alevis will react to discrimination and assimilation attempts.

Alevis' Relations with Sunnis

Conflicts or negative relations with Sunnis are rarely discussed in this field study; however, it is also stated that in some locations, such as the *cemevi* in Ankara, interaction is limited. However, in general, Alevis interaction with Sunnis is neutral and increased when compared to the past.

The increased interaction between Sunnis and Alevis in terms of human rights may be evaluated from two different perspectives. More interaction with Sunnis in cities gives Alevis the opportunity to compare themselves with Sunnis, which can increase their awareness of human rights violations. For example, with increased interaction, Alevis can see that *cemevis* are not state-supported, unlike mosques. Secondly, however, increased interaction with Sunnis can cause Alevis to remain silent about such violations because of their concern over discrimination and social pressure from their fellow citizens, the Sunnis. So, when the Alevis interaction with Sunnis increases, there is a greater possibility of remaining silent about such violations.

Alevis' Relations with the State

Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, which replaced the oppression and severe rights violations of the Ottoman period, Alevis' relationship with the state has developed in the form of being more exposed to discrimination and being neglected. So, rather than such open and public violations, Alevis face discrimination, hidden and invisible violations through neglect. Alevis' relations with the state also concern legal regulations, which expose Alevis to discrimination and neglect, e.g., by recognising only mosques as places of worship. So, modern Turkish law failed to respond to Alevis' demands. The new modern Turkish Republic provided opportunities for Alevis to obtain their freedom and rights; however, not all problems have been resolved.

It is possible to observe that, despite a change in relations with the state, problems related to their religious life remain. Alevis emphasise that they see themselves as treated like second-class citizens, e.g., because of state policy related to *cemevis*, imposing Sunnism at schools, the denial of state services, not being employed, and state policies over Alevi funerals. Some Alevis, as in the case of the *cemevi* in Ankara, point out the assimilation attempts of the state due to their religious identity, even in remote villages. The policy of the state of constructing mosques in Alevi villages is interpreted as feeling the assimilation. In other words, according

to this opinion, Alevis feel more state involvement in religious affairs in smaller settlements, where mosques are used to assimilate them. It is believed that this relationship results in migration to big cities. However, Alevis in cities like Ankara also face human rights problems due to the conditions there. Thus, Alevis who migrated to cities to escape the assimilation attempt felt in smaller settlements face different problems in cities, such as funeral procedures. This problem with funeral ceremonies caused by state policy has forced Alevis to consider establishing their cemeteries, representing further separation from the rest of society due to such policies of the state. In other words, Alevis face human rights problems in their small settlements and in cities. So, in terms of the relationship between Alevis and the state, the situation seems to have no solution.

Alevis also feel that the state is trying to assimilate them by interfering with their religious values. In this issue, the meaning of assimilation has been attributed to the state policy of using scientific means, i.e., changing the nature of knowledge regarding Alevism through scientific assimilation. This is a new method of assimilation declared by Alevis. Secondly, Alevis' relations with the state and human rights violations are related to Alevis degree of trust in the state. Some Alevis, as the jurist father, consider that Alevis lose their faith in the state when court decisions about human rights are not implemented. In other words, Alevis do not trust that the state will solve their human rights problems.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

In the field, it was stressed that there is both internal migration to big cities in Turkey as well as international migration. This is stated as a factor that increases Alevis' awareness of human rights.

Access to information is an important factor in the link between internal migration and human rights awareness because Alevis, especially in urban conditions, have easier access to knowledge through technology. However, internal migration is considered by many to increase Alevis' difficulties in their relations with the state, such as those related to funeral services in Ankara. There is therefore a correspondence between the awareness of human rights gained through internal migration and the human rights violations exposed. So, internal migration and Alevis' relations with the state are also interrelated.

Another perspective on internal migration is this increase in their interaction with Sunnis and the consequent silence about the human rights violations. Alevis' interaction with Sunnis increases, so Alevis can more clearly observe the right violations. However, as a result of internal migration, such as in Ankara, Alevis tend not to voice these concerns due to the risk of becoming unemployed or the threat of facing discrimination, pressure from Sunnis, or social exclusion, which are inherent in urban life. Alevis' relations with Sunnis, which is the third theme, internal migration, and how Alevis experience human rights violations are related to each other.

International migration has increased Alevis' awareness of human rights because Alevis, who migrated to Europe, were the first to become enlightened about human rights and freedoms. For Alevis, Europe meant experiencing freedom and learning more about human rights, and this was also considered to affect awareness of rights and freedoms in Turkey. Although return migration is not a major topic in this field study, it is seen that with the increase in international migration, Alevis abroad have become more conscious of their rights and freedoms.

9.6.2. *Alevi Identity is No Longer Hidden but a Public Identity*

In this field study, Alevis have shown that they are now expressing their identity much more publicly, no longer keeping it hidden but making it a public one. So, Alevis in general do not feel the need to hide their identity but openly reveal it.

9.6.3. The Religious Dimension in the Alevi Identity Is Not Being Practiced as Before; But Alevism as a Political Identity and Part of a Lifestyle Identity Keeps Its Vitality

In this field study, the Alevi identity cannot be defined in a single dimension. The religious identity dimension of Alevism is interpreted as being within Islam; no Alevi interpreted it as being outside. However, it was also stressed that it developed through interaction with other belief systems, such as Shamanism. In the political dimension, although some young Alevis in Ankara are considered to declare their identities as socialists or revolutionists, in general, the dimension of political identity is explained both by their loyalty to the Republic of Turkey and to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and their adherence to constitutional principles such as secularism. Alevism as a lifestyle consists of different perspectives, such as being modern and taking responsibility for your words, actions, and morals. The Alevi lifestyle, like their religious identity, was also influenced by other belief systems, with some considering that its moral teachings originated from Buddhism. In short, the Alevi identity can be summarised in this field study as a dynamic one influenced by different factors; however, Alevis do not practise the religious dimension of the Alevi identity as before, but the political and lifestyle dimension of the identity keeps its vitality.

The themes below are useful to explain these two observations.

Historical Experiences

Since Alevis are no longer subjected to the negative experiences of the Ottoman period, they can reveal their identities in a more public way. With the decrease in negative experiences, state pressure, severe rights violations, and oppression, Alevis do not feel the need to hide their identities, and they live more publicly. For example, this may be seen in the *cemevi* in Ankara and their demands from state authorities.

This fieldwork shows that at some points, the Alevi identity is affected by historical experiences, and the Alevis long-term decline in practising their religious rituals is the result of centuries of policies of assimilation and pressure. For example, although the Republic of Turkey is welcomed by Alevis, some of its policies, especially the creation of a single identity in the name of the nation-state, affect the Alevis' ability to maintain their religious rituals that are a part of their religious identity, as the key dervish lodges were closed as a result of such policies. The political dimension of the Alevi identity and its vitality are also related to historical experiences; Alevis see the problems of the Ottoman period as ending with the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey. Alevi political identity as followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and secularism was born with the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey. In addition, the lifestyle dimension of the Alevi identity is explained as interacting with other cultures historically, i.e., the Alevis considering that their moral teachings originated from Buddhism.

The Influence of Alevis Themselves and Their NGOs

Alevis themselves and their NGOs have a key role in making the Alevi identity public. The activities of the *cemevi* in Ankara are carried out under the name of an Alevi NGO. Setting up a *cemevi* under the authority of NGOs represents the solution to the problem in the first observation related to human rights and the theme of Alevis' relations with the state. As a result, there is a clear relationship between the first observation related to human rights, and NGOs' role in publicising the Alevi identity. In addition, the fieldwork revealed that the more active the NGOs, the more public the Alevi identity became. Active Alevi NGOs, like the one in Ankara, are successful in claiming rights from the state and operating *cemevi* activities, which increases their visibility in society.

The disinterest and ignorance among Alevi are important factors in the Alevi identity. The problem with Alevi *dedes* is that without sufficient education, especially on the religious belief system, *they* are not able to maintain religious rituals. Oral tradition plays an important role in the religious dimension of Alevism, and therefore, the lack of *dedes* and their inability to transmit Alevi religious values are factors in the decline of Alevi, especially young ones, interest in their religious identity. So, this lack of knowledge about Alevi religious values and the increasing misinformation about Alevism create problems for Alevi in terms of their religious identity and the transmission of their oral traditions to the next generation.

Some Alevi, as *dede* in Ankara, think establishing NGO-supported *cemevis* harms the Alevi religious values because *cemevis* must be conducted on a religious basis. This leads some to conclude that the current *cemevi* system is insufficient to maintain the vitality of religious identity. In other words, the solution to state discrimination and negligence, as the first observation related to human rights in the theme of Alevi's relations with the state details, leads to a situation in which the religious dimension of the Alevi identity is not being practised as before.

The lack of institutionalisation in the Alevi identity is also another factor in the Alevi's religious identity. Alevi organise *cem* ceremonies in different ways, with no single approach to praying, especially in cities, and this is evaluated as hindering the continuity of religious rituals. So, city life and its conditions have considerable influence and cause concerns, particularly about the vitality of the Alevi religious rituals.

Alevi NGOs are also named as the reason for having a more vital political identity. Alevi and Alevi NGOs are believed to emphasise the political rather than the religious dimension of the Alevi identity, especially in city life. The connection between urban life and the political identity is that in cities, it is easier to become involved in political issues. The result is that political identity in Alevism keeps its vitality.

Another issue related to identity is the evaluation of Alevi as a community. Alevi have shown that despite their remoteness from each other regarding their human rights problems, as the first observation details, they are aware that, throughout the country, they experience similar issues such as violations of rights, discrimination, and being neglected by the state. The lack of state support led Alevi to establish NGOs, construct, and finance *cemevis* themselves. In addition, Alevi in Turkey learned about their rights and freedoms from their co-religionists abroad, revealing widespread data across national boundaries on issues related to rights and freedoms. Also, in their demands from the state, Alevi regard themselves as a community.

Alevi's Relations with Sunnis

No negative relationships with Sunnis are observed in this fieldwork. Alevi's relations with Sunnis may be sometimes neither positive nor negative, but in general it is an accepted result that interaction is growing and, as a result, affecting the Alevi identity.

In general, Alevi made no attempt to hide their Alevi identity in their relations with Sunnis. This is particularly evident in the large *cemevi* established in the middle of Ankara, located near a mosque.

This relationship is deepening; for example, marrying a Sunni is a development that seemed impossible in the past, and inevitably, Alevi religious identity is affected. Such an interaction is seen as bringing Alevi closer to Sunnism. As also mentioned above, the second theme, the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs, Alevi, who encounter Sunnism more often, do not practise their religious rituals because of their own ignorance. So, there is a connection between these themes and how the Alevi religious identity is affected. In addition, some Alevi follow Sunni religious practices, such as sending their children to Qur'an courses, to avoid discrimination by their Sunni fellow citizens, especially in urban life. So, the increasing Sunni interaction with urban life, together with the discrimination and social exclusion concerns as

the theme Alevi's relations with Sunnis in the first observation related to human rights details, has consequences for Alevi religious identity.

Alevi's Relations with the State

As the first observation discusses, the changed relationship with the state allows Alevi to express themselves more publicly. Alevi can construct their NGOs, *cemevis*, organise *cem* ceremonies, or demand their rights and services from the state more easily as a result of this changed relationship with the state. So, Alevi, who experienced oppression but remained hidden during the Ottoman period, are now publicly voicing their identity and rights violations against the state.

The negative experiences of the Alevi affected their relations with the state, as the theme historical experiences details, which have been problematic throughout history, i.e., when the places where they practised their religious identities, such as dervish lodges, were closed. So, as a result of this, historical experiences and relations with the state combine to create circumstances in which they cannot practise their religious rituals.

The assimilation policies of the state, especially those pursued with the aim of transforming Alevi religious values into Sunni traditions, which also the theme Alevi's relations with the state in the first observation details, is a new factor in Alevi's relations with the state. Alevi see this policy as an attempt to make Alevi religious practises assimilate into Sunni religious practises, so Alevi will not be able to follow their own religious practises anymore.

The relationship of Alevi with the state and the strength of the political identity dimension manifest themselves again in the form of loyalty to the Republic of Turkey, commitment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms, and the constitutional value of secularism. Alevi believe Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republic of Turkey he founded, as the theme historical experiences details, is the end of the Ottoman Empire's oppression. So, the historical experiences theme plays a role in shaping Alevi's relations with the state and their political identities. In other words, the end of the Ottoman period means changes in state relations with the Alevi via loyalty to the Republic of Turkey as a part of their political identities, which they still refer to.

The Role of (internal, international, and return) Migration

In the field study, common topics of discussion were internal migration to cities in Turkey and international migration to Europe, but there was not much explicit reference to return migration.

The migration of Alevi from smaller settlements, especially to big cities such as Ankara, causes more interaction with Sunnis and more publicity. So, there are interrelationships among migration, Alevi's relations with Sunnis, the increased interaction, and having a public Alevi identity.

From another perspective, internal and international migration influence the religious identity of Alevi. Due to internal migration, interactions with Sunnis often bring Alevi closer to Sunni religious identity. As the theme the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs details, Alevi may be ignorant about their religious identity, and as the theme Alevi's relations with Sunnis discusses, there can be an increase in relations with Sunnis that may assimilate Alevi. Thus, internal migration may cause Alevi to shift towards Sunnism.

Although in the Republic of Turkey, Alevi are subject to less pressure in their relationship with the state, the Turkish State makes its assimilation policies felt on their religious identity. According to some Alevi, as in the Ankara *cemevi*, the increasing assimilation attempts of the state in small Alevi settlements result in migration to big cities where Alevi religious rituals are not followed due to the conditions, e.g., employment concerns. So, in this respect, the theme Alevi's relations with the state and internal migration have a connection with the vitality of Alevi religious identity.

In addition, the living conditions in big cities hinder the enactment of Alevi religious practices, i.e., the application of the rules in city cemeteries, preventing Alevi from conducting funerals according to their own beliefs; moreover, Alevi who have migrated to big cities are threatened by denial of employment. This shows how increased interaction with Sunnis, as the theme Alevi's relations with Sunnis discusses, and how Alevi's relations with the state, as the third theme explains, relate to internal migration, and effect the vitality of the religious identity of Alevi.

Variations in the types of *cem* ceremonies are viewed negatively or positively according to the individual, and this situation is particularly associated with city life. From this point of view, such a change in religious rituals is related to internal migration and to the different ways Alevi adopted to city life conditions, for instance, by shortening the duration of *cem* ceremonies, which may be seen as a reason for not having a vital religious identity as in the past.

Alevi's political identity dimension continues to be vital in big cities. It appears that this is because, for Alevi, human rights are a political issue in urban life; moreover, Alevi NGOs tend to politicise Alevi's problems in cities. As a result, the political identity dimension continues in large cities such as Ankara. In this respect, the theme of influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs, under the first observation, which explains NGOs' role in Alevi's human rights, internal migration, and political identity dimension are all interconnected,

From the perspective of international migration, the Alevi identity is perceived in more academic terms in Europe, and this is considered to have a positive effect. In short, international migration creates the opportunity to develop a more scientific approach that will contribute to a better understanding of Alevi religious identity in Turkey as well. So, this also shows that Alevi in Europe will contribute to the strengthening of the religious practises of Alevi in Turkey.

The next chapter, Chapter Ten, is about the conclusion of this research.

CHAPTER 10 Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

In this research, the term Alevi is used as an umbrella term that also includes Bektashis. However, a common definition of Alevism is quite difficult. Alevism has been influenced by different beliefs, such as pre-Islamic beliefs like Shamanism and other identities like Sunnis. Alevi worship in their places of worship [*cemevi*], and during *cem* ceremonies where they perform a ritualistic dance [*semah*], use some verses from the Qur'an in Turkish. Alevi have a unique way of praying but do not perform *namaz*. In addition, there are many different traditions in Alevism, such as brotherhood in Alevism [*musahiplik*].

This concluding chapter starts with the aim, revisits the research questions and methodology of this study in section 10.2). The chapter continues with a general overview of the chapters that also involves the differences of the regions in the field studies in section 10.3). There are three general conclusions, as section 10.4 details. These conclusions also briefly discuss the theoretical concepts, namely, imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism; and the Alevi situation in the light of the field studies. It may be helpful to start with these conclusions.

The first conclusion is about Alevi's human rights experiences on the ground. Alevi experience human rights violations differently. They perceive their relations with the Republic of Turkey in terms of being treated as second-class citizens, and propose different solutions for their problems. This conclusion is understood considering the concepts of localising human rights law, discrimination, and second-class citizenship. In subsection 10.4.1, this conclusion answers the second research question: How do Alevi experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground? And the sub-questions: How does these human rights violations look like on the ground? How was it judged by the different legal authorities? What kind of violations are we talking about? How do Alevi react against such violations? Are Alevi all aware of their human rights and the violations? How do Alevi use the international human rights law language in their local situation? How do Alevi evaluate their citizenship in the Republic of Turkey despite these violations?

The second conclusion is that Alevi can be seen as an imagined community. Alevi have a fluid and hybrid identity, that constantly changes through interaction with political and economic contexts as well as with other Alevi abroad and other identities, the non-Alevi. This conclusion is explained with the concepts of imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity. In subsections 10.4.2 and 10.4.3, the conclusions answer the third research question: Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community? Also, the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?

The third and last conclusion is that despite facing human rights violations, discrimination, and being treated as second-class citizens, Alevi are nevertheless attached and loyal to the Republic of Turkey, which can be explained with constitutional patriotism. The third conclusion, in subsection 10.4.3, also answers the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades? This chapter ends with discussion of the current situations of some fieldwork locations and suggestions for further research in section 10.5.

10.2. The Aim, Research Questions, and Methodology

10.2.1. Aim

In this research, although the central axis remains human rights, after the data obtained in fieldwork, I also explore Alevism and Alevis in four subjects, namely, understanding Alevis as a community, the Alevi identity, Alevis' use of human rights law language in their local contexts, the nature of Alevis' relations to the Republic of Turkey, and their attachment to the Republic of Turkey.

10.2.2. Research Questions

The first question is: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims? In this direction, international legislation and Turkey's domestic law on human rights are studied. However, the results of the ethnographic research influence future research questions.

There are many works about Alevis, but none of them use an ethnographic approach to understand Alevis' human rights situations in the field. I started the ethnographic research to find out more about Alevis' human rights situations in the field. As a result of the ethnographic research data, the second research question is: How do Alevis experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground? This question also has some sub-questions: How do these human rights violations look like on the ground? How was it judged by the different legal authorities? What kind of violations are we talking about? How do Alevis react against such violations? Are Alevis all aware of their human rights and the violations? How do Alevis use the international human rights law language in their local situation? How do Alevis evaluate their citizenship in the Republic of Turkey despite these violations?

In the field, Alevis often use the term *we*, even though they live all around Turkey and other continents. As a result of the field research, the data led to a third research question: Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community?

Field studies also have data on the Alevi identity and their attachment to the Republic of Turkey. As a result of these data, the fourth research question is: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?

10.2.3. Methods

To answer these questions, I used doctrinal, theoretical, and empirical research methods.

Doctrinal research: For the first question: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims? I relied on doctrinal research. Alevis' human rights law problems in Turkey are related to the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. As a part of the doctrinal research method, this study examines international human rights law and Turkish national law, academic works, international and Turkish national legal texts, national and international court cases, EU reports and relevant documents, and academic works about Alevism and the Republic of Turkey.

