



***UNWRITTEN POLICY, CONTRADICTION OR  
ACCEPTANCE IN TURKISH SOCIETY VIEWED FROM A  
RELIGIOUS LIFE PRESPECTIVE***

**KEBIJAKAN TIDAK TERTULIS, KONTRADIKSI ATAU  
PENERIMAAN DALAM MASYARAKAT TURKIYE DITINJAU  
DARI SUDUT PANDANG KEHIDUPAN BERAGAMA**

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Received: 06 September 2023, Revised: 11 November 2023, Accepted: 22 November 2023

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## Abstract

*The majority of Turkish society adheres to the Sunni Islamic faith, while the Alevi group has emerged with a different faith. The Alevi are a complex and diverse religious and cultural identity that has undergone numerous changes in its position, outlook and interactions with the rest of Turkish society. Turkish society is not static, the contradictory attitudes taken by Turkish society towards the Alevi community, and the shifting perspectives on Alevi religious life, are often questioned. Their society changes over time due to factors such as political developments, generations and social movements. By 2022 25 million Alevi people in Turkey will have no legal security. Alevis have faced challenges such as discrimination, unequal treatment and lack of recognition for their unique religious practices. This raises the issue of the Turkish government's policy in dealing with the problems of the Alevi community, the attitude of Turkish society in dealing with the contradictions of the Alevi community, and the comparison of Alevi beliefs with the beliefs of Turkish society and the impact of Alevi groups on Turkish society. This paper uses a descriptive qualitative research method with data analysis and literature review. The findings of this study are that the Turkish government does not have a structured and official policy on the acceptance or rejection of the Alevi community, and Turkish society is beginning to open up to the understanding of Alevi culture. Despite the differences between Sunni and Alevi Islam, the Alevi community is still able to perform their rituals without any hindrance.*

**Keywords:** *alevi, contradiction, turkish society, religious life, religious policy*

## Abstrak

Mayoritas masyarakat Turkiye menganut kepercayaan Islam Sunni sedangkan kelompok Alevi muncul dengan kepercayaan yang berbeda. Alevi adalah identitas agama dan budaya yang rumit dan beragam yang telah mengalami berbagai perubahan dalam kedudukan, pandangan, dan interaksinya dengan masyarakat Turkiye lainnya. Masyarakat Turkiye tidaklah statis, sikap kontradiktif yang diambil oleh masyarakat Turkiye terhadap komunitas Alevi, dan pergeseran perspektif tentang kehidupan keagamaan Alevi, sering dipertanyakan. Masyarakat mereka berubah dari waktu ke waktu karena faktor-faktor seperti perkembangan politik, generasi dan gerakan social. Pada tahun 2022 25 juta orang Alevi di Turkiye tidak memiliki jaminan hukum. Alevis telah menghadapi berbagai tantangan seperti diskriminasi, perlakuan yang tidak setara, dan kurangnya pengakuan atas praktik keagamaan mereka yang unik. Maka muncullah permasalahan tentang kebijakan pemerintah Turkiye dalam menghadapi problematika komunitas Alevi, sikap masyarakat Turkiye dalam menghadapi kontradiksi komunitas Alevi, dan perbandingan kepercayaan Alevi dengan kepercayaan masyarakat Turkiye serta dampak yang ditimbulkan kelompok Alevi terhadap dalam masyarakat Turkiye. Makalah ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis data dan tinjauan literatur. Penemuan dari penelitian ini bahwa Pemerintah Turkiye tidak menuliskan secara terstruktur dan resmi mengenai kebijakan penerimaan ataupun penolakan pada komunitas Alevi dan masyarakat Turkiye mulai terbuka dengan pemahaman budaya Alevi. Meskipun Islam sunni dengan Alevi berbeda, komunitas Alevi hingga kini masih dapat melaksanakan ritual mereka tanpa adanya halangan.

**Kata kunci:** *alevi, kontradiksi, masyarakat Turkiye, kehidupan beragama*

## INTRODUCTION

In order to further discuss Alevism in Turkey, it is essential to understand what Alevism carries in meaning, its characteristics, and how it plays a role in Turkish society. The term Alevi refers to Ali ibn Abi Thalib, the cousin of

Prophet Muhammad, along with his followers. From the nineteenth century on, the Alevi term was used to signify mystical religious societies living in the Anatolian and Balkan districts . Alevism has roots in Shia Islam and comes from a syncretic combination of Islam, local folk traditions, and other beliefs. It is essential to know that the Turks before Islam believed in Tengrism; their rituals were pretty similar to today's Alevism of Turkey. By way of explanation, the Alevism are practically a blend of nominal Islam with retained pre-Islamic beliefs and customs.