Empirical research: As a result of the empirical data in the field studies, this research also explores how we can understand Alevis as a community and the Alevi identity, how Alevis use human rights law language in their local situations, and Alevis' relation to the Republic of Turkey and their attachment to the Republic of Turkey. I used a multi-site ethnographic research

method as an ethnographic research method. According to this method, in 2011, I visited the Western Anatolia region, the Northern Anatolia region, and the Central Anatolia region; and again in 2014, I visited the Central Anatolia region. Before making these visits, interviews were conducted with Alevi NGO's representatives, and I also attended a meeting and rally organised by Alevis in Turkey to get a general overview of local problems and conditions from the NGOs' perspective. After this stage, I subsequently conducted field studies that allowed observing, understanding, and collecting data on Alevis human rights conditions and other related subjects of this study. As subsection 10.2.2 revisits, the empirical research answers the second, third, and fourth research questions.

Theoretical analysis: To make sense of my research findings from the field, I developed a theoretical framework that has sociological, anthropological, and philosophical concepts. The concept of imagined communities explains how Alevis can be considered a community. The dynamic and changing Alevi identity is described in terms of a fluid identity and hybridisation of identity. The concept of localising human rights law is useful to understand how Alevis use international human rights law in their local contexts. The concept of discrimination explains Alevis' discrimination claims that they face both from the state and from fellow citizens. Citizenship and second-class citizenship are other concepts to understand Alevis' claims of being treated as second-class citizens in Turkey. Finally, understanding Alevis' attachment to the Republic of Turkey despite such problems requires the concept of constitutional patriotism.

This research is a descriptive thesis and addresses questions accordingly. There is, as far as I am aware, no prior similar research. The results of this research must be read as collected from only a section of the total Alevi population in Turkey, which may be counted in the millions; i.e., the sample is inevitably selective. Although I have studied various locations, the number of locations I visit is limited. I focused on the human rights problems that Alevis experience and Alevis as a religious phenomenon that sometimes follows particular people as a result of snowball sampling. So, with this particular focus, visiting every part of the country and researching those living in every region, including cities, townships, and villages, is impossible.

10.3. An Overview of the Chapters

10.3.1. Chapter One

After the introduction section, Chapter One briefly outlines Alevism and describes its complex definition. As a religious phenomenon, Alevis is characterised as the belief system of Turkish tribes that adopted the more esoteric [*batini*], spiritual versions of Islam. However, Alevis also has associations with ancient Turks' beliefs and cultures, such as Shamanism. The *sui generis* way of praying in Alevis, such as performing the *cem* ceremony, is a part of this section. So, Alevis as a religious phenomenon may be summarised as a syncretistic belief system. Chapter One also discusses Alevis, called *Kızılbaş*, in the Ottoman period. During the Ottoman period, different degrading terms, such as being immoral, were used to identify Alevis. Alevis in the Ottoman period have been tried, subjected to oppressions, and exiled. However, the Bektashi order⁵⁴ had positive relations with the Ottoman Empire until 1826, because of the connection between the military unit called the Janissaries in the Ottoman period.

Chapter One introduces a short history of the Republic of Turkey and the Alevis during the Republic of Turkey. The Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Sèvres after World War I, and Anatolia was occupied by the Allies, namely the United Kingdom, Greece, Armenia, France, and Italy. Thereupon, the Turkish War of Independence, also with the support of Alevis, started

⁵⁴ Sufi order, which was founded by Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli.

with the national forces established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the War of Independence under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the modern Turkish Republic was established. After the war, Turkey signed the Lausanne Peace Treaty with the Allies (the United Kingdom, Greece, Armenia, France, and Italy). After the Republic was declared in 1923, the new country, which accepted a western legal system, also adopted political, social, and economic reforms. The Turkish Grand National Assembly [*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* – TGNA] was founded, and the reforms continued with the proclamation of the Republic. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the first political party, the Republican People’s Party [*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP]. In the 1930s, Kemalism was introduced, namely, the principles of the Republic of Turkey, written in the Turkish Constitution: Republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism; these are also principles of CHP. In the new country, an identity was tried to be established under the name of Turkishness that aimed to create a common identity based on issues like territory, ethnicity, and religion. In the Republic of Turkey, after the multi-party period in 1946, several political revolutions, governments, government formation processes, coalition governments, and coups took place. After the 1980 military coup, political Islam became stronger. Since the 2002 elections, the Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP] is the ruling party. This chapter also discusses that in the Republic of Turkey, the government evaluates Alevism as a culture, not a religion. On the other hand, the European Union used the term Muslim minorities before, but after the reaction from the Alevis, abandoned it and started to use the term Muslim Alevi community.

Chapter One is also about Alevis’ violence and massacre in the Republic of Turkey. In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis have been exposed to some acts of violence. These can be listed as the 1937 and 1938 Dersim insurrections, 1938 Erzincan, 1966 Ortaca, 1968 Hekimhan, 1967 Elbistan, 1971 Hatay, and Kırıkhan events. In the late 1970s, Kahramanmaraş events and in the early 1980s Çorum events took place. In 1993, during the Sivas massacre, radical Islamists set fire to a hotel and killed Alevi intellectuals; in 1995, in Istanbul's Gazi district, a provocative attack targeted Alevis. The Sivas massacre is a turning point for Alevis and has caused increases in the number of Alevi non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although there are many different organizations, three Alevi NGOs, the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation, the Cem Foundation, and the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, are the major Alevi NGOs in Turkey. Alevis has also established NGOs in Europe. These associations both bring the problems of Alevis to the forefront, try to find solutions, and offer solutions. In the last ten years, Alevis have faced a different kind of violence and oppression in Turkey, with red X marks placed on the doors of Alevi houses in many parts of the country.

Chapter One also introduces the situation of Alevis in the Republic of Turkey. In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis are facing human rights violations. According to the decision of *Diyanet*, the state institution responsible for religious affairs, *cemevis* are not recognised as places of worship. This means that *cemevis* cannot receive support like Sunni mosques, which are supported both financially and legally by the state, and Alevis are exposed to discrimination.

Another issue for Alevis is the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in Turkey. These lessons ignore Alevis, expose them to discrimination, and cause Alevi children to receive Sunni religious education; according to Alevis, this situation means the assimilation of Alevi children. Alevis argues that these lessons violate the right to education, the right not to be discriminated against, and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Chapter One also discusses the research questions in the study, as subsection 10.2.2 also details, and ends with a conclusion.

10.3.2. Chapter Two

Chapter Two introduces the research. After the introduction, the second chapter discusses the multidisciplinary nature of this research. In this section, there is an explanation of the doctrinal research method, the ethnographic research method, and a grounded approach to some theoretical concepts in this thesis.

Chapter Two also discusses the multi-sited ethnographic research method used in this research. This chapter justifies the exclusion of Alevis who speak Kurdish, those in big cities and cosmopolitan areas like Istanbul, and those in Europe. The chapter also details methods of data collection, namely, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and embedded observations during the interviews with experts, gatekeepers, and key informants. This chapter also details data collection from legal and official documents.

The second chapter details the challenges of validity, reliability, objectivity, reflexivity, and data analysis in this research. In this study, I was able to gain trust by revealing my Alevi identity, through my family ties, and through access to reference people, such as gatekeepers. Studying human rights in Turkey is a sensitive issue, and it was important to be seen as objective and transparent as possible. In this research, external validity is achieved through rich description throughout the thesis. Internal validity is provided by the descriptive questions directed at participants. I also avoided responding to any questions put to me about my views about the research questions. Transparency and using the data directly from local settings provide reliability. Transparency, both for the readers and respondents, also ensured objectivity in the research. My Alevi background is another issue, underscoring the need for reflexivity in this research. I ensured this by taking a middle position, i.e., avoiding extremes of involvement or distance.

This chapter is also about data analysis. After analysing the data, by open coding, master codes, categories, themes, and outcomes are reached (see Appendix One).

The ethical concerns, which are another issue in Chapter Two, are dealt with by being transparent with the participants, getting their permission, and making sure that the identities and places in the fieldwork were replaced with pseudonyms and codes.

Chapter Two details the structure of the thesis and ends with a conclusion.

10.3.3. Chapter Three

Chapter Three details the theoretical framework and its operationalisation in the situation of the Alevis. After the introduction section, the third chapter starts with some central concepts from anthropology, sociology, and law. This research has started with no defined theory in mind. Following the empirical data, some theoretical concepts other than legal ones, such as imagined communities, fluid and hybrid identity, localising human rights, discrimination, citizenship, and constitutional patriotism, are used to explain this data in the field. The first concept is imagined communities, which explains how people can feel and experience being connected with each other without ever having met. The second concept is the fluid and hybrid identity. The fluid identity explains how identity is not fixed. In the hybrid identity concept, identity is studied as changing and may be recreated, reshaped, and reformulated. Under the identity concept, cultural identity also explains the change in identity with the influence of history and other cultures. Localising human rights details how international human rights are being used by people in their local situations. In this study, discrimination is understood from different perspectives, such as the right to equal treatment, the right to treatment as an equal, facing discrimination due to political opinions, employment discrimination, and interpersonal discrimination. Citizenship in this research focuses on second-class citizenship, which is not enjoying citizenship rights due to having the status of citizen. The last concept, constitutional patriotism, is a form of loyalty

referring to being attached to the values of a democratic constitution. Section 10.4 below details these concepts and their relation to Alevis.

Chapter Three also discusses the Alevi identity from a historical perspective and details the Alevi identity considering the cultural and religious hybridisation concept in Ottoman times. This chapter questions the relationship of Alevi identity with some belief systems from the past and details the interaction of Alevi identity with other belief systems, including Islam and ancient Turkish culture. The chapter also examines the situation of the Alevi identity at the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the constitutional patriotism of the Alevis during those years. The support of Alevis in the founding years of the Republic of Turkey goes back to the positive relations of Alevi-Bektashis with Ottoman intellectuals called Young Turks, who aimed to set up a system based on constitutional order and abolish the Ottoman caliphate. This chapter also details the marginalisation of Alevis and Alevi identity after 1923. The chapter also discusses the violence and massacres that Alevis experienced and how they are becoming more organised and embracing human rights after the massacres.

The third chapter is also about the application of the theoretical framework to the current situation of Alevis. Initially, the chapter examines how Alevis, as imagined communities, consider themselves a community without being physically connected to each other. It also covers how Alevis interact with other beliefs, cultures, and identities as a fluid and hybrid identity. This chapter discusses Alevis' religious, political, and lifestyle-oriented identities from three different perspectives. Alevis use human rights in their own situations. The translators' role in localising human rights has also been the subject of this chapter. This chapter exposes Alevis to discrimination and details that Alevis are discriminated against for different reasons, such as their beliefs, political affiliation, or interpersonal discrimination. This chapter also details that Alevis consider themselves second-class citizens because of such discriminatory practices, and before the conclusion section, it finally details the constitutional patriotism of Alevis from past to present, despite human rights violations.

10.3.4. Chapter Four

Chapter Four is about international human rights law and the domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis' human rights violation claims. After the introduction section, this chapter discusses Turkey's adoption of international human rights law. The chapter starts with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, the legal document that introduces the minority regime in the new Turkish State. The chapter explains that Turkey adopted the United Nations and the Council of Europe human rights legal documents, and with its candidature to the European Union, Turkey introduced some reforms. This chapter also examines Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, which is about the incorporation of international treaties related to human rights in Turkish law.

Chapter Four details the human rights and freedoms, namely the right to not be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education, in terms of both international human rights law and the law of the Republic of Turkey.

The right not to be discriminated against is formulated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In addition, the Human Rights Committee (HRC) also has relevant case law. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and Additional Protocol No. 12 of the ECHR have regulated the right not to face discrimination within the Council of Europe (CoE). The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has made decisions regarding this right, which the chapter details.

This chapter details the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which is protected by the UDHR, the ICCPR, and the case law of the HRC. In addition, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief is

another document that protects this right. The ECHR also formulates this freedom, and the ECtHR has many decisions regarding this freedom.

The right to education, which Chapter Four details, is formulated in the UDHR, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. HRC also has relevant case law. The right to education is also formulated in Additional Protocol No.1 of the ECHR, and there are ECtHR decisions related to the right. In addition, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has formulated the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools related to the right to education.

In terms of the law of the Republic of Turkey, the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education are formulated by the Turkish Constitution. Regarding the place of worship, which is a part of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the other related Turkish domestic regulations are the Turkish Criminal Code, Turkish Construction Code, Turkish Tax Code, Law No. 677, Law No. 633, Law No. 5784, and Regulation on Mosques' Repair, Cleaning, and Environmental Arrangements. Regarding the right to education, Turkish domestic law also has rules in the Turkish National Education Basic Law and Turkish Civil Code. Alevis also argue that secularism, which is regulated in the Turkish Constitution, is violated in Turkey by the state's policies.

Chapter Four continues with the legal actions that Alevis have taken based on international human rights related to the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. Discrimination allegations against Alevis are detailed in the *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey* case. In this case, Alevis allege that *Diyamet* does not provide service on equal footing and denies Alevis from benefiting from its service. The chapter also details the *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey* case. This case involves Alevis' human rights violation complaints about their *cemevi*. Alevis argues that *cemevis* are not recognised as places of worship and do not receive a share of the state budget. In this chapter, the other case, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, details Alevis' human rights violation complaints about compulsory religious education in Turkey. This chapter also details new topics and knowledge on Alevism in the new version of the religious culture and ethics textbooks after the *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey* case. The chapter continues with the *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey* case, which is again about compulsory religious education in Turkey. According to the ECtHR, in all these cases, the Republic of Turkey violates the human rights of Alevis. Chapter Four also has a short section about another case of Alevis in the ECtHR, *Sinan Işık v. Turkey*; however, the claims in this case do not concern the research questions of this study. Chapter Four continues with the situation in Turkey after 2016, secularism in Turkey, and ends with the conclusion.

10.3.5. Chapter Five

The next part of this research is the fieldwork. Chapter Five, gives background information about the next empirical chapters. The goal of this chapter is to help the reader make sense of the following empirical chapters by providing background information.

10.3.6. Chapter Six

Chapter Six discusses the fieldwork in the Western Anatolia region in 2011. This chapter starts with an introduction and continues with details of the fieldwork in the villages of Kazana, Yana, and Hakah.

Regarding the topics in this research, the highlighted results, and observations from this region, detailed in Chapter Six, can be described as follows: Alevi states that the roots of their current problems are in the past. Alevi do not have much to say about their religious identity in this region. These people continue to follow their pre-Islamic Turkish traditions. Alevi state different dimensions of Alevism, e.g., Alevism is a belief system and has political and lifestyle dimensions. In the Western Anatolia region, Alevi emphasise their relations with Sunnis as positive, and there are no discussions on discrimination between Sunnis and Alevi. In some locations of the Western Anatolia region, there aren't *cemevis*, or the single *cemevi* is not functioning because of some difficulties, such as economic reasons or the lack of a religious leader, a *dede*. Alevi in the Western Anatolia region have lower awareness of their religious identity, human rights violations and do not state much about the human rights violations related to their religious identity. The insufficiency of the activities of Alevi NGOs in the region affects this because Alevi NGOs are raising awareness about Alevi religious identity and human rights. They also show that internal migration and return migration are linked to achieving economic prosperity, and this has positive effects on their identity, such as having a more public identity and increasing awareness of human rights. However, they also show that internal migration has some negative effects on the continuation of the religious identity of Alevi, such as not being able to follow their religious rituals and constructing a mosque in their village.

10.3.7. Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven details the fieldwork in the Northern Anatolia region in 2011. This chapter starts with an introduction and continues with details of my visit to a famous Alevi minstrel's family in Fide township and describes the fieldwork in Fide township, Zirve city, Tepe township, a *cemevi* in Zirve city, Dereli city, and Çatı village.

Regarding the topics of this research, the key results, and observations from this region, detailed in Chapter Seven, can be listed as follows: In the Northern Anatolia region, Alevi emphasise that their problems come from the past, since the Ottoman Empire. In this field study, Alevi made a self-criticism. In other words, they mostly considered themselves one of the reasons why they could not keep their religious identity alive as before. In this field, the Alevi identity is defined in terms of religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions. They also detail Alevism as an identity that preserves the values of the modern Turkish Republic. Alevi's relations with Sunnis are more neutral; however, the negative relations and violence of the past are still fresh in their memories. In the Northern Anatolia region, Alevi face difficulties due to state bureaucracy and economic difficulties in regards to constructing and operating *cemevis*. Alevi also opposes state policies such as *Diyanet* and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. In addition, Alevi details that they are discriminated against by the state, including in business life. In the region, Alevi also face difficulties in their social lives because of their Alevi identity, e.g., feeling social pressure for not fasting during Ramadan. Alevi here do not hide their identities. Alevi NGOs in the Northern Anatolia region are actively working. In this respect, Alevi awareness of their religious identity and human rights is high in the region. In addition, Alevi emphasise that internal, international, and return migration affect the Alevi identity, such as by making Alevi not live their religious identity as vitally as increasing awareness of human rights and human rights violations. Alevi in the north are also aware of Alevi's situation living in Europe.

10.3.8. Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight details the fieldwork in the Central Anatolia region in 2011. This chapter starts with an introduction and continues with details of the fieldwork in Sarı township, Yenice township, and Çifteli village.

Regarding the topics of this research, the key results, and observations from this region, detailed in Chapter Eight, can be listed as follows: According to Alevi in this region, the problems that they experience have historical roots. In other words, the current problems are not new and come from the past, from the Ottoman Empire. Alevi here do not hide their identities as much as before. Different dimensions of Alevi identity, namely religious, political, and lifestyle, are emphasised. However, the religious dimension of the Alevi identity is not as vital as before. Alevi emphasise that they face discrimination because of their Alevi identity, such as employment discrimination and discrimination because of their political views. Alevi also state they do not receive social services from the state because of their Alevi identity. However, in this region, it is stated that the influence of the state on Alevi is decreasing. Their relations with the state are not as negative as in the past, but the problems of the Alevi on issues such as *cemevis* and facing discrimination continue. Alevi's relations with Sunnis are unproblematic in the region. Developing relations with Sunnis offers Alevi the opportunity to observe more human rights violations by comparing themselves with Sunnis. However, it also brings to light the fact that their religious identities are not as vital as they were in the past because some of them have adopted the Sunni belief system. Alevi NGOs are more active, and in this respect, this has a positive effect on raising awareness of human rights and helping Alevi live out their identities more publicly. So, in this region, Alevi have a high awareness of human rights and violations. They achieve this through some factors, such as using technology and the effects of internal, international, and return migration. In addition, internal, international, and return migration enables Alevi to live their identities more publicly; however, such migrations are also the reason why Alevi do not live their religious identity as vitally as before.

10.3.9. Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine details the last fieldwork in the Central Anatolia region in 2014. This chapter begins with an introduction before providing details of an interview conducted with Oğuz, an influential Alevi religious leader. The next sections cover my visit to a *cemevi* in Ankara for an interview with a *dede* and a father and son who are both jurists in Ankara. This fieldwork is considered to use snowball sampling because I was initially directed to Ankara by Oğuz.