According to Prof. Dr. Hilmi Demir, both Shia and Alevism have similarities and differences, the most basic similarities between Shia and Alevism are that they both love Caliph Ali r.a., love Ahl-Bayt, and commemorate the events of Karbala, these three similarities are common features that can be found among Anatolians and Turks, until now these features are still continued by the Turks in Central Asia, then these features are maintained in Alevism-Bektashi, its literature is formed and institutionalized as a form of sect/belief called Bektashism (H. Demir, 2019).

Pir Musa Kazım Engin, son of “Kureyşan Ocağı”, mentioned the basic differences between Shia and Alevism, such as Islamic Sharia in Shia is applied based on the Qur'an, sunnah, hadith, ummah and kiyas, while in Alevism it is stated “The end of the road without knowledge is darkness”; In Alevism there is a mentor, Pir, Mursyid and Mother, while in Shia there is an imam; worship in Alevism is Cem and is performed in the cemavi before performing Cem will be interrogated and manners while Shia worship is performed in the mosque without any questions and manners when going to worship; The center of belief of Alevism is Pir Hacı Bektaş Veli Dervish Lodge while Shia Najaf is the center of their belief; Worship in Alevism always uses music, semah and baglama while Shia strongly consider music a sin in worship (PIRHA, 2020).

Alevism as it exists in Turkey today should be defined as a synthesis of Islamic beliefs influenced by Turkmen nomadic culture and Bektashi culture (M, 1997). Therefore, when compared with the Shia in Indonesia, it is very different, Shia in Indonesia which entered in the 16th century in Indonesia was influenced by the Iran Shia sect, the Indonesian Shia sect was coordinated by the Jakarta ICC which was chaired by Mohsen Hakimullah from Iran (Arkanudin, 2021).

During the 19th century, Orientalists began researching the Bektashi group, followed by studies on the origins of the Kızılbaş group. The Orientalists drew parallels between the Bektashi and Kızılbaş groups, suggesting that their beliefs had Christian origins. According to these Orientalists, the Kurdish Kızılbaş group

in eastern Turkey was believed to have originated from Armenia. Missionary groups during this era also started attempting to convert the Kızılbaş groups in Turkey to Christianity, which raised concerns within the Ottoman Empire about the increasing number of Kızılbaş individuals converting to Christianity. During the reign of Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman Empire categorized the Alevi as Muslims and attempted to guide them toward true Islam (E. Yilmaz, 2021).

According to (Akın, 2021), there is a distinction between Alevism and Bektashism. Alevism is a structured belief system organized within “ocaks” (hearth organizations), while Bektashism is one of the components of these “ocaks.” Significant figures within the Alevi community recognized as “Kalenderis” within the “ocak” structure include Baba İlyas, Dede Garkın, Barak Baba, Sarı Saltık, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Geyikli Baba, Otman Baba, Abdal Musa, Şeyh Şücaeddin Veli, and Kaygusuz Abdal. During the 4th and 5th centuries, there was a belief that nomadic Turkish people living in Central Asia adhered to Shamanism. Shamanism evolved by incorporating elements from various religions such as Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism, Christianity, and Judaism. In the narrative of Alevi-Bektashism, there is a connection with Central Asian Shamanism, and this connection is interwoven with elements of Anatolian and Mesopotamian mythology. It can be said that Alevi-Bektashism is closely linked to ancient Turkish beliefs (Değer, 2019).

The term “Alevi” designation can vary from one Alevi group to another, as exemplified by the Alevi group in the Arab region, which is not referred to as Alevi-Bektashi, but rather as Nusayris or Ensariyye. This group follows the leadership of Muhammad bin Nusayr and is located in the northwest of Syria. Alevi Nusayris have distinct beliefs from Alevi groups in Turkey. The beliefs of Alevi Nusayris draw from İsmailiyyah beliefs, pre-Islamic traditions, Shia teachings, and Messianic beliefs. This group believes in reincarnation, which is divided into two parts: physical and spiritual reincarnation. Additionally, the Alevi Nusayri group respects the prophets and also honors Jesus. They celebrate Messianic celebrations and baptisms as well (Meşkur & İsfahanî, 2019).