Regarding the subjects of this research, the key results, and observations from this region, detailed in Chapter Nine, can be listed as follows: Alevi emphasises that the current problems facing Alevi are rooted in history. The historical experiences are also considered a reason why their religious beliefs are not as vital as before. They do not, however, feel the need to conceal their identity. These historical experiences, like the oppression of the Ottoman Empire that decreased for a certain level with the foundation of the new modern Republic of Turkey, also explain Alevi loyalty to the Republic of Turkey, commitment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms, and the constitutional values of the Republic of Turkey. Alevi in the region state the three dimensions of the Alevi identity, namely religious, political, and lifestyle. In this chapter, Alevi mostly state that the Alevi identity dimensions are shaped by interaction with different belief systems and cultures. In this fieldwork, Alevi are more knowledgeable about the religious dimension of the Alevi identity. Having active Alevi NGOs in the region is raising their awareness of religious identity and human rights. Although Alevi have knowledge about their religious identity, they self-criticise and declare that their religious identity is not as vital as before because of themselves. Alevi do not talk much about their relations with Sunnis; however, there are no negative relations between Alevi and Sunnis. This situation increases

awareness of their human rights circumstances because Alevi compare themselves with Sunnis. However, the increasing relations also influence the Alevi identity, and according to Alevi in the region, this relation may cause easier assimilation of Alevi. The problems within the Alevi, their degeneration and ignorance, also facilitate this assimilation. In this region, Alevi declare their relations with the state as changing compared to the past because the Republic of Turkey has provided opportunities for Alevi to obtain their freedom and rights. However, Alevi also accept being exposed to discrimination, problems related to their places of worship, and compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. As a result of the changing relationship with the state, Alevi do not hide their identities, and they are loyal to the Republic of Turkey. In this region, the state's attempt to systematically assimilate Alevi religious principles was first brought to light. This assimilation attempt aimed to assimilate Alevi religious practises, bringing them in line with Sunni traditions. Alevi in this region have increased their awareness of human rights, also through internal and international migration. Alevi also do not hide their identities after migrating, so the migration of Alevi results in having a more public identity. However, as a result of internal migration, Alevi feel the effects of assimilation policies more. On the other hand, the Alevi identity is being studied from an academic perspective as a result of international migration. So, there are different effects of migration in the region.

10.3.10. The Thematic Comparisons Between the Field Studies

There are some similarities and some differences between the different field studies. This section provides a thematic comparison.

Alevi in every region that I visited stated that their current problems stem from history with the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish state, and Alevi-Sunni relations.

Alevi in the Northern and Central Anatolia regions are more open to discussing their religious identity and are more aware of religious values than those in the Western Anatolia region. In these two regions, there are many dervish lodges and tombs, which are historically and religiously important for Alevi, so this may provide the reason.

The pro-activeness of Alevi NGOs varies by region. Unlike the Western Anatolia region, the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region have active, functioning NGOs. The NGOs in these two regions make considerable efforts to conduct *cem* ceremonies, construct and operate *cemevis*, raise Alevi understanding of human rights, and preserve the vitality of the Alevi religious identity. These more active Alevi NGOs in the northern and central parts of Anatolia raise Alevi's awareness of their religious values, which are an important part of their religious identity. Because of this, Alevi here can point out that their human rights are often violated with respect to religion.

In general, Alevi's relationships with Sunnis are harmonious. In the northern and central parts of Anatolia, Alevi cite more interpersonal discrimination. In the Western Anatolia region, where there is limited knowledge of their own religious identity, Alevi tend not to compare their human rights and discriminatory situations with those of Sunnis. Alevi in the Western Anatolia region are less aware of discrimination and violations of their rights than those in the other two regions. Greater awareness makes it more likely that Alevi in the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region claim that they are exposed to religion-based human rights violations.

In contrast to other regions, human rights issues in the Central Anatolia region are also related to the lifestyle dimension of their identity. This difference can be explained by the religious and historical importance of the area. Because events that happened during the Ottoman Empire affected the identity and human rights violations of the Alevi, the origin of

human rights issues is the confrontation between the traditional Sunni lifestyle, which developed during the Ottoman era, and the more modern lifestyles of the Alevis in the region.

The historical and theological significance of the Central Anatolia region also influences the relationship between Alevis and the state. Alevis argue that the state is unable to assimilate Alevis in certain parts of the Central Anatolia region to the same extent as in other regions. Due to the religious significance of the region, the Turkish State is aware that any such attempts would be met with a united response from Alevis.

The political dimension of Alevi identity and its connection to human rights violations are most apparent in the city of Ankara and locations where opposition parties hold power. In the northern and central parts of Anatolia, it is difficult for Alevis to obtain state-provided social services, such as interment in urban cemeteries. Alevis in the Central Anatolia region claim discrimination in business and in access to public services.

Alevis assert that they are subject to similar violations of human rights throughout Turkey. Therefore, Alevis in different regions are aware of each other's human rights circumstances despite never having met. In contrast to the Western Anatolia region, Alevis in the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region have a greater sense of solidarity in the face of human rights violations. This is because Alevis in these regions retain awareness of their religious identity, despite a certain decline.

The discussions of internal, international, and return migration across all regions reveal that most of the Alevi migrants in the Northern Anatolia region and the Central Anatolia region financially support their *cemevis* and Alevi NGOs. In the region of Western Anatolia, however, an internal migrant Alevi helped to build not a *cemevi* but a mosque. This could be because Alevis in the Western Anatolia region know less about their own religious beliefs than their counterparts in the Northern and Central Anatolia regions.

Analysis of these data leads to some general conclusions, which are explained in section 10.4 along with the theoretical framework.

10.4. The General Conclusions of the Thesis

This section focuses on the general conclusions of this research. Before moving on to the general conclusions of this research, it should be noted that Chapter Four answers the first research question: What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevis human rights violation claims? This question is the initial research question at the beginning of this study, and Chapter Four answers this research question in detail on its own.

Beyond that, the first general conclusion is: Alevis experience human rights violations differently. They perceive their relations with the Republic of Turkey in terms of being treated as second-class citizens, and they propose different solutions for their problems. The second general conclusion is: Alevis can be seen as an imagined community. Alevis have a fluid and hybrid identity, that constantly changes through interaction with political and economic contexts as well as with other Alevis abroad and other identities, the non-Alevis. The third general conclusion is: Despite facing human rights violations, discrimination, and being treated as second-class citizens, Alevis are nevertheless attached and loyal to the Republic of Turkey, which can be explained with constitutional patriotism.

10.4.1. Alevis Experience Human Rights Violations Differently. They Perceive Their Relations with the Republic of Turkey in Terms of Being Treated as Second-Class Citizen, and They Propose Different Solutions for Their Problems

Experiences of Human Rights Violations

This conclusion answers the second research question: How do Alevis experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground? And the sub-questions: How does these human rights violations look like on the ground? How was it judged by the different legal authorities? What kind of violations are we talking about? How do Alevis react against such violations? Are Alevis all aware of their human rights and the violations? How do Alevis use the international human rights law language in their local situation? How do Alevis evaluate their citizenship in the Republic of Turkey despite these violations? In addition, this conclusion discusses the relevance of localising human rights concept, discrimination, and second-class citizenship.

In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis face human rights violations, discrimination, assimilation and are neglected. The field studies, provide that many Alevis are aware of this situation, and can express their grievances using the language of human rights law. Alevis in Turkey use all the administrative and judicial complaint procedures available under the Turkish national law against human rights violations. Furthermore, after having exhausted all domestic remedies, Alevis apply to the ECtHR. In the field, Alevis use the language of international human rights in their local situations and in doing this they adapt human rights into their local problems. Alevis use human rights law terminology to describe their human rights problems, namely the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to education and even the right to work.

Localising human rights concept explains how people use the global human rights law language. In this process, transplantation requires appropriation and translation. Appropriation is about taking the human rights idea and putting them in another setting. Moreover, translation is the process of drawing the global idea on locals, adapting the program to local situations, and redefinition of the target group. This process of vernacularization has layers and translators. The layers may have different meanings, but the translators are localising the human rights language.

In line with the localising human rights law concept Alevis use certain institutions as translators, and have benefited from the idea of appropriation, which refers to adapting the human rights ideas into a new setting with a variety of circumstances and contexts. The empirical research gives opportunity to understand the role of translators, Alevi NGOs and activists, entities which allow Alevis to use the international human rights law. These translators increase Alevis' awareness of human rights and freedoms, and facilitate adaptation of international human rights law in explaining their circumstances. There are also different layers in this process, understanding the problems from various dimensions, like historical, political, or religious conflicts. Moreover, some Alevis discuss that the human right problems are not only for Alevis but is a general problem for everyone living in Turkey. However, Alevi NGOs makes Alevis understand their problems from human rights perspective.

Alevis localise the human rights law as a result of facing *Diyanet's* rejection policy towards their places of worship, *cemevis*. Alevis state the Sunni impositions with the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons as another human rights violation. Alevis emphasise constructing mosques to Alevi settlements, facing discrimination in business, and receiving social service from the state, in general not being granted opportunities as Sunnis as the other human rights problems. These claims come to the fore with being discriminated. So, in this research discrimination is interpreted as a concept that explains the distinction without justified grounds. Discrimination can occur in the form of not being able to share any burden or benefit

in the same way as others, although these people receive the same respect and treatment as others. It can also be in the form of not recognizing the right to equal distribution of opportunities, resources, or burdens. However, discrimination in this study cannot only be interpreted as discrimination by the state, but also discrimination by other citizens (interpersonal discrimination), in other words, facing unfair treatment due to belonging to a group by their fellow-citizens. Although Alevis' relations with Sunnis have developed positively some Alevis feel discrimination in social life related to their Alevi identity, and this discrimination is often accompanied by concerns about being unemployed, social exclusion or being backlisted. People may also face discrimination because of their political opinions. Alevis also state that they are discriminated against by the state in terms of receiving social services due to political affiliation. Additionally, people face discrimination also in their business life, namely, employment discrimination, that may be directed both from the state and private sector employers. In a very broad sense, employers may discriminate against people because of belonging to a different religious group, and this kind of discrimination may also happen in recruitment and getting promotion. Alevis also state that they expose to employment discrimination both by the state and the private sector.

Variations in Perceptions of Discrimination and Human Rights Violations

Not all Alevis feel the human rights violations in the same way. While some Alevi have less awareness about human rights and violations, some others have a higher awareness of human rights and violations. Moreover, the rights and subjects of rights violations may also differ from each other. The following paragraphs examine the factors affecting these changes under five factors.

The first factor is the historical experience. Alevis feel human rights violations differently due to their historical experiences. Alevis regard the problems they experience as rooted in the past and the Ottoman Empire. The negative historical experiences, such as violence and oppression, cause them to settle in more isolated places with more difficult living conditions, which means that they primarily focus on survival. Knowing more about the historical experiences raises Alevis awareness of human rights problems in Turkey, which come from the past. In other words, the higher the awareness of the problems that come from the past, the higher the awareness of human rights and violations. Additionally, the negative experiences in the Republic of Turkey, such as the more recent Sivas massacre in 1993, have also caused Alevis to become more organised through the founding of NGOs.

The second factor that accounts for feeling human rights violations differently is the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs. At this point, the decrease in ignorance among Alevis, especially their easy access to information through technology and media, reduces Alevis' ignorance about their rights and freedoms. There is also a connection between the awareness of Alevis' religious identity and the realisation that they are subject to violations of their rights because of their religious identity. In this respect, Alevis, who have an awareness of their religious identity and try to keep it vital, are more aware that they are exposed to violations of their rights due to their religious identity. Increasing activities of Alevi NGOs, as a result of historical events, also promote Alevis' human rights awareness because active Alevi NGOs are affecting Alevis human rights awareness positively, in other words, making them aware of human rights and violations. Alevis may also talk about violations of rights at varying degrees on different issues due to the different dimensions of the Alevi identity, namely political and lifestyle. In other words, Alevis may feel the human rights violations from different perspectives about their identity.

A third factor of this research that makes Alevis' experience human rights violations differently is Alevis' relations with Sunnis, whether positive, distant, or neutral. The relationship between Alevis and Sunnis is not as distant as it used to be. These two communities,

which used to be more distant from each other, now live together more closely, interacting more in all areas of life, such as business or social life. When interaction with Sunnis increases, Alevi have more opportunity to compare their respective human rights conditions. The increased interaction shows Alevi that they are exposed to discrimination and neglected in some matters, such as not gaining support for their places of worship, as a result of comparing their own situation with that of Sunnis. In this case, Alevi are more conscious of human rights and freedoms as a result of being able to compare their conditions with those of Sunnis. However, the increase in interaction may also lead Alevi to be silent about human rights violations. Alevi, who do not follow or practise their own religious rituals, can be more open to following the Sunni religious rituals, and they do not discuss any human rights problems related to their Alevi religious identity. Additionally, the interaction with Sunnis can cause Alevi to remain silent about violations of their rights because of the concern of facing discrimination from fellow citizens, the Sunnis, namely interpersonal discrimination, or social pressure that Alevi will face from Sunnis, especially in cities. The spread of political Islam among Sunnis also affects relations between Alevi and Sunnis. With the strengthening of political Islam, Sunnis who adopt a more conservative lifestyle may prevent Alevi from living their lifestyles freely and may make Alevi feel more pressured.

A fourth explanation for the differences among Alevi on human rights issues can be seen in Alevi' relations with the state. Severe rights violations, violence, and oppression experienced previously, especially during the Ottoman period, have now taken the form of facing discrimination, more hidden and invisible violations through neglect in the Republic of Turkey. Moreover, in this changing relationship, the Turkish State's agenda, e.g., the Alevi Initiative process and changes in the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons textbooks that added Alevism, affirm that the Turkish State is effective in making Alevi observe that they have human rights and freedoms problems. The Turkish State also accepts that Alevi have some human rights problems. Although the Turkish State declares that Alevi have problems with the Alevi Initiative, this does not mean that the state has made changes to its policies. Another dimension of Alevi' relations with the state is the non-implementation of court decisions. There are national court and ECtHR decisions stating that Alevi face violations of rights by the state; however, the Turkish State neglects these decisions and does not solve Alevi problems. As a result, Alevi are losing their belief that the state may solve their problems. In other words, the state continues to violate the human rights of Alevi in its policies, and this reinforces the feeling among Alevi that Alevi should emphasise their claims in terms of human rights violations. Facing such problems with the Turkish State made Alevi more organized. In other words, reduced pressure and severe violations of rights mean Alevi may establish their NGOs.

The fifth factor is the role of (internal, international, and return) migration. The field studies also reveal that ongoing processes of internal, international, and return migration in which Alevi participate affect Alevi' awareness of human rights and their experience of varying degrees of human rights violations. It is possible to consider the migration of Alevi from different perspectives. Alevi migrates and settles in isolated places, especially during the Ottoman period. However, in the Republic of Turkey, with urbanisation, Alevi have migrated to cities or townships from their villages and isolated settlements. Sometimes they have moved their isolated villages to lands that are closer to city centres, or, in other words, to new settlements where they would not live isolated. In addition, Alevi have also migrated to Europe, especially after the 1961 bilateral Turkish-West German labour recruitment agreement. Alevi are also migrating back to their old settlements, namely return migration, or continuing to visit the settlements they have migrated to with seasonal visits. As a result of all these migrations, Alevi' interaction with other cultures increases. Alevi who have migrated abroad learn more about their human rights and freedoms, for example, by living in an environment of

rights and freedom in Europe and transferring this to Alevis in Turkey with return migration or periodic visits to their homelands. However, the field studies have revealed that internal migration also has other consequences for Alevis regarding their human rights. City life conditions have brought some other human rights problems to Alevis, e.g., problems in city cemeteries. In addition, as a result of the changing priorities of city life and the increase in interaction with Sunnis as a result of internal migration, Alevis may have to remain silent about the right violations in order to avoid facing problems. Alevis are getting stronger economically with internal and international migration, so they can establish and support more NGOs, which raises awareness of Alevis commitment to human rights as a result of improved incomes. However, as a result of internal migration, Alevis may adopt Sunni religious values, such as constructing mosques in their village, rather than adhering to their own religious culture by constructing *cemevis*.

Alevis have Different Suggestions for Solutions

Alevis makes different suggestions for solutions. Suggestions for solutions taken by Alevi NGOs affect Alevis in the field, and Alevis, like Alevi NGOs, have different views on the issue. The field studies show that different Alevi NGOs operate culture centres and *cemevis* and therefore influence local Alevis' ideas accordingly. There are two main findings in this regard. Firstly, most Alevis emphasise that the Republic of Turkey is secular, so religion and state should be separated from each other in accordance with Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution, which declares the secularist nature of the Republic. This is also the suggestion of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Foundation and the Alevi Bektashi Federation. Secondly, some other Alevis argue that the state may support Alevi religious activities if it treats all faiths equally. These Alevis believe that *cemevis* or *dedes* may get financial or educational support from the state, like imams and mosques. This suggestion represents the suggested solution for the Cem Foundation.

Alevis Shape Their Relations with the Republic of Turkey in Terms of Being Treated as Second-Class Citizens

Alevis are exposed to discrimination, as detailed in the theme above, and experiences of human rights violations, and this also shapes their relations with the Turkish State. In short, Alevis are being denied equal rights in the Republic of Turkey. These various feelings of discrimination cause a feeling of being treated as second-class citizens.

Citizenship is another concept used to understand Alevis ideas about their citizenship. Citizenship involves some elements, such as having a legal status, being able to exercise citizenship rights, participating in political decision-making processes, and having a sense of belonging. Second-class citizenship is about not being treated equally when compared with the majority. The second-class citizens cannot access the same state opportunities and resources as the majority.

In the field, Alevis state that they are treated as second-class citizens because of some state policies, namely, not being represented in *Diyanet*, not recognising *cemevis* as places of worship, not giving any legal status to *cemevis*, only serving Sunni mosques and imams, rejecting Alevis' social demands, imposing Sunni beliefs on Alevis through compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, and facing unemployment or not being promoted in business life due to their Alevi identity. Alevis also declare that they and their religious and cultural differences are not being represented in the state. So, violations of human rights and experiencing discrimination in Turkey affect Alevis' relationship with the Republic of Turkey, their views of their citizenship status in the Republic of Turkey, and make them state they are second-class citizens in Turkey.

10.4.2. Alevis Can Be Seen as an Imagined Community. Alevis Have a Fluid and Hybrid Identity, that Constantly Changes Through Interaction with Political and Economic Contexts as well as with Other Alevis Abroad and Other Identities, The Non-Alevis.

This general conclusion answers the third research question: Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community? In addition, this conclusion also answers the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?

Alevis are an Imagined Community

Alevis in Turkey number more than 20 million, and the community-based idea of Alevis in Turkey may be understood through the concept of imagined communities. The term imagined communities meant that people who do not live in a single unit and do not know each other face-to-face can also be defined as a community. In other words, people who do not know each other and do not have direct contact may have the collective state of mind of being a community and be named as a community. In imagined communities' language, book publishing, and capitalism play roles in creating such a community. So, the imagined communities are moving away from being defined by territorial limits.

During the field studies, I frequently noticed that it is possible to describe the Alevis as a community because they are aware of each other despite not living in a single territory. Especially while explaining their problems with the state, human rights violations, these people reflect that they are aware of each other. They speak on behalf of Alevis, not only on an individual basis, and give the impression that they are a community. Alevis in Turkey also have ideas about other Alevis residing in Europe and even compare their situations with them.

Alevis in the field share the sense of being part of a community because of their shared history. Historically, Alevis have formed a common identity through the oppression they lived under the Ottoman Empire. Almost all Alevis express their negative experiences of that period. Alevis constitute the sense of community partly through the awareness of this shared history.

Because technology makes it easy to access information, Alevis are more united and aware of each other. In the field studies, Alevis states that people reach data and news about each other through technological developments and media, so accessing information is easy. Young Alevis use the internet and social media, while the older generation reads newspapers or watches television, and such methods are also useful to help Alevis gain information about their human rights and about each other. So, Alevis increase their awareness of each other and create a collective sense of being an imagined community as a result of reaching data easier and reacting against human rights violations.

The data in this research also reveals that Alevis have been able to learn about the human rights violations of other Alevis as a result of globalisation, as well as, internal, international, and return migration. So, the first part of this overarching conclusion is that there is in fact an Alevi community that may be defined as an imagined community, which answers the third research question: Is there such a thing as an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community?

Alevis Have a Fluid and Hybrid Identity, that Constantly Changes Through Interaction with Political and Economic Contexts as well as with Other Alevis Abroad and Other Identities, The Non-Alevis

The Alevi identity is a complex phenomenon. This research reveals the different dimensions of the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity, and as a concept, this research handles identity as changing

and dynamic. With the guidance of a constantly changing identity concept, identity is a never-ending experiment. In this research, explaining identity from a single perspective is not possible; identity is a constructional process. In this concept, history and other cultures are accepted as effective in shaping our identities, which ends with the idea of cultural identity. So, identities result from interactions with politics, economics, and cultural contexts. When people interact with others and meet new cultures, they reshape their identities under such effects, so identity has some dimensions from other cultures and identities.

According to the field studies, the Alevi identity is a never-ending process that is dynamic. The Alevi identity is a result of interacting with political and economic context, other people, and new cultures. Understanding the Alevi identity is possible with these concepts because there are different explanations that Alevis put forward during the field studies. There isn't a single perspective to explain Alevism. There are religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions to the definition of Alevi identity. These dimensions are not disconnected from each other because Alevis who evaluate their Alevi identity in terms of religion may also detail it as a political or lifestyle identity.

The field studies reveal that after contact with other belief systems, i.e., Shamanism and Islam, Alevis' shape their syncretic religious identity. The fluid-changing Alevi religious identity's interaction with Sunni Islam is a part of the hybridisation process. Some dimensions of the Alevi religious identity originate from Islam, such as reading the Qur'an in Turkish. However, Alevi religious identity continues to include Shamanic rituals, i.e., ways of dressing at religious ceremonies and ritualistic dances, confirming that the religious identity dimension of the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity is affected by different beliefs and cultures.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey affected the political dimension of the Alevi identity. The political dimension in Alevism is being secular, respecting human rights and democracy, being revolutionary, republican, and supporters of freedom and equality; in other words, following the values of the Republic of Turkey written in the Turkish Constitution. Although there were some shifts to right-wing parties in history, almost every Alevi states their support for left-wing political parties, such as CHP, which Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded. Alevis also details how Alevism is about being Kemalism and resisting political Islam and Sharia.

Alevism as a lifestyle is the other dimension of the Alevi identity. Alevis, who describe Alevism as a lifestyle, also state that other cultures and historical events shape the Alevi lifestyle. In the field, Alevism is also about following some ancient pre-Islamic Turkish customs, such as distributing appetisers and drinks [*hak dağıtma*]. The effect of Buddhism on their identity and lifestyle is also another aspect of Alevism as a lifestyle. For example, Alevis believe that taking care of your words, actions, and other moral values comes from Buddhism. Moreover, Alevism as a lifestyle is also about having a rebellious character, being modern and being against the conservative Sunni lifestyle of the Ottoman period, being a humanist, respecting the environment, promoting equality between men and women, and standing for rightness. So, Alevis as a lifestyle identity includes different worldviews and has effects from other cultures, which is related to the cultural identity subject.

In this research, including the analysis of the data from the field studies, there are also two aspects of the changes in the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity. The Alevi identity, which used to be more discreet due to the threat of violence and oppression in the Ottoman Empire, is now a much more public identity. So, the first conclusion about the ongoing changes in the Alevi identity is about having a more public Alevi identity when compared to the past. Secondly, the religious dimension of the Alevi identity is not as vital as before; however, the political and lifestyle dimensions are more vital. In this context, e.g., some Alevi religious practices, such as *musahiplik*, are not being followed as much as before. Also, *cem* ceremonies are not held as often as they used to be. Even religious rituals, such as playing *saz* in the *cem* ceremonies,

which have religious significance, are used for purposes other than their religious significance, such as entertainment.

This general conclusion answers the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in last decades? The following paragraphs examine the factors affecting these changes because the field studies uncover the factors behind these changes in the Alevi identity. These five factors are the same ones that subsection 10.4.1 discusses.

The first factor is the historical experiences that have had an impact on both changes. The negative historical experiences of oppression suffered in the Ottoman period decreased to a certain level in the Republic of Turkey. This represents the change in the Alevi identity towards being more public. However, the oppression and assimilation policies experienced in the past continue to affect the Alevi religious identity. The former poverty and hard living conditions persist and make it more difficult for Alevis to practise their religious identity, i.e., in not being able to afford animals for sacrifice in religious ceremonies or the *cemevi* electricity and water bills. The vitality of the political identity dimension in Alevism also relates to the past. Historically, the Alevi-Bektashi community supported the calls for reform and the movement against the Ottoman sultanate, especially during the Young Turks period. The end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey also meant a reduction in the oppression and severe human rights violations that Alevis faced during the Ottoman Empire. This is the reason why Alevis supported both Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish War of Independence, and the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey. From this point of view, the political identity of Alevis, such as following the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, relates to the end of the Ottoman period. The reforms brought with the new modern Republic of Turkey, such as the equality of men and women and the modern lifestyle, are in accordance with the Alevi lifestyle. So, historically, the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey means the liberation of Alevis from the conservative Sunni lifestyle of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of a new modern state where Alevis can keep their lifestyle vital.

The second factor is the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs. As much as the lands where Alevis live have religious and historical importance, Alevis' sense of belonging to these places' increases, the assimilation attempt of the state is less felt, and Alevis live their identities more publicly. Alevis and their NGOs also play a role in the Alevi identity because Alevi NGOs facilitate religious activities. Alevi NGOs make the Alevi identity more public through activities such as opening *cemevis*, organising protests and congresses, organising festivals, opening lawsuits, demanding service from the state authorities, and even demonstrating their *cem* ceremonies in the media. The Sivas massacre was a turning point, after which Alevis became more organized, and Alevis continues to found more NGOs. In turn, these NGOs influence the Alevi religious identity. In other words, the more effective the NGOs became, the greater the awareness of the Alevi religious identity. However, Alevis are turning their religious rituals into means of entertainment, i.e., playing *saz* as entertainment, although it has religious importance in *cem* ceremonies. Making *cem* ceremonies broadcasted in the media as a part of entertainment is another factor that degenerates the Alevi religious rituals. So, while Alevism is becoming more public through broadcasting *cem* ceremonies in the media, it may also result in the degeneration of the Alevi religious rituals because of Alevis themselves. The Alevi religious rituals cannot continue due to the lack of active Alevi NGOs; however, another view is that functioning *cemevis* under these NGOs is also degenerating the Alevi religious identity. From this perspective, the method of operating *cemevis* under Alevi NGOs, against the state policies of discriminating against and neglecting Alevis, is not useful to maintain their Alevi religious rituals because *cemevis* must have a religiously based system, i.e., every *ocak* family may have their *cemevis* and perform their religious rituals. So, although

Alevi NGOs have an important role in the Alevi religious identity, the field studies show that the activities of these NGOs are not fully sufficient to keep the religious identity vital due to the predominance of other reasons. The degeneration of Alevism and *dedes* is affecting the change in the Alevi religious identity. *Dede's* are important religious figures and leaders in Alevism who led the *cem* ceremonies; however, *dede's* do not have enough education and knowledge on Alevism, and are not eligible to teach Alevism to Alevism. *Dede's* are believed to be ignorant and corrupt in their position and cannot function as religious leaders anymore. Furthermore, not performing *cem* ceremonies, not completing *cemevi* constructions, not giving enough importance to transferring the Alevi oral traditions to the next generation, the absence of institutionalisation in Alevism, and Alevism that follow Sunni religious rituals are some situations that Alevism state cause degeneration in Alevism and make the religious identity lose its vitality. Alevi NGOs also have a role in keeping the Alevi political identity vital. Some Alevi NGOs bring Alevism to the forefront as a political identity. Alevism also make efforts to transmit their lifestyle to younger generations in order to protect themselves against the assimilation policies of the state, namely compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons. This leads to the conclusion that Alevism are making efforts to follow their way of life and keep the lifestyle dimension of the Alevi identity vital.

The third factor is about Alevism's relations with Sunnis. When relation and interaction increases, Alevism have a more public identity, i.e., they even hold wedding ceremonies, which was impossible in the past. However, better communication with Sunnis, together with their ignorance of their own religious identity, results in changes in the Alevism's religious identity, as they may increasingly follow Sunnism rather than their own religious identity. On the other hand, discrimination, the concern for social exclusion that may come from Sunnis, and the increase of internal migration, as the fifth factor below details, may also result in Alevism not following the religious rituals of Alevism. This situation has led to a change in the Alevi identity, which no longer follows the religious rituals of Alevism.

The fourth factor is Alevism's relations with the state. When compared to the Ottoman period, there is a change in Alevism's relations with the state. The oppression of Alevism decreased with the establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey. So, currently, Alevism no longer need to hide their identities and are more public. As a result, Alevism can establish Alevi NGOs, *cemevis*, and be more public. In the Turkish Republic, the Alevi political identity is defined as following the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the principles of the Republic of Turkey in the Turkish Constitution, or being leftist. This political identity reshapes itself in the Republic of Turkey. With the changing political environment in the Republic of Turkey, the Alevi political identity has changed in different aspects. Alevism have merged their identities with leftism, although there were shifts to the right-wing political party, Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950s; later, Alevism gave up their support for DP. Currently, Alevism continues to support leftist parties. Although the relationship between the modern Turkish Republic, after the Ottoman Empire, and Alevism is positive, some problems remain. The lack of legal status of *cemevis* as places of worship as a result of state policy, together with the economic difficulties of Alevism, makes it difficult for Alevism to keep their places of worship functional. Thus, the inability of the *cemevis* to continue their activities, of course, leads to the fact that the Alevism face problems in continuing their religious rituals. Compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons are another policy of the state, and for Alevism, it is an intervention in their religious identity. Moreover, a new term, scientific assimilation, which means the state is attempting to assimilate Alevi religious beliefs with Sunni values in a structured and observable manner, is also explaining Alevism's problems with the Turkish State. In this respect, the fact that the Alevi religious identity does not remain vital also relates to relations with the state.

The fifth factor is internal, international, and return migration, as well as periodic visits to the homeland. Becoming more public, and the decrease in the vitality of the religious identity

dimension in the Alevi identity also relate to these migrations. As a result of internal and international migration, Alevis became more economically empowered and therefore better able to establish and support their NGOs, which makes the Alevi identity more public, i.e., by NGOs organising *cem* ceremonies or constructing *cemevis*. With internal and international migration, Alevi-Sunni interaction increases. In this interaction, Alevis are making their identities more public. In the field, Alevis' return migration or regular visits to their homelands are essential for bringing new cultures and economic welfare to their homelands. The interaction of the migrated Alevis with the Sunni identity and culture affects the Alevi identity by directing it towards some changes. For example, Alevis, who become closer to Sunni identity as a result of internal migration, build mosques in their homelands. State policies, especially in the form of neglecting the Alevi religious identity, are felt more intensely in cities after Alevis, and due to these difficulties, Alevis may shift priorities and stop following the Alevi religious rituals. When the conditions of urban life become more difficult as a result of internal migration, the priorities of Alevis change from living their religious identities to surviving in cities. In addition, problems associated with city life make it difficult for Alevis to practise their religious rituals. Moreover, Alevis who settle in cities as a result of internal migration do not use any means of objection against compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in order not to marginalise their children in schools and not to be exposed to social exclusion. On the other hand, international migration has a different effect because Alevis in Europe can practise their religious rituals. Alevis also state that as a result of international migration, Alevism is being studied and evaluated from a more academic perspective, which increases the availability of scientific data on the Alevi identity. For Alevis in the field, this is making the Alevi identity more visible in academic life. So, the globalisation that Alevis are also feeling in this sense is affecting Alevism. Moreover, meeting with new cultures in Europe also facilitates Alevis to establish NGOs and support Alevis in Turkey through these NGOs; however, this is not sufficient to make Alevis in Turkey follow the religious rituals of Alevism. Some Alevis in Europe are directing Alevism into politics after meeting with some political ideologies, such as socialism. Also, as a result of internal migration, Alevis perceive their human rights issues as political issues. This increase directs Alevis, especially young Alevis, into political debates. In this direction, Alevis are becoming part of political debates and mostly explain their Alevism in political terms instead of religious values. So, the Alevi identity has undergone different changes in these respects, and the Alevi identity is more politicized.

Thus, with such factors, the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity is a never-ending process, has been reshaping over time and will be rewritten in the future.

10.4.3. Despite Facing Human Rights Violations, Discrimination, and Being Treated as Second-Class Citizens, Alevis are Nevertheless Attached and Loyal to The Republic of Turkey, Which Can Be Explained with Constitutional Patriotism

Alevis see their identity in terms of facing human rights violations and discrimination and being treated as second-class citizens, but they maintain their loyalty to the Republic of Turkey. Alevis show their attachment to the Republic of Turkey both in their words and symbols, such as hanging Turkish flags on shrines or their places of worship, *cemevis*. This research details that Alevi's loyalty to the Republic of Turkey is identified with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and expressed through rights, freedom, reforms, and constitutional values. So, despite all problems, Alevis' continuing loyalty to the Republic of Turkey can be understood in terms of the concept of constitutional patriotism, which is about feeling attached to the values and principles of a democratic constitution that aims to create political attachment and equal rights for all. As the previous section details, the Alevi identity has a political dimension, and one of the aspects is their political attachment to the norms and values of the constitution of the Republic of Turkey,

e.g., secularism. This third general conclusion answers the fourth research question: If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in last decades? The below paragraphs uncover the factors behind this conclusion and are the same as the ones that subsection 10.4.2 discusses.

The first factor is the historical experiences that have had an impact on Alevi's constitutional patriotism. This research suggests that the loyalty of Alevi to the Republic of Turkey remains unchanged since its founding years, and this feature explains the loyalty of Alevi to the Republic of Turkey from a historical point of view. The data in Chapter One reveals that Alevi faced violence, oppression, marginalisation, and humiliation in the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk led the Turkish War of Independence, which replaced the Ottoman Empire with the modern Republic of Turkey. Alevi in the field express that the oppression of the Ottoman Empire has decreased to a certain level in the Republic of Turkey. So, therefore Alevi were the first supporters of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish War of Independence, and the establishment of the new modern Republic of Turkey as deliverance from the Islamic Sunni Ottoman Empire that oppressed, killed, and exiled Alevi. There is also a historical precedent for such reformist movements, as Chapter Three details. The Alevi-Bektashi community supported the Young Turks' critical approach towards the attitude of the Ottoman caliphate. Thus, Alevi-Bektashis are supporters of the constitutionalist and reformist movements, which started in the last period of the Ottoman Empire. From such a perspective, the Alevi in this research are one of the primary constituent elements -founders- of the new modern Republic and supporters of the new modern Republic of Turkey. As a result of these historical events, Alevi have established a strong bond with the Republic of Turkey and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that continues in the Republic of Turkey. In the field studies, Alevi show their constitutional patriotism in their statements as well as by displaying symbols such as flags or portraits of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at home and even in places of worship. This research emphasises that during the Republic's history, Alevi have followed Kemalism, reformism, and maintained their constitutional patriotism; however, different perspectives have emerged. At the end of the 1950s, Alevi supported a right-wing political party; however, at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, many Alevi accepted political ideologies that unified socialism and leftism. In the following decades, after the 1980s, for Alevi, protecting the modern Republic of Turkey and its values in the Turkish Constitution means supporting Kemalist secularism against reactionary movements and political Islam.

The second factor that affects Alevi's constitutional patriotism is the influence of Alevi themselves and their NGOs. The Alevi culture and beliefs and the constitutional values of the modern Turkish Republic meet on common ground. For example, the Alevi culture and belief system reject Sharia, as do the values of the modern Republic of Turkey. Kemalism, the ideology of the Republic of Turkey based on Atatürk's Principles, opposes the political and ideological Arabic Islam understanding of government. Kemalism is the key constitutional value underlying Alevi's commitment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, his reforms, and the modern Republic of Turkey. The six modern principles of the Republic of Turkey, namely republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, statism, and reformism, are all enshrined in the Turkish constitution and have a fundamental meaning for Alevi. Such common values are essential in creating the strong attachment between Alevi, the modern Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and his reforms protected by the Turkish Constitution. Ignorance, degeneration, a lack of unity and institutionalisation among Alevi, and non-functioning Alevi NGOs are some reasons for not keeping the Alevi religious identity vital, as subsection 10.4.2 discusses. However, Alevi keep their identities more vital in terms of lifestyle and political identity dimensions. According to the field studies, most Alevi and Alevi NGOs emphasise the political rather than the religious dimension of the Alevi identity, especially in city life. This political identity also manifests itself in some elements, such as following Atatürk's reforms

and being supportive of constitutional values. In this respect, Alevis keep their political identity dimension, of which constitutional patriotism is a part, vital because of themselves and Alevi NGOs.

The third factor is Alevis' relations with Sunnis. These relations can result in a decline in the number of Alevis following their religious rituals. The ignorance of Alevis about their religious identity, as the above paragraph states, also influences this shift. This causes Alevis not to keep their religious identity as vital as before. In this case, Alevis emphasise and keep vital the political and lifestyle dimensions rather than the religious dimension of the Alevi identity. In this respect, Alevis keep their political identity and constitutional patriotism vital and bring them to the fore in the field.

The fourth factor is Alevis' relations with the state in explaining Alevis' constitutional patriotism. Alevis highlights problems with some state policies. These complaints, while considered serious, are relatively mild when compared with conditions in other Muslim countries around the world. In countries such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, oppression of religious and cultural minorities is often more severe; moreover, in Turkey, Alevis face no political or legal prohibitions on the operation of *cemevis* or performing their religious rituals. This may be another reason why they remain constitutional patriots attached to the Republic of Turkey. Alevis' complex relationship with the state is therefore understandable: On the one hand, they claim to face human rights violations and discrimination and are treated as second-class citizens; on the other, they remain constitutional patriots. Thus, their relationship with the state may be characterised as hybrid. Because Alevis' are negatively affected by state policies, they feel treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against. In their interaction with the state, Alevis create an identity that balances their attachment to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Republic of Turkey, i.e., constitutional patriotism, with the perception of being second-class citizens, facing human rights violations and discrimination. As a result, Alevis have reshaped, reformulated, and recreated their identity, weighing their constitutional patriotism against such hardships.

The fifth factor is internal, international, and return migration. Migration is also influential on constitutional patriotism, which is part of the political identity of Alevis. Alevis who migrate abroad or domestically help Alevis be more organised with return migration or periodic visits to Turkey. For example, by enabling Alevis to set up more NGOs with economic support. Migration is an effective factor for Alevis to keep their political identity vital but not their religious identity. Because of internal migration to cities, Alevis and Alevi NGOs emphasise the political rather than the religious dimension of the Alevi identity. Alevis also interact with political ideologies as a result of international migration. As a result, the Alevi identity in terms of its political dimension, of which constitutional patriotism is also a part, keeps its vitality as a result of migration.