The majority of Turkish people practice Alevi-Bektashism. Alevi-Bektashism is a subdivision of Alevism that draws upon concepts and practices from the Bektashi Sufi order. The inception of Bektashism occurred in the 13th century in the Ottoman Empire and has had a profound effect on Alevism, particularly in Anatolia and the Balkans. Alevi-Bektashism began when the religious views of the Turks in Transoxiana, the presence of sheikhs and Sufis in Anatolia, the impact of Greek culture and Christianity in the area, and the cultural regulations

of the Seljuk kings all played a significant part in the formation and customs of Alevi-Bektashism (Hanoglu, 2020).

During the twentieth century, many Turkish nationalists, Alevism scholars, and Alevis have accepted the idea of a single 'Alevi-Bektashi' identity and often refer to it as 'Alevi-Bektashi' (Wilson, 2015). However, the terms Alevism and Bektashism are not interchangeable; Alevis never claimed Sunni lineage while the Bektashi order was officially Sunni, and until 1826, Bektashism was recognized by the Ottoman Empire (Wilson, 2015). The elite Janissary Corps of the Ottomans were connected with Bektashism until they were cruelly abandoned, outlawed, and slaughtered in 1826.

The important key to Alevi-Bektashism is based on spiritual leaders, as they lead spiritual ceremonies, the concepts of baba or fatherhood, syncretism, and the emphasis on love, tolerance, and social justice, The emergence of Alevi-Bektashi, by virtue of its syncretic structure, can be viewed as an unrestricted way of transforming into Islam. As opposed to the widely known Islamic rituals, such as Ramadan or daily prayers, the dervishes of Alevi-Bektashi belief manifested a more tolerant approach to spiritual familiarity with Islam with regard to their pre-Anatolian central Asian religious components (E. Yilmaz, 2021).

Alevis always appear as having controversial characteristics as a heterodox branch of Islam; Alevilik seems to be a less well-defined tradition. However, some scholars commonly agree on defining Alevism as a unique belief system of Islam (Hanoglu, 2020). The known history of Alevis is not only about religious affiliation but is also related to a particular geography and has become a part of identity politics. During Ottoman Empire periods, Alevis used to call themselves Qizilbash. The Ottoman Empire persecuted the Alevis due to their support of the Safavids. The Alevis experienced hardship throughout the Ottoman Empire period. Alevi issues have always been seen as something different, as well as facing discrimination. Despite the negative insight about them, Alevi-Bektashi became a favorite among Turkish Secular-nationalists connected to the Republican period. Due to the negativity the Kızılbaş group received during the Ottoman era, the name Kızılbaş was eventually replaced with Alevism in the 19th century. However, in Anatolia Alevism is often referred to as Alevism-Bektashiism and this belief is used to express a religion other than Sunni (Canpolat, 2023).

In the decades following the transformation to the Republic of Turkey, the Alevi-Bektashi were perplexed by their situation. Nevertheless, their way of life

has always been interesting to study. This study will focus on the main problems that occur in the Alevi community, such as the Turkish government's policy in dealing with the problems of the Alevi community, then to find out the attitude of Turkish society in dealing with the contradictions of the Alevi community, and finally to find out the comparison of Alevi beliefs and beliefs of Turkish society and the impact that Alevi groups have on Turkish society.

## **METHOD**

In this study, the author will employ a qualitative descriptive research method. The descriptive method will be explained in the background by the author. The data analysis technique for this research will involve using literature data as secondary research data. The data collection technique will involve a literature review (library research). The author will search for relevant data or writing materials through books, research journals, websites, and official newspapers that align with the topic that will be discussed by the author. After the data has been gathered, the author will conduct an analysis and, finally, draw conclusions based on the indicators of the causes that give rise to contradictions in the rejection or acceptance of the Alevi community by Turkish society, as well as the perspectives on the religious life of the Alevi community.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Beliefs in the Religious Life of the Alevi Group**