10.5. Current Situations of the Field Study Regions in 2022 and Suggestions for Further Research

The field study chapters contain data from different regions and participants. These were all done between 9 and 12 years ago. Since then, many events have occurred in Turkey. The influx of Syrian refugees has reached more than 3.5 million. On July 15, 2016, the Turkish state defeated a coup attempt, and as a result, the socio-political structure of Turkey changed. In 2016, after the coup attempt, the government declared a state of emergency that continued for two years, and many people were accused of being a part of the coup attempt or members of

FETÖ⁵⁵, fired, and imprisoned. In April 2017, with a constitutional referendum, the parliamentary system of government was replaced with a presidential system, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the President of the Republic of Turkey. In all these processes, people in Turkey also faced terrorist attacks, and many civilians died.

There were also developments in Turkey's foreign relations. The FETÖ leader, Fetullah Gülen, continues his life in the United States of America, and despite Turkey's requests, he is not being transferred to Turkey. A series of ongoing crises led to a divergence in relations between the United States of America and Turkey. On the other hand, relations between Turkey and Russia improved with bilateral trade agreements. However, Turkey's opposing stance against Bashar al-Assad in Syria brought Russia and Turkey face to face, because Russia has backed Bashar al-Assad regime forces. As a result, Turkish-Russian relations developed in many directions, and the two countries have become interdependent in many areas, such as trade and tourism; however, the interests of Turkey and Russia conflict at some points, such as the Syrian issue. On the other hand, in the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, Turkey's stance in foreign relations is more moderate. Turkey defends the protection of Ukraine's territorial integrity and has improved its relations with Ukraine in the field of defence industry. However, on the other hand, Turkey did not follow the sanctions against Russia. Turkey preferred to keep its relations with Russia in balance and ensure the continuation of the Russia-Turkey relationship, especially in the energy sector (see Pirinççi, 2022). In addition, in the process of Turkey's EU membership, the European Commission decided to suspend negotiations on some chapters in 2019. While all these processes are happening in Turkey, Alevis' problems have not disappeared from the Turkish State's agenda, and there are no indications that the problems themselves have been solved. Therefore, Alevis' problems, as reflected in the data obtained from my empirical research, may continue to be valid because of Alevis' situation in Turkey.

In 2022, I reviewed the general situation of the places I visited through phone calls, personal visits, and internet searches. The situation in the Western Anatolia region, as Chapter Six details, is as follows: In Kazana, there are no changes. There are still no Alevis going to the mosque, and no construction of a *cemevi*. A family friend who has relatives living in Yana states that the *cemevi* is still not operating. In recent years, because of the economic difficulties, the activities of the *cemevi* have been more restricted. Nevertheless, villagers continue their commitment to ancient Turkish customs. For example, according to news on the internet, the faith-oriented food offering [*hak dağıtma*] continues. In Hakah village, the *dede* is no longer serving as the headman of the village. The tomb remains unchanged, but it is slightly more neglected by the villagers; it is a little dirty outside, and the walls are damp. The village is still the same, with neither a mosque nor a *cemevi*.

In the Northern Anatolia region, as Chapter Seven details. The *cemevi* project has not yet been completed in Zirve. However, a new *cemevi* has opened in the township of Fide, in collaboration with Alevi citizens and the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation. The *cemevi* in Zirve continues to operate after being closed for almost 1.5 years due to the COVID-19 epidemic and holds *cem* ceremonies. As far as I can learn, in Tepe township, the *cemevi* is still open. In an internet video interview dated 2021, the *cemevi* administrator emphasised that the decrease in the number of young Alevis in Tepe is continuing. The only *cemevi* in Dereli is still active. The *cemevi* administration continues to organise social activities, such as exhibitions and protests, and is trying to maintain regular *cem* ceremonies. Also, the *cemevi* in Çatı had started to function. According to my internet searches, Alevis continue to have difficulties accessing state social services in the Northern Anatolia region.

⁵⁵ The Fetullah Gülen Movement, an Islamic movement, was declared a terrorist organisation after it was accused of being behind the 2016 military coup attempt.

I obtained data about the latest situations in the Central Anatolia region, as Chapter Eight details, mostly by conducting internet searches. In the Central Anatolia region, NGO activities, especially NGO-supported festivals, continue in Sarı. According to an internet video interview recorded in 2019, Alevi use their own resources to organise these festivals. In addition, in another internet video interview made in 2021, the migration of the young population to the big cities was still high. In addition, in 2021, a press release from the municipality of Sarı stated that the central government was still not supporting the municipality. The situation in Yenice is still the same, and there aren't any further developments.

Finally, I searched for the latest situation in Ankara, as Chapter Nine details. The *cemevi* continues its activities, providing both social activities and religious services. Beyond this information, I have not found any further updates regarding the regions or individuals in the field studies.

After the failed coup attempt in 2016, many structural changes took place in Turkey, as stated above. So, an area for further research may be focusing on the ways the regime changes in Turkey affect Alevi's position in the Republic of Turkey. In addition, this research did not include the Kurdish-speaking Alevi in order to avoid the Kurdish issue debates (see Chapter Two). However, further studies may focus on Kurdish-speaking Alevi. In this study, the focus is deliberately limited to Alevi in Turkey and excludes those in Europe (see Chapter Two). However, further research may investigate the experiences and conditions of Alevi in Europe regarding human rights and the other issues raised by this research.

Summary

1. Introduction: The Background of The Study

I started this research as a study of human rights law with regard to Alevi. My initial aim was to study the human rights situation of Alevi. Initially, the focus was on a legal study, but during my research process, the aim became broader, and I focused on how the human rights situation was experienced by Alevi. Alevi claim that their human rights problems derive from state policies and their implementations, namely the policy of not recognising Alevi's places of worship [*cemevi*⁵⁶] and the religious education system that imposes Sunnism on every child, regardless of their beliefs, and requires them to learn Sunni-Hanafi beliefs and practises. In this thesis I wrote a doctrinal-legal chapter, but during the research process I focused more on other perspectives than on just positive law. After I completed the fieldwork, I came across events and conclusions that were better understood within other disciplines and by other concepts than legal ones. So, in this dissertation, I not only studied the human rights violations and experiences of Alevi but explored the Alevi community, the Alevi identity, Alevi's use of human rights law language in their local contexts, the nature of Alevi's relations to the Republic of Turkey, the nature of Alevi's relations to the Republic of Turkey, and their attachment to the Republic of Turkey.

Alevi have a unique culture and belief system, with their own traditions, way of praying and places of worship. The Alevi belief system endorses the esoteric, inner meaning of Islam, the love and uniqueness of God, accepts Prophet Muhammed as the prophet of Islam and the holiness of Caliph Ali, and combines this with its own way of belief and culture. Alevi have their own places of worship and during *cem* ceremonies where they perform a ritualistic dance [*semah*], use some verses from the Qur'an in Turkish.

Alevi do not perform *namaz*, that is prayer or ritual worship. In addition, there are many different traditions in Alevism, such as brotherhood [*musahiplik*]. Due to their different beliefs and lifestyles from those of Sunnis, Alevi have been exposed to violence, massacres, and oppression throughout history. For example, Alevi's ancestors, called *Kızılbaş*, were faced with violence and oppression during the Ottoman period and with negative images attributed to them, such as being heretics.

Alevi gained some hope for freedom and rights with the end of the Ottoman era and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Alevi were supporters of the War of Independence and the establishment of the new Republic. Although the oppression of the Ottoman Empire decreased with the foundation of the modern Republic, Alevi continued to face rights violations, violence, and massacres, such as the Sivas massacre in 1993⁵⁷. So, while Alevi expected welfare, freedom, and equal rights from the new Republic of Turkey, they continue to be confronted with human rights violations and live in difficult legal, political, and social conditions in Turkey.

⁵⁶ Places of worship for Alevi, the building where Alevi come together and pray. In most of the *cemevi* buildings there is also a library, conference hall, kitchen, dining room, and similar facilities.

⁵⁷ On July 2, 1993, 33 Alevi intellectuals who attended the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Festival and two hotel employees were killed after a mob of extremist Islamists set fire to the Madmak Hotel. The incidents began with protests by radical Islamists.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

The first research question in this research was: **1. What is the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevi human rights violation claims?** The second research question was: **2. How do Alevi experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground?** There were additional sub-questions under the second research question, namely: 2.1. How do these human rights violations look like on the ground? 2.2. How was it judged by the different legal authorities? 2.3. What kind of violations are we talking about? 2.4. How do Alevi react against such violations? 2.5. Are Alevi all aware of their human rights and the violations? 2.6. How do Alevi use the international human rights law language in their local situation? 2.7. How do Alevi evaluate their citizenship in the Republic of Turkey despite these violations?

The third research question was: **3. Is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community?**

The fourth research question was: **4. If one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?**

To answer these questions, I used doctrinal, empirical, and theoretical research methods.

Using doctrinal methods, I examined Alevi's human rights law problems in Turkey related to the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to education. This study examined international human rights law and Turkish national law, international and Turkish national legal texts, national and international court cases, EU reports and relevant documents, and academic publications.

To collect empirical data from the field I used a multi-sited ethnographic research approach. There are many publications about Alevi, but none of them use an ethnographic approach to understand Alevi's human rights situations in the field. So, I started this research to find out more about Alevi's human rights situations and did field studies in three districts of Turkey. I started with the Western Anatolia region where I visited three villages. In the Northern Anatolia region, I visited two cities, two townships, and a village. In the Central Anatolia region, I visited two townships and a village. In 2014, I also arranged a meeting with an important Alevi religious leader in Central Anatolia. Moreover, in the 2014 fieldwork, snowball sampling directed me to visit the capital city of Turkey, Ankara. In Ankara I visited a *cemevi* and interviewed several others among which a *dede*. Before these visits, interviews were conducted with Alevi NGO's representatives, and I also attended a meeting and rally organised by Alevi in Turkey to get a general overview of local problems and conditions from the NGOs' perspective.

The methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and observations during the interviews with experts, gatekeepers, and key informants. The field studies did not include the Kurdish-speaking Alevi in order to avoid the Kurdish issue debates. I planned to focus on areas outside the cosmopolitan areas, such as Istanbul, and continued the research in locations where Alevism remains a religious phenomenon limited to Alevi in Turkey. I also excluded Alevi in Europe from this study for two reasons. The first one was financial. As this research is self-funded, I had no budget or time for it. Additionally, none of the interviewed Alevi had directed or guided me to Europe.

This research was done a decade ago and during this period many changes took place in Turkey in terms of political, economic, and international relations. However, while all these processes were happening in Turkey, Alevi's problems have not disappeared from the Turkish State's agenda, and the problems themselves have not been solved. Therefore, the analysis of

Alevis' problems, as reflected in the data obtained from my empirical research, continues to be valid with regard to the current Alevis' situation in Turkey.

This descriptive thesis addressed questions accordingly. The results of this research must be read as collected from only a section of the total Alevi population in Turkey, which may be counted in the millions, i.e., the sample is inevitably selective. I started these field studies by considering Alevis and Alevism as a religious phenomenon and Alevis human rights violations due to this religious phenomenon. So, with this particular focus, visiting every part of the country and researching those living in every region, including cities, townships, and villages, was impossible.

There were also some challenges regarding validity, reliability, objectivity, reflexivity, and methods of data analysis in this research. I was able to gain trust by revealing my Alevi identity, through my family ties, and through access to reference people, such as gatekeepers. Studying human rights in Turkey is a sensitive issue, and it was important to be as objective and transparent as possible. In this research, external validity was achieved through rich description throughout the thesis. Internal validity was provided by the descriptive questions directed at participants. I also avoided responding to any questions put to me about my views about the research questions. Transparency and using the data directly from local settings provided reliability. Transparency, both for the readers and respondents, also ensured objectivity – in the sense of traceability - in the research. My Alevi background was underscoring the need for reflexivity in this research. I ensured this by taking a middle position, i.e., avoiding extremes of involvement or distance. Through open coding, I developed codes, and broader categories and themes grounded in the data. The ethical concerns were dealt with by being transparent with the participants, getting their permission, and making sure that the identities and places in the fieldwork were replaced with pseudonyms and codes.

To make sense of my research findings from the field, I developed a theoretical framework that includes sociological, anthropological, and philosophical theoretical concepts. The concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 2006, originally 1983) explained how Alevis could be considered a community. The dynamic and changing Alevi identity was described in terms of a fluid identity and hybridisation of identity (Bauman & Vecchi, 2008. Hall, 1996. Smith, 2008). The concept of localising human rights law was useful to understand how Alevis use international human rights law in their local contexts (Merry, 2006). The concept of discrimination explained Alevis' discrimination claims that they face both from the state and from fellow citizens (Dworkin, 1978. Madera & Hebl, 2013). Citizenship and second-class citizenship (Bellamy, 2008. Bosniak, 2006) were other concepts that helped to understand Alevis' claims of being treated as second-class citizens in Turkey. Finally, understanding Alevis' attachment to the Republic of Turkey despite such problems required the concept of constitutional patriotism (Habermas, 1996).

3. Answering the Research Questions

The five themes that explain the results of this research are: historical experiences, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, Alevis' relations with Sunnis, Alevis' relations with the state, and the role of (internal, international, and return) migration. Although there are some similarities and some differences between the different field studies, there are three general conclusions of this research that also answer the research questions. The first general conclusion: Alevis experience human rights violations differently. They perceive their relations with the Republic of Turkey in terms of being treated as second-class citizens, and they propose different solutions for their problems. The second: Alevis can be seen as an imagined

community. Alevi have a fluid and hybrid identity, that constantly changes through interaction with political and economic contexts as well as with other Alevi abroad and other identities, the non-Alevi. The third: Despite facing human rights violations, discrimination, and being treated as second-class citizens, Alevi nevertheless are attached and loyal to the Republic of Turkey, which can be explained with constitutional patriotism.

3.1. Turkey, Human Rights Law, Domestic Law and Alevi

To answer the research question **on the state of the current international human rights law and domestic law of Turkey related to Alevi human rights violation claims**, I refer to current international and domestic human rights law relating to Alevi human rights violation claims. To protect their rights and freedoms, Alevi use legal remedies at both the domestic and international level, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

In terms of human rights, Alevi claim that the right not to be discriminated against, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the right to education, are violated in Turkey. Alevi experience discrimination, neglect, and attempts at assimilation related to their Alevi religious identity. Two core problems stand out: the state policy that does not legally recognise *cemevis* as places of worship and the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, which impose Sunnism.

Diyanet, the institution responsible for all religious issues in the country, causes difficulties for Alevi. It represents state power and control over religion. *Diyanet* does not recognise *cemevis* as places of worship in Islam. Consequently, *cemevis* do not qualify for the same privileges as mosques, for example, for exemptions from payment of electricity costs and legal protection. Alevi's discontent with *Diyanet* focuses on its role as a state institution serving only Sunni Islam followers. Alevi believe that it is a discriminatory institution. Alevi oppose the lack of objectivity of *Diyanet* and consider the institution to hold a religious-political role against the secularism principle written in the Turkish Constitution. As a solution, Alevi establish NGOs to operate *cemevis*. The Turkish Supreme Court decided that along with the right to believe in Alevism, people should be permitted to form associations in order to establish places of worship. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), in two cases, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, 2014, and *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, 2016, decided that there was no objective and reasonable justification for the difference in treatment to the applicant Alevi. As a result, Article 14, the prohibition of discrimination, taken in conjunction with Article 9, the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, of the ECHR, had been violated.

Alevi also emphasise the injustice of the official education system, which obligates children to attend compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons for eight years, starting in the fourth grade of primary school, which imposes Sunni-Hanafi beliefs and practises. Alevi allege that compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons violate the right to education. The Turkish Constitutional Court interpreted the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons as a necessity. However, in the cases of *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, 2007, and *Mansur Yalçın and Other v. Turkey*, 2005, the ECtHR stated that the compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons had violated Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, the right to education.

3.2. Alevi Experiences and Reactions with Human Rights Violation

The general answer to the second research question on **how Alevi experience and react to the international human rights and freedoms and their violations on the ground** stresses the differences among the Alevi experiencing human rights violations. Alevi perceive their relations with the Republic of Turkey in terms of being treated as second-class citizen, and

propose different solutions for their problems. Localising human rights, discrimination, and second-class citizenship concepts explain this conclusion.

Localising Human Rights and Alevis

Localising human rights concept explains how people use the global human rights law language. In this process, transplantation requires appropriation and translation. Appropriation refers to adapting the human rights ideas into a new setting with a variety of circumstances and contexts. Moreover, translation is the process of applying the global idea on local contexts, adapting the program to local situations, and redefinition of the target group. This process of vernacularisation has layers and translators. The layers may have different meanings, but the translators localise the human rights language.

In line with the localising human rights law concept, Alevis use certain institutions as translators, and benefit from the idea of appropriation. According to my empirical research there are some translators, namely, Alevi NGOs and activists. These translators increase Alevis' awareness of human rights and freedoms, and facilitate adaptation of international human rights law in their local circumstances. There are also different layers in using human rights language. Alevis understand their problems from various dimensions, namely, historical, political, lifestyle, and/or religious conflicts. Moreover, some Alevis believe that the human right problems are not only experienced by Alevis but are general problems for everyone living in Turkey.

Discrimination and Alevis

In this research discrimination is interpreted as a concept that means making distinction without justified grounds. The distinction between the right to equal treatment and the right to treatment as an equal is useful in this context. The first is the right to an equal distribution of some opportunity or resource or burden, the second is the right to be treated with the same respect and concern as anyone else. Discrimination cannot only be interpreted as discrimination by the state, but also as discrimination by other citizens (interpersonal discrimination), in other words, facing unfair treatment due to belonging to a group by their fellow-citizens. People may also face discrimination because of their political opinions or discrimination in business life, because of belonging to a different religious group, and this kind of discrimination may also happen in recruitment and getting promotion.

Alevis feel discrimination in social life because of their identity, and their concerns about being unemployed, experiencing social exclusion, or being blacklisted accompany this discrimination. The state is discriminating against Alevis in terms of receiving social services due to their political affiliation. Alevis also face employment discrimination both by the state and the private sector.

Citizenship and Alevis

Citizenship involves elements such as having a legal status, being able to exercise citizenship rights, participating in political decision-making processes, and having a sense of belonging. Second-class citizenship is about not being treated equally when compared with the majority. Second-class citizens cannot access the same state opportunities and resources as the majority.

Alevis describe themselves as second-class citizens due to various forms of discrimination, state policies (detailed in section 2.1), not being employed or not being able to gain promotion in business life. Alevis also declare that they and their religious and cultural differences are not represented in the state. Violations of human rights and experiencing discrimination in Turkey affect Alevis' relationship with the Republic of Turkey and their views of their citizenship status in the Republic of Turkey, and make them regard themselves as second-class citizens.

Alevis Felt the Human Rights Violations in Varying Degrees

Although Alevis localise human rights, feel discriminated and being treated as second class citizens, they do not experience the human rights violations in the same way. While some Alevis have little awareness about human rights and violations, others have a higher awareness of human rights and violations. This difference among the Alevis experiencing human rights violations can be understood with the factors in the next paragraphs of this sub-section.

Alevis feel human rights violations differently due to their historical experiences. The negative historical experiences, such as violence and oppression, caused them to settle in more isolated places with more difficult living conditions. This made their primarily focus on survival. Alevis who know more about the historical experiences also have high awareness of human rights problems in Turkey.

The Alevis' themselves and their NGOs are other factors to understand the difference. Decrease in ignorance among Alevis, especially their easy access to information through technology and media, reduces Alevis' ignorance about their identity, rights and freedoms. Those Alevis who have a high awareness of their religious identity and try to keep it vital are more aware that they are subject to violations of their rights due to their religious identity. In locations where Alevi NGOs are active, Alevis' human rights awareness is high, because active Alevi NGOs make Alevis aware of human rights and their violation. There are also some Alevis who believe the human rights violations are because of their political opinion or/and lifestyle.