During the Ottoman Empire era, the Alevi group was known as Kızılbaş and Rafizi, but in the 19th century, the term changed to "Alevi." Alevi and Sunni Islam have several differences in their religious practices. The fundamental beliefs of the Alevi sect mostly align with Islam, although there are various interpretations within Alevism. Their interpretation framework revolves around the trilogy of divinity, prophethood, and guardianship (Yağbasan & Öztürk, 2016). Historically, the naming of Alevi is based on their lineage, such as descendants of Hacı Bektas, Kızılbaş (Erdebil Sufi), Dede Garkın, Hubyar, Tahtacı, Keçeci Baba, each with their own interpretations of beliefs and practices within the framework of spiritual orders (tarikāt) and Sufi life (Üçer, 2018). From the past to the present, the Alevi group has followed customs and practices in their religious beliefs, such as the Cem ritual performed at the "meydan evi," practices of repentance, sema rituals, seeking forgiveness, the symbolism of fire, worship of three individuals, five individuals, seven individuals, forty

holy individuals, the sacrifice of Abdal Musa (Sakramen) performed in Elmali Antalya, the sacrifice of Kızıldeli, the practice of musahip, the practice of dar, the practice of muharram, the performance of dervish prayers, fasting during muharram, and pilgrimages to Karbala (Coşkuner & Aslan, 2020).

According to (Arslan, 2022), in Alevi belief, the core elements consist of (Uçler) Allah, Muhammad, and Ali, while (Beşler) refers to the members of Ahl-Bayt, including Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Fathimah, Hasan, and Husein. Alevism's affection for Ahl-Bayt has deep historical roots. There are two opinions about the term "Yediler" (Seveners) within Alevism. According to dedes (spiritual leaders) and the followers of the Cibali lineage, "Yediler" refers to seven great lovers: Hatayi, Nesimi, Fuzuli, Kul Himmet, Virani, Yemini, and Pir Sultan Abda. However, according to the Alevi sect residing in the village of Eskiyapar, "Yediler" comprises Allah, Muhammad, Ali, Khadijah, Fatimatuz Zahra, Salman Al-Farisi, and Kanber. Based on Alevi beliefs, the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad should have been Ali, and some Alevi communities consider Ali a prophet. This view leads to Alevi groups avoiding naming their children Ali, Aishah, or Umar, which creates a negative perception of other caliphs (Karakoyunlu, 2023).

In their worship, the Alevi group has unique practices. They hold a negative view of important Islamic rituals, influenced by factors such as their itinerant lifestyle, external influences during the Islamization process, and the concept of "teberra," which means "not to love those who don't love Ali." This concept excludes those who dislike Ali from Alevi identity and even from being considered part of Islam. The Alevi understanding of wudhu (ablution) differs from the general Islamic understanding. They have both a spiritual wudhu performed throughout the day and a physical wudhu done through bathing. There is even a term for "wudhu tahunan" (yearly ablution) performed during the cem ceremony by washing only the fingers (A. İ. Demir & Şanlı, 2018).

According to the research by (Arslan, 2022), the Alevi group's interest in performing Friday prayers (jum'at) is greater than the five daily prayers. For instance, in six villages inhabited by Alevi communities, around 1 to 30 people attend Friday prayers, whereas only 1 to 10 people attend the five daily prayers. Some Alevi individuals refuse to perform regular prayers, but this doesn't mean that the concept of prayer is absent within the Alevi group. The murder of Ali in a mosque and the propaganda by the Umayyad dynasty during the mosque's transformation have contributed to Alevi reluctance to attend mosques and participate in regular prayers.

Within Alevi beliefs, the Cem ritual holds great significance. Cem signifies unity, togetherness, and gathering. The Cem ritual takes place between Thursday night and Friday, emphasizing unity and equality between men and women as it celebrates the love for Allah, Muhammad, and Ali. In the past, Cem rituals were held in Bektashi Tekkes or in the Kızılbaş village homes. During the Cem ritual, all participants are considered equal, regardless of gender, status, or position. The place for performing Cem is known as a Cemevi. Various forms of Cem ceremonies and their functions include:

1. İrşad Cem focuses on educating the younger generation about Alevism, teaching proper behavior during Cem, guiding prayer practices, and fostering human relationships.
2. Koldan Kopma Cem focuses on social problem-solving and decision-making guided by dedes based on majority opinions.
3. Müsahiblik Cem aims to mold individuals into complete beings (*insan kamil*) and solidify relationships between families through the sacrifice of an animal.
4. Lokma Cem focuses on reconciliation and agreements among individuals, often involving commemorations of deceased relatives through shared meals.
5. Abdal Musa Cem focuses on conflict resolution and unity-building, often involving sharing food between conflicted parties to foster peace.
6. Görgü Cem participants must have good reputation, ethics, and manners and must believe in Allah, Muhammad, and Ali, treating each other as equals.
7. Dardan İndirme Cem focuses on questioning the deceased, where close relatives answer questions posed to the deceased. Any complaints from the deceased are resolved during this ceremony, including repaying debts if applicable (Yıldız, 2020).