Interaction between Sunnis and Alevis is also important because Alevis who interact more with Sunnis, have more opportunity to compare their respective human rights conditions, and understand that they have been exposed to discrimination and neglected. However, this interaction also induces some Alevis to be silent about human rights violations with the fear of being blacklisted or face social exclusion. When Alevis do not follow and practice their own religion they become closer to Sunni rituals. These Alevis do not much discuss any human rights problems in connection to their Alevi religious identity. Also, as a result of the rise of political Islam in Turkey, Sunnis who adopted a more conservative lifestyle prevent Alevis from living their lifestyles freely and pressurize Alevis.

Alevis' relationship with the state has changed from severe rights violations, violence, and oppression experienced previously, especially in the Ottoman period, to a new form of discrimination and more hidden and invisible violations through neglect in the Republic of Turkey. The Turkish State also accepts that Alevis have some human rights problems, in several meetings with Alevis. As a consequence of problems in the Turkish State, Alevis have become more organized. In other words, the pressure and severe violations of rights have made Alevis establish more NGOs and increase Alevis' human rights awareness since the 1990s.

As a result of internal and international migrations, Alevis interact with other cultures more. Alevis who migrate abroad learn more about their human rights and freedoms. Alevis in Europe transfer the ideas of equality, human rights and freedom to Alevis in Turkey with return migration or periodic visits to their homelands. However, migration also affect Alevis' priorities. The conditions of city life change Alevis' priorities to survive. Together with the interaction with Sunnis as a result of internal migration, Alevis have two choices: they have to remain silent about the right violations in order to avoid problems, or have to adopt Sunni religious values. When Alevis become stronger economically with internal and international migration, they establish and support more NGOs.

Alevis have different suggestions for solutions and Alevi NGOs affect Alevis. There are two main findings in this regard. Firstly, most Alevis emphasise that religion and state must be separated from each other because of secularism. Secondly, some other Alevis argue that the state support to Alevi religious activities may be welcomed if the state treats all faiths equally.

3.3. On the Imagined Alevi Community

The term imagined communities means that people who do not live in a ‘single unit’ and do not know each other face-to-face can also be defined as a community. In other words, people who do not know each other and do not have direct contact may have the collective state of mind of feeling and being a community and be named as a community. The imagined community concept, together with analyses of the empirical data in this dissertation, answers to the third research question on **is there something like an Alevi community and if so, what would be core elements of this community?** It is possible to describe Alevi as an imagined community because they are aware of each other despite not living in a single territory. Alevi share the sense of being part of a community because of their shared history. Historically, Alevi formed a common identity through the oppression they lived under the Ottoman Empire. Almost all Alevi mention the negative experiences of that period. Alevi state that they acquire data and news about each other through technological developments, internet, and media, and that these tools make them aware of each other and their human rights. Alevi learn more about other Alevi and their human rights violations because of globalisation among which the internal and international flows of people travelling back and forth.

3.4. The Fluid and Hybrid Alevi Identity

Identity changes and is dynamic (fluid identity). Identity is a never-ending experiment. Explaining identity from a single perspective is not possible; identity is a constructional process. In this concept, history and (other) cultures are seen as shaping our identities (cultural identity). Identities result from interactions with political, economic and cultural contexts. Hybridisation of identity is about the changes in the identity. When people interact with others and meet new cultures, they reshape their identities by including partial elements of these cultural encounters. The interaction of groups of people creates new identities and mixed cultures; as a result, hybridity contradicts the concept of homogenous identities. People reshape, recreate, and reformulate their identities as a result of interaction.

The concept of fluid and hybrid identity, together with analyses of the empirical data in this research, answers to the fourth research question on **if one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?** Alevi fluid and hybrid identity is constantly changing through interaction with political and economic contexts as well as with other Alevi abroad and other identities, the non-Alevi. There is not a single perspective to explain the Alevi identity. There are religious, political, and lifestyle dimensions to the definition of Alevi identity. These dimensions are not disconnected from each other because Alevi who evaluate their Alevi identity in terms of religion may also detail it as a political or lifestyle identity.

In the hybridisation of Alevi identity, Alevi pick up certain characteristics of their surroundings. From a historical perspective, in terms of religion and belief after encountering other belief systems, i.e., Shamanism and Islam, Alevi developed their own syncretic religious identity.

The political dimensions in Alevism are summarized and conceptualized as: secularism, respect for human rights and democracy, revolutionary, republican, follower of left-wing political parties, such as CHP, Kemalist, supporter of freedoms and equality, respect for and belief in the values of the Republic of Turkey written in the Turkish Constitution.

Alevi who describe Alevism as a lifestyle, state that other cultures and historical events have shaped the Alevi lifestyle. Lifestyle dimensions in Alevism are summarized and conceptualized as: being followers of some ancient pre-Islamic Turkish customs, being affected by Buddhism, having a rebellious character, modern, against the conservative Sunni lifestyle

of the Ottoman period, humanist, having respect for the environment, promoting equality, and standing for justice.

A More Public Alevi Identity with Less Vitality in The Religious Dimension but Greater Vitality in The Political and Lifestyle Dimensions

Two dimensions of changes in the fluid and hybrid Alevi identity can be discerned. First, the Alevi identity is more public when compared to the past. Second, the religious dimension of the Alevi identity is not as vital as before; however, the political and lifestyle dimensions are more vital.

The More Public Alevi Identity

Alevi living in locations that are religiously and historically important to them do not feel the need to hide their identities and feel less assimilation attempts from the state.

Alevi NGOs also make the Alevi identity more public through activities such as cem ceremonies, protests, congresses, festivals, and lawsuits. Alevi NGOs even organise cem ceremonies that are watched by people on television and that also make the Alevi identity public.

The interaction between Alevi and Sunni is another factor in understanding the more public Alevi identity because Alevi do not hide their identity in their relationship with Sunni. For example, Alevi and Sunni marry, which was impossible in the past. This interaction also increases as a result of internal and international migrations.

Since the changes in the relationship between Alevi and the state (the decrease of oppression, but facing more hidden and invisible human rights violations), Alevi no longer need to hide their identities and are more public, because they feel freer when compared with the past, Ottoman era.

The increase in internal and international migration also affects the more public Alevi identity. As a result of these migrations Alevi are economically empowered and are better able to establish and support their NGOs. Therefore, NGOs that are economically stronger are more capable of organising activities (such as *cem* ceremonies) that make the Alevi identity more public.

Less Vitality in The Religious Dimension of the Alevi Identity but Greater Vitality in The Political and Lifestyle Dimensions

Alevi lived in poverty and under hard living conditions in the Ottoman era, however this situation persists. Such a situation also hinders the vitality in the religious dimension on Alevism because Alevi have to pay for their own praying and places of worship despite their difficult economic position. The vitality of the political identity dimension in Alevism also relates to the past. Historically, the Alevi-Bektashi community had supported the calls for reform and the movement against the Ottoman sultanate, especially during the Young Turks⁵⁸ period. With hopes of reforms and freedom Alevi supported Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish War of Independence, and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, the reforms resulting from the new modern Republic of Turkey, such as equality of men and women, and the modern lifestyle, are in accordance with the Alevi lifestyle.

Alevi themselves are also a factor that make their identity less vital. Broadcasting *cem* ceremonies, is also regarded as one of the causes of the degeneration of the Alevi religious rituals because the *cem* ceremonies become a part of entertainment. The more effective the

⁵⁸ In the second half of the 19th century, Young Turks was a common name for the Ottoman intellectuals who chose an orientation towards the West and Europe. The Young Turks sought to establish a system based on constitutional order and free elections. This resulted in the proclamation of the first and last constitution of the Ottoman Empire in 1876 [*Kanun-i Esasi*].

NGOs are, the greater the awareness of the Alevi religious identity. However, the activities of NGOs are not fully sufficient, because the Alevi identity is not as vital as in the past due to other reasons. *Dede*'s, religious leaders of Alevis, do not perform their duty in accordance with Alevism, and that they are ignorant and corrupted. Furthermore, Alevis claim that they do not perform *cem* ceremonies, do not complete *cemevi* constructions, and do not give enough importance to transfer the Alevi oral traditions to the next generation. The absence of institutionalisation in Alevism and the fact that some Alevis follow Sunni religious rituals are also causes for degeneration in Alevi religious identity. Some Alevi NGOs bring Alevism to the forefront as a political identity. Alevis also try to transmit their lifestyle to younger generations in order to protect themselves against the assimilation policies of the state, namely compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons, so this is how they keep the lifestyle dimension of the Alevi identity vital.

Better communication with Sunnis, together with Alevis' ignorance of their own religious identity, also result in changes in Alevi's religious identity. Discrimination, the concern for social exclusion that can come from Sunnis, and the internal migration, as detailed below, also have the effect that Alevis do not follow the religious rituals of Alevism.

In the Republic of Turkey, Alevis merge their identities with leftism. Alevis use a new term, scientific assimilation, which means the state attempts to assimilate Alevi religious beliefs with Sunni values in a structured and observable manner. The relationship of Alevis and the Turkish State is also a factor of less vitality in the religious dimension of the Alevi identity but greater vitality in the political dimension.

The conditions of urban life are more difficult, so because of internal migration, the priorities of Alevis change. Alevis are more concerned with surviving in cities than with their religious identities. Furthermore, problems in city life make it more difficult for Alevis to practise their religious rituals. As a result of internal migration, Alevis do not object to compulsory religious culture and ethics lessons in order not to marginalise their children in schools or face social exclusion. As a result of international migration, Alevism is studied and evaluated from a more academic perspective, which increases the availability of scientific data on the Alevi identity. Globalisation also affects Alevism. After Alevis meet with new cultures in Europe, they become freer, so they establish NGOs and support Alevis in Turkey through these NGOs. However, this is not sufficient to make Alevis in Turkey follow the religious rituals of Alevism. Internal and international migration also make Alevism a part of political debates. So, the Alevi identity experiences different changes and is politicised in this respect.

3.5. Alevi's Identity and Constitutional Patriotism

Constitutional patriotism is about feeling attached to the values and principles of a democratic constitution that aims to create political attachment and equal rights for all. Constitutional patriotism, is one part of the answer to the fourth research question on **if one could speak of a community, what is the role of Alevi identity within the community, what does this Alevi identity entail and how did it change in the last decades?** This question has already been discussed in the previous section but the notion of constitutional patriotism adds an extra dimension to this. Despite facing human rights violations, discrimination, and being treated as second-class citizens, Alevis nevertheless are loyal to the Republic of Turkey. Constitutional patriotism explains this situation. Alevis show their constitutional patriotism in their statements as well as in some symbols. In every location that I visited I saw symbols such as flags or portraits of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk at homes and even in *cemevis*. Alevis identify their loyalty to the Republic of Turkey as being followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, his reforms, and the constitutional values, i.e., secularism, of Turkey.

From a historical perspective Alevi-Bektashis were supporters of the constitutionalist and reformist movements, which started in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the new Republic of Turkey.

Most Alevis and Alevi NGO representatives emphasise the political rather than the religious dimension of the Alevi identity, especially in city life. In this respect, Alevis keep their political identity dimension vital also because of themselves and Alevi NGOs.

The Alevi culture, beliefs and the constitutional values of the modern Turkish Republic meet on common ground, namely rejection of Sharia, which also explains Alevis' constitutional patriotism.

Samenvatting

1. Inleiding: De achtergrond van deze studie

Ik ben dit onderzoek begonnen met het idee een studie naar mensenrechtenwetgeving met betrekking tot Alevieten te gaan doen. Mijn doel was om de mensenrechtensituatie van Alevieten te bestuderen. Aanvankelijk lag de focus op een juridisch onderzoek, maar gedurende het onderzoeksproces verbreedde het doel zich en heb ik me meer en meer gericht op hoe Alevieten hun mensenrechtensituatie ervaren. Alevieten beweren dat hun mensenrechtenproblemen voortkomen uit het staatsbeleid en de uitvoering daarvan, namelijk het beleid om de gebedshuizen [cemevi] van Alevieten niet te erkennen en het religieuze onderwijssysteem dat eist dat alle kinderen Soennitisch-Hanafische overtuigingen en praktijken leren, en daarmee de Alevitische kinderen achterstelt. Dit proefschrift omvat ook een doctrinair-juridisch hoofdstuk, maar tijdens het onderzoeksproces heb ik me vooral gericht op andere perspectieven dan alleen op het positieve recht. Na afronding van het veldwerk en tijdens de analyse van de verzamelde data, stuitte ik op gebeurtenissen en thema's die beter binnen andere disciplines en met sociaalwetenschappelijke, niet-juridische concepten begrepen konden worden. In dit proefschrift heb ik dan ook niet alleen de mensenrechtenschendingen en -ervaringen van Alevieten bestudeerd, maar onderzocht ik ook de Alevitische gemeenschap, de Alevitische identiteit, het gebruik van de taal van de nationale en internationale mensenrechten door Alevieten in hun lokale context, en de aard van de relaties van Alevieten met de Republiek Turkije.

Alevieten hebben een unieke cultuur en geloofssysteem, met hun eigen tradities, manier van bidden en gebedshuizen. Het Alevitische geloofssysteem gaat uit van de esoterische, innerlijke betekenis van de Islam en de liefde en de uniciteit van God. Het aanvaardt de Profeet Mohammed als de profeet van de Islam en aanvaardt de heiligheid van Kalief Ali, en combineert dit met een eigen cultuur en manier van geloven. Alevieten hebben hun eigen plaatsen van samenkomst waar zij tijdens cem ceremoniën een rituele dans [semah] uitvoeren, en enkele verzen uit de Koran in het Turks reciteren. Alevieten kennen niet de verplichting om vijfmaal daags te bidden [namaz]. Daarnaast zijn er nog andere tradities in het Alevitisme, zoals die van broederschap [musahiplik]. Vanwege hun geloof en levensstijl die afwijken van de Soennieten zijn Alevieten in de loop van de geschiedenis blootgesteld aan geweld, onderdrukking en slachtpartijen. De voorouders van de Alevieten, Kızılbaş genaamd, werden bijvoorbeeld geconfronteerd met geweld en onderdrukking tijdens de Ottomaanse periode en met negatieve beelden over hen zoals dat zij kettters zouden zijn.

Alevieten kregen enige hoop op meer vrijheid en rechten met het einde van het Ottomaanse tijdperk en de oprichting van de Republiek Turkije. Alevieten waren voorstanders van de Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog en de oprichting van de nieuwe Republiek Turkije. Hoewel de onderdrukking van Alevieten met de stichting van de moderne Republiek verminderde, bleven Alevieten geconfronteerd worden met schendingen van hun rechten. Ook bleven zij slachtoffer van geweld en bloedbaden, zoals het bloedbad in Sivas in 1993. Terwijl de Alevieten welvaart, vrijheid en gelijke rechten verwachtten van de nieuwe Republiek Turkije, bleven zij dus geconfronteerd met mensenrechtenschendingen. Nog steeds leefden zij onder moeilijke juridische, politieke en sociale omstandigheden in Turkije.

2. Onderzoeksvragen en methodologie

De eerste onderzoeksvraag in dit onderzoek luidde: 1. Wat is het huidige internationale en nationale Turkse recht rond mensenrechten met betrekking tot de Alevitische claim van mensenrechtenschendingen?

De tweede onderzoeksvraag was: 2. Hoe ervaren en reageren Alevieten op internationale mensenrechten en op de schendingen daarvan in de praktijk? Onder de tweede onderzoeksvraag valt een aantal aanvullende deelvragen, namelijk 2.1. Hoe zien deze mensenrechtenschendingen er in de praktijk uit? 2.2. Hoe werden ze door de verschillende juridische autoriteiten beoordeeld? 2.3. Over wat voor soort schendingen gaat het? 2.4. Hoe reageren Alevieten op dergelijke schendingen? 2.5. Zijn Alevieten zich allemaal bewust van hun mensenrechten en de schendingen ervan? 2.6. Hoe gebruiken Alevieten de taal van de internationale mensenrechten in hun lokale situatie? 2.7. Hoe beoordelen Alevieten hun burgerschap in de Republiek Turkije ondanks deze schendingen?

De derde onderzoeksvraag luidde: 3. Bestaat er zoiets als een Alevitische gemeenschap en zo ja, wat zouden kernelementen van deze gemeenschap zijn?

De vierde onderzoeksvraag luidde: 4. Als men zou kunnen spreken van een gemeenschap, wat is dan de rol van de Alevitische identiteit binnen deze gemeenschap, wat houdt deze Alevitische identiteit in en hoe is deze de laatste decennia veranderd?

Om deze vragen te beantwoorden heb ik naast juridisch-doctrinaire methoden ook theoretische en empirische onderzoeksmethoden gebruikt.

Met behulp van juridisch-doctrinair onderzoek onderzocht ik de mensenrechtenproblemen van Alevieten in Turkije met betrekking tot het recht om niet te worden gediscrimineerd, de vrijheid van gedachte, geweten en godsdienst, en het recht op onderwijs. In deze studie bestudeerde ik internationale mensenrechtenwetgeving en Turkse nationale wetgeving, internationale en Turkse nationale wetteksten, nationale en internationale rechtszaken, EU-rapporten en relevante documenten, en academische publicaties.

Om empirische gegevens uit het veld te verzamelen heb ik gebruik gemaakt van een multi-sited etnografische onderzoeksbenadering. Er bestaan veel publicaties over Alevieten, maar in geen enkele - voor zover mij bekend - gebruikt de onderzoeker een etnografische benadering om de mensenrechtensituatie van Alevieten in het veld te begrijpen. Daarom ben ik dit onderzoek begonnen om meer te weten te komen over de mensenrechtensituatie van Alevieten en heb ik veldstudies uitgevoerd in drie districten van Turkije. Ik begon met de regio West-Anatolië, waar ik drie dorpen bezocht. In de regio Noord-Anatolië bezocht ik twee steden, twee gemeenten en een dorp. In de regio Centraal-Anatolië bezocht ik twee gemeenten en een dorp. In 2014 regelde ik ook een ontmoeting met een belangrijke Alevitische religieuze leider in Centraal-Anatolië. Tijdens het veldwerk in 2014 bracht de 'sneeuwbal methode' mij bovendien naar Ankara, de hoofdstad van Turkije. In Ankara bezocht ik een cemevi en interviewde ik verschillende andere personen, waaronder een dede. Voorafgaand aan deze veldstudies heb ik interviews afgenomen met vertegenwoordigers van Alevitische NGO's, en ik heb ook een bijeenkomst en rally bijgewoond die door Alevieten in Turkije werd georganiseerd om een overzicht te krijgen van de lokale problemen en omstandigheden vanuit het perspectief van de NGO's.

Ik heb tijdens de verschillende veldstudies gebruikt gemaakt van semigestructureerde interviews, informele gesprekken en observaties tijdens de interviews met deskundigen, poortwachters en sleutelinformanten om mijn data te verzamelen. De veldstudies hebben zich niet op de Koerdisch sprekende Alevieten gericht om zo de intense debatten over de Koerdische kwestie te vermijden. Ik heb er ook voor gekozen geen veldwerk in het kosmopolitische centrum Istanbul te doen, maar heb het onderzoek voortgezet op locaties waar het Alevitisme

een religieus fenomeen blijft. Ik heb me beperkt tot de Alevieten in Turkije en de Alevieten in Europa heb ik om twee redenen van dit onderzoek uitgesloten. De eerste was van financiële aard. Aangezien ik deze veldstudies zelf gefinancierd heb, was er onvoldoende budget of tijd voor. Bovendien heeft geen enkele door mij geïnterviewde Aleviet mij naar mogelijke respondenten in Europa geleid.

Ik heb dit onderzoek tien jaar geleden uitgevoerd en sindsdien vonden er in Turkije veel veranderingen op politiek, economisch en internationaal gebied plaats. Desondanks zijn de problemen van de Alevieten niet van de agenda van de Turkse staat verdwenen en zijn de problemen evenmin opgelost. Daarom blijft mijn analyse van de ervaringen van de mensenrechtenschendingen van de Alevieten, zoals die naar voren komen in mijn empirische onderzoek, geldig voor de huidige situatie van de Alevieten in Turkije.

In dit beschrijvende proefschrift zijn de vragen dienovereenkomstig behandeld. De resultaten van dit onderzoek moeten worden gelezen als afkomstig van slechts een deel van de totale Alevitische bevolking in Turkije, die in de miljoenen loopt. Dat betekent dat de onderzoeksgroep en de onderzoekslocaties per definitie selectief zijn. Ik begon deze veldstudies met het beschouwen van Alevieten en Alevitisme als een religieus fenomeen en Alevitische mensenrechtenschendingen met betrekking tot dit religieuze fenomeen. Met deze specifieke focus was het onmogelijk om alle delen van het land te bezoeken en onderzoek te doen naar alle inwoners van elke regio, inclusief de hierbij behorende steden, gemeenten en dorpen.

Er waren in dit onderzoek ook enkele uitdagingen met betrekking tot validiteit, betrouwbaarheid, objectiviteit, reflexiviteit en methoden van gegevensanalyse. Ik kon tijdens de veldstudies en de interviews vertrouwen winnen door mijn Alevitische identiteit en mijn familiebanden te onthullen en door de inzet van de juiste poortwachters. Het bestuderen van mensenrechten in Turkije is een gevoelig onderwerp, en het was belangrijk om zo objectief en transparant mogelijk te zijn. In dit onderzoek werd externe validiteit nagestreefd door een rijke beschrijving in het volledige proefschrift te presenteren. De interne validiteit werd zo veel mogelijk gerealiseerd door vooral beschrijvende vragen aan de respondenten te stellen. Ook heb ik vermeden te reageren op vragen die mij werden gesteld over mijn opvattingen over de onderzoeksvragen. Transparantie en het gebruik van beschrijvende gegevens rechtstreeks van Alevieten uit concrete lokale settingen hebben bijgedragen aan de betrouwbaarheid van dit proefschrift. Transparantie, in de zin van navolgbaarheid, zowel voor de lezers als voor de respondenten, hebben ook bijgedragen aan objectiviteit in het onderzoek. Mijn Alevitische achtergrond onderstreepte de noodzaak van reflexiviteit in dit onderzoek. Ik zorgde hiervoor door een middenpositie in te nemen, dat wil zeggen uitersten van betrokkenheid of afstand te vermijden. Door open codering ontwikkelde ik codes, en bredere categorieën en thema's die in de data zijn gegrond. Met de ethische kanten van dit onderzoek ben ik op uiteenlopende wijzen omgegaan: zo ben ik transparant geweest naar de (potentiële) deelnemers over de opzet en het doel van het onderzoek, heb ik hen om hun toestemming gevraagd en heb ik ervoor gezorgd hen onherkenbaar in beeld te brengen door hun persoonlijke kenmerken zoals namen en woonplaatsen te vervangen door pseudoniemen en codes.

Om mijn onderzoeksresultaten uit het veldwerk te begrijpen, ontwikkelde ik een theoretisch kader dat sociologische, antropologische en filosofische theoretische concepten omvat. Het concept van 'imagined communities' (Anderson 2006, oorspronkelijk 1983) verklaarde hoe Alevieten als een gemeenschap konden worden beschouwd. De dynamische en veranderende Alevitische identiteit werd beschreven in termen van een fluïde en hybride identiteit (Bauman & Vecchi, 2008. Hall, 1996. Smith, 2008). Het concept van het lokaliseren van het recht inzake mensenrechten was nuttig om te begrijpen hoe Alevieten internationale mensenrechten in hun lokale context gebruiken (Merry, 2006). Het concept 'discriminatie' duidde de discriminatiebeweringen van Alevieten die zij zowel van de staat als van medeburgers ervaren (Dworkin, 1978. Madera & Hebl, 2013). Burgerschap en tweederangs-burgerschap (Bellamy, 2008.

Bosniak, 2006) waren andere concepten die mij hielpen de beweringen van Alevieten dat ze in Turkije als tweederangsburgers worden behandeld te begrijpen. Om de gehechtheid van Alevieten aan de Republiek Turkije in een dergelijk problematische context te verstaan, was ten slotte het concept ‘constitutioneel patriottisme’ nodig (Habermas, 1996).

3. Beantwoording van de onderzoeksvragen

De vijf thema's die de resultaten van dit onderzoek samenvatten en duiden, zijn: (1) historische ervaringen, (2) de rol van Alevitische ngo's en Alevieten zelf, (3) de relaties van Alevieten met Soennieten, (4) de relaties van Alevieten met de staat, en (5) de betekenis van (interne, internationale en terugkeer) migratie. Hoewel er in relatie tot de onderzoeksvragen enkele overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen de verschillende veldstudies bestaan, zijn er drie algemene conclusies van dit onderzoek die ook de onderzoeksvragen beantwoorden. Een eerste algemene conclusie luidt dat Alevieten mensenrechtenschendingen verschillend ervaren. Zij voelen zich in relatie tot de Republiek Turkije tweederangsburgers en dragen tegelijkertijd verschillende oplossingen voor hun problemen aan. Een tweede algemene conclusie die in dit proefschrift wordt uitgewerkt betreft de constatering dat de Alevieten zich met elkaar verbonden voelen en als een ‘verbeelde gemeenschap’ (imagined community) kunnen worden gekarakteriseerd. De Alevitische identiteit is een fluïde, hybride identiteit, die voortdurend verandert in interactie met de politieke en economische context en met Alevieten in het binnen- en buitenland en in relatie tot niet-Alevieten. De derde algemene conclusie die in dit proefschrift nader wordt uitgewerkt betreft de constatering dat ondanks de ervaringen van mensenrechtenschendingen en discriminatie en de perceptie in Turkije als tweederangsburgers behandeld te worden, Alevieten toch gehecht en loyaal zijn aan de Republiek Turkije. Deze ogenschijnlijk paradoxale situatie kan vanuit het ‘constitutioneel patriottisme’ begrepen worden.

3.1. Turkije, mensenrechtenwetgeving, nationaal recht en Alevieten

De eerste onderzoeksvraag betreft hoe het internationale en nationale recht met betrekking tot mensenrechten omgaat met claims inzake schending van mensenrechten door Alevieten. Om hun rechten te beschermen hebben Alevieten een beroep gedaan op zowel nationaal als internationaal recht, onder meer door klachten bij het Europees Hof voor de Rechten van de Mens (EHRM).

Alevieten hebben daarbij gesteld dat het vooral om drie mensenrechten gaat: het recht om niet te worden gediscrimineerd, de vrijheid van gedachte, geweten en godsdienst en het recht op onderwijs in Turkije worden geschonden. Alevieten ervaren discriminatie, verwaarlozing en pogingen tot assimilatie in verband met hun Alevitische religieuze identiteit. Twee kernproblemen springen in het oog: allereerst het overheidsbeleid dat cemevis niet wettelijk erkent als gebedshuizen en in de tweede plaats de verplichte lessen in religieuze cultuur en ethiek, die het soennisme opdringen.

Diyanet, de nationale instelling die verantwoordelijk is voor alle religieuze aangelegenheden in het land, veroorzaakt moeilijkheden voor de Alevieten. Diyanet vertegenwoordigt de macht van de staat en diens controle over de religie. Diyanet erkent cemevis niet als islamitische gebedshuizen. Bijgevolg komen cemevis niet in aanmerking voor dezelfde privileges als moskeeën, zoals vrijstelling van betaling van elektriciteitskosten en gelijke wettelijke bescherming. Het ongenoegen van de Alevieten over de Diyanet richt zich op haar rol als staatsinstelling die alleen volgelingen van de soennitische islam bedient. Alevieten vinden het

een discriminerende instelling. Alevieten verzetten zich tegen het gebrek aan objectiviteit van Diyanet en vinden dat de instelling een religieus-politieke rol speelt die indruist tegen het in de Turkse grondwet vastgelegde secularisme.

Als oplossing richten Alevieten NGO's op om hun cemevis te beheren. Het Turkse Hooggerechtshof besliste dat naast het recht om in het Alevitisme te geloven, het mensen moet worden toegestaan verenigingen op te richten om gebedshuizen te stichten. Het Europees Hof voor de Rechten van de Mens (EHRM) besloot in twee zaken, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı tegen Turkije*, 2014, en *İzzettin Doğan e.a. tegen Turkije*, 2016, dat er geen objectieve en redelijke rechtvaardiging was voor het verschil in behandeling van de Alevieten die klachten daarover hadden ingediend. Daardoor was Artikel 14, het discriminatieverbod, in samenhang met Artikel 9, de vrijheid van gedachte, geweten en godsdienst, van het ECHR geschonden.

Alevieten benadrukken ook de onrechtvaardigheid van het officiële onderwijssysteem, dat kinderen verplicht om acht jaar lang, te beginnen in de vierde klas van de lagere school, lessen in religieuze cultuur en ethiek te volgen, waardoor Soennitisch-Hanafische geloofsovertuigingen en praktijken worden opgedrongen. Alevieten beweren dat de verplichte lessen in religieuze cultuur en ethiek het recht op onderwijs schenden. Het Turkse Constitutionele Hof interpreteerde de verplichte lessen religieuze cultuur en ethiek als een noodzaak. In de zaken *Hasan en Eylem Zengin tegen Turkije*, 2007, en *Mansur Yalçın en anderen tegen Turkije*, 2005, heeft het EHRM echter verklaard dat de verplichte lessen religieuze cultuur en ethiek in strijd zijn met Artikel 2 van Protocol nr. 1, het recht op onderwijs.

3.2. Ervaringen en reacties van Alevieten met mensenrechtenschendingen

Het algemene antwoord op de tweede onderzoeksvraag over hoe Alevieten de internationale mensenrechten en de schendingen ervan in de praktijk ervaren en hierop reageren, benadrukt hoe verschillend de Alevieten die mensenrechtenschendingen ervaren. Alevieten voelen zich tweederangsburgers in hun betrekkingen met de Republiek Turkije en dragen verschillende oplossingen voor hun problemen aan. De lokalisering van mensenrechten, discriminatie en tweederangs burgerschap verklaren deze conclusie.

Alevieten en mensenrechten gelokaliseerd

Het concept 'lokaliseren van mensenrechten' verklaart hoe mensen de taal van de wereldwijde mensenrechten gebruiken; dit proces vereist 'toe-eigening' en 'vertaling' van mensenrechten. Toe-eigening verwijst naar het aanpassen van de ideeën over mensenrechten in een nieuwe omgeving met uiteenlopende omstandigheden en contexten. Vertaling is het proces van toepassing van het mondiale, algemene idee op lokale contexten; een aanpassing van het programma aan lokale situaties met een herdefiniëring van de doelgroep. Dit proces van 'vernacularisatie' heeft lagen en vertalers. De lagen kunnen verschillende betekenissen hebben, maar de vertalers lokaliseren de mensenrechtentaal.

In overeenstemming met het concept van het lokaliseren van mensenrechtengebruiken Alevieten bepaalde instellingen als 'vertalers' en profiteren ze van het idee van toe-eigening. Uit mijn empirisch onderzoek komt naar voren dat er verschillende vertalers, namelijk Alevitische NGO's en activisten, zijn. Deze vertalers vergroten het bewustzijn van de Alevieten over mensenrechten en vergemakkelijken de aanpassing van de internationale mensenrechtenwetgeving aan hun lokale omstandigheden. Er zijn ook verschillende lagen in het gebruik van mensenrechtentaal. Alevieten begrijpen hun problemen en conflicten vanuit historische, politieke, levensstijl- en/of religieuze dimensies. Bovendien zijn sommige Alevieten van mening dat de mensenrechtenproblemen niet uitsluitend door Alevieten worden ervaren, maar algemene problemen zijn voor alle inwoners van Turkije.

Discriminatie en Alevieten

In dit onderzoek wordt discriminatie geïnterpreteerd als het maken van ongerechtvaardigd onderscheid. Het onderscheid tussen het recht op gelijke behandeling en het recht op behandeling als gelijke is in dit verband nuttig. Het eerste is het recht op een gelijke verdeling van bepaalde kansen of middelen of lasten, het tweede betreft het meer fundamentele recht om met hetzelfde respect en dezelfde zorg te worden behandeld als ieder ander. Discriminatie kan niet alleen discriminatie door de staat betreffen, maar ook discriminatie door andere burgers (interpersoonlijke discriminatie). Mensen kunnen ook in het bedrijfsleven te maken krijgen met discriminatie vanwege hun politieke opvattingen of discriminatie, of omdat zij tot een andere religieuze groep behoren. Dit soort discriminatie kan ook voorkomen bij werving, selectie en bevordering.

Alevieten voelen zich in het sociale leven gediscrimineerd vanwege hun identiteit; dit komt tot uitdrukking in hun zorgen over werkloosheid, sociale uitsluiting of plaatsing op een zwarte lijst. De staat discrimineert Alevieten wat betreft het ontvangen van sociale voorzieningen en vanwege hun politieke voorkeur. Alevieten worden ook gediscrimineerd op het gebied van werkgelegenheid, zowel door de staat als door de particuliere sector.

Burgerschap en Alevieten

Burgerschap omvat elementen als het hebben van een wettelijke status, het kunnen uitoefenen van burgerrechten, deelname aan politieke besluitvormingsprocessen en het gevoel erbij te horen. Tweederangs burgerschap gaat over het niet gelijk behandeld worden ten opzichte van de dominante groep. Tweederangsburgers hebben geen toegang tot dezelfde mogelijkheden en middelen als de dominante groep.

Alevieten beschrijven zichzelf als tweederangsburgers als gevolg van verschillende vormen van discriminatie, overheidsbeleid (zie hierboven paragraaf 2.1), geen werk hebben of geen promotie kunnen maken in het bedrijfsleven. Alevieten verklaren ook dat zij met hun religieuze en culturele verschillen niet vertegenwoordigd zijn in de staat. De mensenrechtenschendingen en ervaringen van discriminatie beïnvloeden de relatie van Alevieten met de Republiek Turkije en hun opvattingen over hun burgerschapsstatus in de Republiek Turkije zodanig dat zij zichzelf als tweederangsburgers beschouwen.

Alevieten ervaren mensenrechtenschendingen in verschillende mate

Hoewel Alevieten zich de taal van mensenrechten hebben eigen hebben gemaakt, en zij zich gediscrimineerd voelen en de ervaring van het tweederangsburgerschap delen, ervaren zij de mensenrechtenschendingen op verschillende manieren. Terwijl sommige Alevieten zich weinig bewust zijn van mensenrechten en de schendingen hiervan, zijn anderen zich hier aanmerkelijk meer bewust van. Deze verschillende belevingen en duidingen van mensenrechtenschendingen door Alevieten kan aan de hand van de factoren in de volgende paragrafen van dit deel worden begrepen.

Alevieten ervaren mensenrechtenschendingen anders door hun verschillende historische ervaringen. De negatieve historische ervaringen, zoals geweld en onderdrukking, zorgden ervoor dat zij zich op meer geïsoleerde plaatsen vestigden die vaak met moeilijkere leefomstandigheden gepaard gingen. Hierdoor waren zij vooral gericht op overleven. Alevieten die meer weet hebben van deze historische ervaringen hebben ook een groter bewustzijn van mensenrechtenproblemen in Turkije.

De rol van Alevieten zelf en hun NGO's zijn eveneens van belang om de verschillende duidingen van de mensenrechtenschendingen te kunnen begrijpen. Een verbeterde toegang tot informatie, in het bijzonder via technologie en media, heeft de kennis van Alevieten over hun identiteit, en over hun rechten vergroot. Alevieten die zich sterk bewust zijn van hun religieuze

identiteit en deze vitaal proberen te houden, zijn zich bovendien er meer van bewust dat vanwege hun religieuze identiteit hun rechten worden geschonden. Op plaatsen waar Alevitische NGO's actief zijn, is het mensenrechtenbewustzijn van Alevieten vanwege hun religieuze identiteit hoger, omdat actieve Alevitische NGO's Alevieten bewust maken van mensenrechten en de schending daarvan. Er zijn ook Alevieten die geloven dat de mensenrechtenschendingen te wijten zijn aan hun politieke mening en/of levensstijl.

Sociale interactie tussen Soennieten en Alevieten is ook belangrijk omdat Alevieten die meer interactie hebben met Soennieten, meer gelegenheid hebben om hun respectieve mensenrechtensituatie te vergelijken. Deze vergelijking maakt ook dat Alevieten beter begrijpen dat zij zijn blootgesteld aan discriminatie en verwaarlozing. Deze interactie leidt er echter ook toe dat sommige Alevieten zwijgen over mensenrechtenschendingen uit angst op een zwarte lijst te komen of sociaaleconomisch uitgesloten te worden. Wanneer Alevieten hun eigen godsdienst niet volgen en praktiseren, sluiten ze dicht aan bij soennitische rituelen. Deze Alevieten praten niet veel over mensenrechtenproblemen die verband houden met hun Alevitische religieuze identiteit. Als gevolg van de opkomst van de politieke islam in Turkije verhinderen Soennieten die een meer conservatieve levensstijl hebben aangenomen, bovendien dat Alevieten hun levensstijl vrij kunnen leven en zetten zij Alevieten onder druk.

De relatie van de Alevieten met de staat is veranderd: van geweld, onderdrukking en ernstige schendingen van hun rechten, die zij vroeger, vooral in de Ottomaanse periode, ondervonden, naar een nieuwe vorm van discriminatie en meer verborgen en onzichtbare schendingen door verwaarlozing in de Republiek Turkije. De Turkse staat heeft ook in verschillende ontmoetingen met Alevieten erkend dat Alevieten mensenrechtenproblemen hebben. Door de problemen met en in de Turkse staat zijn de Alevieten zich meer gaan organiseren. Met andere woorden, de druk en de ernstige schendingen van de mensenrechtenschendingen hebben ertoe geleid dat Alevieten sinds de jaren negentig van de twintigste eeuw meer NGO's hebben opgericht en zich meer bewust zijn geworden van hun mensenrechten.

Tot slot speelt (inter)nationale migratie een rol in het begrijpen van de verschillende posities die Alevieten innemen ten opzichte van mensenrechtenschendingen. Door interne en internationale migratiebewegingen gaan Alevieten meer om met andere culturen. Alevieten die naar het buitenland migreren, leren daar meer over hun mensenrechten. Alevieten in Europa dragen de ideeën over gelijkheid, mensenrechten en vrijheid over aan Alevieten in Turkije omdat zij soms al dan niet tijdelijk of permanent naar Turkije terugkeren. Migratie heeft echter ook gevolgen voor de prioriteiten van de Alevieten. De omstandigheden van het stadsleven veranderen de prioriteiten van de Alevieten om te overleven. In reactie op de toenemende interactie met Soennieten als gevolg van interne migratie kiezen Alevieten er vaak voor om te zwijgen over de schendingen van het recht om problemen te vermijden, of om soennitische religieuze waarden over te nemen. Wanneer Alevieten economisch sterker worden door interne en internationale migratie, richten zij meer NGO's op en steunen zij deze.

Alevieten dragen verschillende oplossingen aan voor de hierboven geschetste problematiek. Er zijn twee verschillende benaderingen in dit verband. De meeste Alevieten benadrukken dat religie en staat van elkaar gescheiden moeten worden vanwege het secularisme. Andere Alevieten stellen juist dat de overheidssteun aan Alevitische religieuze activiteiten welkom is indien de staat alle godsdiensten daarbij gelijk behandelt.

3.3. Over de verbeelde Alevitische gemeenschap

De term 'verbeelde gemeenschappen' houdt in dat mensen die niet in een eenheid leven en elkaar niet persoonlijk kennen ook als gemeenschap kunnen worden gedefinieerd. Met andere woorden, mensen die elkaar niet kennen en geen direct contact hebben, kunnen de collectieve gemoedstoestand hebben dat zij zich samen een gemeenschap voelen en daarvan deel uitmaken

en kunnen dan als gemeenschap worden benoemd. Het concept verbeelde gemeenschap, samen met analyses van de empirische gegevens in dit proefschrift, geeft antwoord op de derde onderzoeksvraag: bestaat er zoiets als een Alevitische gemeenschap en zo ja, wat zouden kernelementen van deze gemeenschap zijn? Het is mogelijk om Alevieten te beschrijven als een verbeelde gemeenschap omdat zij zich van elkaar bewust zijn ondanks het feit dat zij niet in één gebied wonen. Alevieten delen het gevoel deel uit te maken van een gemeenschap vanwege hun gedeelde geschiedenis. Historisch gezien vormden Alevieten een gemeenschappelijke identiteit door de onderdrukking die zij onder het Ottomaanse Rijk ondergingen. Bijna alle Alevieten vermelden de negatieve ervaringen uit die periode. Alevieten verklaren dat zij gegevens en nieuws over elkaar verwerven via technologische ontwikkelingen als internet en andere media en dat deze hulpmiddelen hen bewust maken van elkaar en van hun mensenrechten. Alevieten komen meer te weten over andere Alevieten en hun mensenrechtenschendingen in een context van mondialisering waaronder ook interne en internationale stromen van mensen die heen en weer reizen.

3.4. De fluïde en hybride Alevitische identiteit

Identiteit verandert en is dynamisch; een ‘vloeibare identiteit’. Identiteit is een nooit eindigend experiment. Het verklaren van identiteit vanuit één enkel perspectief is niet mogelijk; identiteit is een constructief proces. In dit concept worden geschiedenis en (andere) culturen gezien als vormend voor onze identiteit (culturele identiteit). Identiteiten vloeien voort uit interacties met politieke, economische en culturele contexten. Hybridisering van de identiteit gaat over de veranderingen in de identiteit. Wanneer mensen met anderen relaties aangaan en nieuwe culturen ontmoeten, geven zij hun identiteit een nieuwe vorm door deelementen van deze culturele ontmoetingen op te nemen. De interactie van groepen mensen creëert nieuwe identiteiten en gemengde culturen; de resulterende hybriditeit is in tegenspraak met de gedachte van homogene identiteiten. Mensen hervormen, herscheppen en herformuleren hun identiteit als gevolg van interactie.

Het concept van fluïde en hybride identiteiten, samen met analyses van de empirische gegevens in dit onderzoek, geeft antwoord op de vierde onderzoeksvraag: als men kan spreken van een gemeenschap, wat is dan de rol van de Alevitische identiteit binnen de gemeenschap, wat houdt deze Alevitische identiteit in en hoe is deze veranderd in de afgelopen decennia? De Alevitische fluïde en hybride identiteit verandert voortdurend in interactie met de politieke en economische context, met andere Alevieten in het buitenland en met niet-Alevieten. Er is niet één enkel perspectief om de Alevitische identiteit te begrijpen. Er zijn religieuze, politieke en levensstijldimensies in de definitie van de Alevitische identiteit. Deze dimensies staan niet los van elkaar, want Alevieten die hun Alevitische identiteit beoordelen in termen van religie, kunnen deze ook invullen als een politieke of levensstijlidentiteit.

In de hybridisering van de Alevitische identiteit nemen Alevieten bepaalde kenmerken van hun omgeving over. Vanuit een historisch perspectief, in termen van religie en geloof, ontwikkelden de Alevieten in hun kennismaking met andere geloofssystemen, d.w.z. sjamanisme en islam, hun eigen syncretische religieuze identiteit.

De politieke dimensies van het Alevitisme worden samengevat en geconceptualiseerd in termen van secularisme, respect voor mensenrechten en democratie, revolutionair, republikeins, aanhanger van linkse politieke partijen zoals de CHP, Kemalistisch, voorstander van mensenrechten en gelijkheid, respect voor en geloof in de waarden van de Republiek Turkije die in de Turkse grondwet zijn vastgelegd.

Alevieten die het Alevitisme beschrijven als een levensstijl, stellen dat andere culturen en historische gebeurtenissen de Alevitische levensstijl hebben gevormd. Levensstijldimensies in het Alevitisme worden samengevat en geconceptualiseerd als aanhanger zijn van bepaalde oude

pre-islamitische Turkse gebruiken, beïnvloed zijn door het boeddhisme, een opstandig karakter hebben, modern zijn, tegen de conservatieve soennitische levensstijl van de Ottomaanse periode ingaan, humanistisch zijn, respect hebben voor het milieu, gelijkheid bevorderen en opkomen voor rechtvaardigheid.

Een meer publieke Alevitische identiteit met minder vitaliteit in de religieuze dimensie maar meer vitaliteit in de politieke en levensstijldimensies

Er kunnen twee dimensies van veranderingen in de fluïde en hybride Alevitische identiteit worden onderscheiden. Ten eerste is de Alevitische identiteit in vergelijking met vroeger meer openbaar. Ten tweede is de religieuze dimensie van de Alevitische identiteit minder vitaal als vroeger; de politieke en levensstijldimensies zijn echter vitaler.

De meer publieke Alevitische identiteit

Alevieten die op plaatsen wonen die religieus en historisch belangrijk voor hen zijn, voelen niet de behoefte om hun identiteit te verbergen en ervaren de assimilatiepogingen van de staat minder intensief.

Alevitische NGO's maken de Alevitische identiteit ook meer openbaar door activiteiten als cem ceremonies, protesten, congressen en festivals te organiseren en rechtszaken te voeren. Alevitische NGO's organiseren zelfs cem ceremonies die door mensen op televisie worden bekeken en die de Alevitische identiteit ook publiek maken.

De interactie tussen Alevieten en Soennieten is een andere factor om de meer publieke Alevitische identiteit te begrijpen, omdat Alevieten hun identiteit niet verbergen in hun relatie met Soennieten. Alevieten en Soennieten trouwen bijvoorbeeld met elkaar, wat vroeger ondenkbaar en onmogelijk was. Dergelijke interacties nemen ook toe door interne en internationale migratiebewegingen.

Sinds de veranderingen in de relatie tussen Alevieten en de staat (minder evidente onderdrukking, maar meer verborgen en onzichtbare mensenrechtenschendingen), hoeven Alevieten hun identiteit niet langer te verbergen en zijn ze meer publiek, omdat ze zich vrijer voelen in vergelijking met de periode van het Ottomaanse Rijk.

De toename van interne en internationale migratie heeft ook gevolgen voor de meer publieke Alevitische identiteit. Als gevolg van deze migraties zijn Alevieten economisch sterker geworden en zijn zij beter in staat hun NGO's op te richten en te ondersteunen. NGO's die economisch sterker zijn, zijn bovendien beter in staat activiteiten te organiseren (zoals cem ceremonies) die de Alevitische identiteit meer publiek maken.

Minder vitaliteit in de religieuze dimensie van de Alevitische identiteit, maar meer vitaliteit in de politieke en de levensstijldimensie

Alevieten leefden in armoede en onder zware levensomstandigheden in het Ottomaanse Rijk, maar deze situatie duurt nog steeds voort. Een dergelijke situatie belemmert ook de vitaliteit van de religieuze dimensie van het Alevitisme, omdat de Alevieten met hun moeilijke economische positie moeten betalen voor hun eigen religieuze bijeenkomsten en gebedshuizen. De vitaliteit van de politieke identiteitsdimensie van het Alevitisme houdt ook verband met het verleden. Historisch gezien heeft de Alevitische-Bektashi gemeenschap de roep om hervormingen en de beweging tegen het Ottomaanse sultanaat gesteund, vooral tijdens de periode van de Jonge Turken. In de hoop op hervormingen en vrijheid steunden de Alevieten Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, de Turkse Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog en de oprichting van de Republiek Turkije. De hervormingen in de nieuwe moderne Republiek Turkije, zoals de gelijkheid van mannen en vrouwen en de moderne levensstijl, zijn dan ook in overeenstemming met de Alevitische levensstijl.

Alevieten zelf zijn ook een factor in het minder vitaal worden van hun identiteit. Het uitzenden van cem ceremonies wordt ook beschouwd als een van de oorzaken van de degeneratie van de Alevitische religieuze rituelen, omdat cem ceremonies een vorm van amusement zijn geworden. Hoe doeltreffender de NGO's zijn, hoe groter het bewustzijn van de Alevitische religieuze identiteit. De activiteiten van de NGO's zijn echter niet volledig toereikend, omdat de Alevitische identiteit om andere redenen niet meer zo vitaal is als in het verleden. Dede's, de religieuze leiders van Alevieten, vervullen hun taak niet in overeenstemming met het Alevitisme en zijn onwetend en corrupt. Bovendien verwijten Alevieten dat de dede's geen cem ceremonies uitvoeren, geen cemevi constructies voltooiën en onvoldoende belang hechten aan de overdracht van de Alevitische orale tradities aan de volgende generatie. Het gebrek aan institutionalisering van het Alevitisme en het feit dat sommige Alevieten soennitische religieuze rituelen volgen, zijn ook oorzaken voor het verval van de Alevitische religieuze identiteit. Sommige Alevitische NGO's zien het Alevitisme vooral als politieke identiteit. Alevieten proberen ook hun levensstijl door te geven aan jongere generaties om zich te beschermen tegen het assimilatiebeleid van de staat door middel van verplichte lessen in religieuze cultuur en ethiek; zo houden zij de levensstijldimensie van de Alevitische identiteit vitaal.

Een betere communicatie met de Soennieten, samen met de onwetendheid van de Alevieten over hun eigen religieuze identiteit, leidt ook tot veranderingen in de religieuze identiteit van de Alevieten. Discriminatie, de zorg voor sociale uitsluiting die van Soennieten kan uitgaan, en de interne migratie, zoals hieronder nader wordt toegelicht, hebben ook tot gevolg dat Alevieten de religieuze rituelen van het Alevitisme niet volgen.

In de Republiek Turkije verbinden Alevieten hun identiteit met een linkse oriëntatie. Alevieten gebruiken een nieuwe term, wetenschappelijke assimilatie, wat betekent dat de staat probeert de religieuze overtuigingen van de Alevieten op een gestructureerde manier te assimileren met de soennitische waarden. De spanningsrelatie tussen de Alevieten en de Turkse staat leidt enerzijds tot minder vitaliteit in de religieuze dimensie van de Alevitische identiteit, maar anderzijds tot meer vitaliteit in de politieke dimensie.

Als gevolg van de interne migratie veranderen de prioriteiten van Alevieten, omdat de omstandigheden van het leven in de stad moeilijker zijn. Alevieten zijn meer bezig met overleven in de steden dan met hun religieuze identiteit. Bovendien maken de problemen in de stad het voor Alevieten moeilijker om hun religieuze rituelen uit te voeren. In de stad maken Alevieten geen bezwaar tegen verplichte lessen in religieuze cultuur en ethiek om hun kinderen op school niet te marginaliseren of met sociale uitsluiting te confronteren. Als gevolg van de internationale migratie wordt het Alevitisme vanuit een meer academisch perspectief bestudeerd en geëvalueerd, waardoor meer wetenschappelijke gegevens over de Alevitische identiteit beschikbaar komen. De mondialisering heeft ook gevolgen voor het Alevitisme. Doordat Alevieten nieuwe culturen in Europa hebben leren kennen, worden zij vrijer, richten zij NGO's op, en ondersteunen via deze NGO's de Alevieten in Turkije. Dit is echter niet voldoende om de religieuze rituelen van het Alevitisme in Turkije levend te houden. Door interne en internationale migratie wordt het Alevitisme ook onderdeel van politieke debatten. De Alevitische identiteit ondergaat dus verschillende veranderingen en wordt in dit opzicht gepolitiseerd.

3.5. Alevitische identiteit en constitutioneel patriottisme

Bij constitutioneel patriottisme gaat het erom dat men zich verbonden voelt met de waarden en beginselen van een democratische grondwet die politieke verbondenheid en gelijke rechten voor iedereen beoogt. Constitutioneel patriottisme is een onderdeel van het antwoord op de vierde onderzoeksvraag, of men kan spreken van een gemeenschap, wat de rol is van de

Alevitische identiteit binnen de gemeenschap, wat deze Alevitische identiteit inhoudt en hoe deze is veranderd in de laatste decennia. Deze vraag is al besproken in het vorige hoofdstuk, maar het begrip constitutioneel patriottisme voegt hier een extra dimensie aan toe. Ondanks de mensenrechtenschendingen, discriminatie en de behandeling als tweederangsburgers zijn Alevieten trouw aan de Republiek Turkije. Grondwettelijk patriottisme verklaart deze situatie. Alevieten tonen hun grondwettelijk patriottisme zowel in hun uitspraken als in sommige symbolen. In elke plaats die ik bezocht, zag ik symbolen zoals vlaggen of portretten van Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in huizen en zelfs in cemevis. Alevieten identificeren hun loyaliteit aan de Republiek Turkije met het zijn van aanhangers van Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, van zijn hervormingen en van de constitutionele waarden, te weten het secularisme, van Turkije. Vanuit historisch perspectief waren Alevitische Bektashi's aanhangers van de constitutionele en reformistische bewegingen, die begonnen in de laatste periode van het Ottomaanse Rijk, de nieuwe Republiek Turkije.

De meeste Alevieten en vertegenwoordigers van Alevitische NGO's benadrukken eerder de politieke dan de religieuze dimensie van de Alevitische identiteit, vooral in het stadsleven. In dit opzicht houden de Alevieten hun politieke identiteit ook door hun eigen inzet en die van de Alevitische NGO's vitaal. De Alevitische cultuur, overtuigingen en de constitutionele waarden van de moderne Turkse Republiek ontmoeten elkaar op gemeenschappelijke grond, namelijk de afwijzing van de sharia, wat ook het constitutionele patriottisme van de Alevieten verklaart.

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Appendix One

The developments of the codes are a mixture of ‘thematic coding’ based on the literature and research questions next to what is called ‘open coding’ in which the interview data and observations were connected to the thematic coding. This hybrid and personal way of analysing through coding was not a goal in itself, but merely a way of getting grip and giving meaning to an abundance and wealth of qualitative data. In the following, I will present some examples of master codes and subcodes that I developed and analysed my data with. The thematic master code ‘human rights’ (HR) is divided into subcodes that were grounded in the interviews, namely human rights and the Ottoman Empire (HR-OTTO), human rights after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (HR-TR), human rights and Alevis ignorance (HR-AI), human rights and Alevis themselves (HR-ALEVI), human rights and Alevi NGOs (HR-NGO), human rights and Alevis gain knowledge about their human rights (HR-KNOW), human rights and interaction with Sunnis (HR-SUNNI), human rights and the state education system (HR-EDU), human rights and places of worship (HR-PW), human rights and state discrimination (HR-DISC), human rights and the state neglecting Alevis (HR-NEG), human rights and internal migration (HR-INMIG), human rights and international migration (HR-INTMIG), human rights and return migration (HR-RMIG). The subcodes in this thematic master code are part of two categories: Human rights awareness of Alevis, and Alevis experiences and offer solutions related to human rights. The themes may be counted as historical experiences, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, Alevis’ relations with Sunnis, Alevis’ relations with the state, influence of (internal, international, and return) migration, which are all having connection with the human rights situation of Alevis. The first outcome, observation, of this analysis is: Alevis experience human rights violations, but in varying degrees, and they offer different solutions to their problems.

The subcodes under the thematic master code identity (ID) as such the outcome of research questions, literature and the interviews, are about Alevis religious identity (ID-RELIGIOUS), Alevis political identity (ID-POLITIC), the Alevi identity and citizenship (ID-CTZ), the Alevi identity and loyalty (ID-LYT), Alevis lifestyle identity (ID-LIFE), Alevi identity and the Ottoman Empire (ID-OTTO), Alevi identity and establishment of the Republic of Turkey (ID-TR), Alevi identity and ignorance of Alevis (ID-AI), Alevi identity and the role of *dedes* (ID-DEDE), Alevi identity and Alevi NGOs (ID-NGO), interaction with other belief systems (ID-INTERACT), the Alevi identity and community (ID-COMM), the Alevi identity and gain knowledge about their Alevi identity (ID-KNOW), the Alevi identity and Sunni interactions (ID-SUNNI), the Alevi identity and the state education system (ID-EDU), the Alevi identity and places of worship (ID-PW), the Alevi identity and state discrimination (ID-DISC), the Alevi identity and the state neglecting Alevi (ID-NEG), the Alevi identity and internal migration (ID-INMIG), the Alevi identity and international migration (ID-INTMIG), the Alevi identity and return migration (ID-RMIG). Such codes are a part of two categories: different forms of the Alevi identity; and changes in the Alevi identity. These themes are related to historical experiences, the influence of Alevis themselves and their NGOs, Alevis’ relations with Sunnis, Alevis’ relations with the state, influence of (internal, international, and return) migration, which are all explaining the different forms of Alevi identity and the change in the Alevi identity. As a result, the first outcome of this analysis is: Alevi identity is no longer hidden but a public identity. The second outcome is that, the religious dimension in the Alevi identity is not being practiced as before; but Alevism as a political identity and part of a lifestyle identity keeps its vitality.

Curriculum vitae

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Education

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Melih Uğraş Erol

Description	Organizer	EC
Required		
EGSL - Writing Clinic (2016)		5.00
EGSL - Academic Writing in English (2018)		4.00
EGSL - Managing your PhD (2018)		3.00
Total EC		----- + 12.00

Additional

Anthropology of Law

Section Seminars Sociology, Theory and Methodology	5 ects
Research Methods Anthropology, Ethnography	2 ects
Conference participation and Presentations	2 ects
Individual work to the Research Project	20 ects
	20 ects

Conferences & Workshops

The Annual Law, Culture and Humanities Graduate Student Workshop, March 31,2016, Association for the Study of Law, Culture & the Humanities, University of Connecticut Law School, USA.

The Balkans Dialogue: Conflict Resolution and EU Accession Politics in the Balkans and Turkey, February 8-9, 2012, Institute for Cultural Relations Policy, Budapest, Hungary. Erol, M.U. 'Violated Human Rights and Freedoms near the European Union (EU): Analysing the Turkish Alevi Community's Human Rights Position in the Process of EU Accession'.

Articles

Erol, M.U. 'Questioning Non-Discrimination, Equality, and Human Rights in Contemporary Turkey from the Perspective of the Alevi Religious Community' Muslim Journal of Human Rights, August 2015, ISSN (Online) 1554-4419, ISSN (Print) 2194-6558.

Erol, M.U. 'Remaining Loyal Despite their Diversity. The Diversifying Identity of the Alevi- Bektashi Community and Their Continuing Loyalty to the Republic of Turkey' International Review of Turkish Studies (IRTS) 2:2, June 2012.