The month of Muharram holds significant importance for the Alevi community, as exemplified by the Alevi group residing in Mersin. During the month of Muharram, they conduct a twelve-day event to commemorate the lineage of the Ahl-Bayt family, who were martyred in Karbala. Alevi individuals observing fasting during Muharram are required to avoid various activities such as:

- Not consuming meat
- Abstaining from drinking plain water during fasting



- Avoiding harm to living creatures
- Abstaining from festive events like celebrations and weddings
- Prohibition on using knives
- Refraining from consuming alcohol and smoking
- Avoiding marital relations
- Not holding gatherings like “Cem”.

Within the Alevi Cultural Association (AKD) branch in Mersin, a space is typically provided during the month of Muharram for individuals who wish to fast together. Those participating in the collective fast usually bring “lokma” (food offerings), which are then blessed by the dede (spiritual leader). During these gatherings, discussions are held with varying topics over the course of the twelve-day fasting period. Candles are lit during these discussions, and they are extinguished when the discussions conclude. On the thirteenth day, a thanksgiving sacrifice (kurban syukur) is performed (Eker, 2019). The concept of sacrifice (kurban) within the Alevi community differs significantly from the Sunni Islamic tradition. In the Alevi context, the sacrifice is a sign of gratitude for the salvation of Imam Hussein’s son, Zain Al-Abidin. During the month of Muharram, the Alevi community prepares and makes “aşure,” a dessert dish. The roots of the aşure tradition are traced back to the story of Prophet Noah, who, when the food on his ark was nearly exhausted, cooked whatever was left in a pot, giving rise to aşure. In the Alevi community, there is no fixed date for preparing aşure, so some prepare it on the tenth day of Muharram fasting, while others do so on the twelfth day (Eker, 2019).

The term of Alevi is one of important part of the Turkish cultural History. Their tradition such as Semah Ritueli carries important images from the Central Asian Turkish culture. Semah is a family of ritual dance marked by spinning and swirling, the practice of semah performed by both genders together, with the Ba’lama providing musical accompaniment. The dances represent several things, such as laying oneself aside and joining with God, as well as the revolution of the planets around the Sun by depicting men and women turning in circles. Semah ritual is also a religious practice that finds its basis in the Alevism-Bektashi system of thought and is kept alive. The Samah dance is an integral part of the spiritual and religious practices of Alevism and Bektashism. It is performed as a means of connecting with the divine, achieving spiritual ecstasy, and expressing devotion to God. The dance is often accompanied by music, typically played on instruments. The dance carries rich symbolism. The spinning motion represents the celestial bodies in motion, echoing the cosmic order. It is also interpreted

as a symbol of the soul's journey towards God. Samah dance often promotes gender equality, with both men and women participating in the dance together. This reflects the egalitarian values present in Alevi and Bektashi beliefs. The samah dance not only expressing connection between human and God but also expressing the feelings The Samah dance is a form of worship and devotion. It allows participants to express their love, gratitude, and surrender to the divine presence. In the context of specific ritualistic practices, denoted as "semahs," certain animals of cultural significance such as cranes, sheep, horses, and camels are emblematically incorporated. These animals, deeply intertwined with the sociocultural fabric of the Turkish populace, hold pivotal symbolic roles within the semah performances (Arnaud-demir, 2022).

One such semah, known as the "Crane Semah," is characterized by its ubiquity across various regions. Functioning as a performative representation of the crane avian species, this semah manifests as a visual and kinetic tribute to the crane. The crane, resonating with profound metaphysical connotations within the Alevi-Bektashi belief framework, akin to its import in Shamanic rituals, becomes intrinsically linked with the personas of "Turna" (crane) and Ali ibn Abi Talib. Symbolic gesture-mimicry is employed as the dancers emulate the crane's airborne maneuvers, static postures, wing oscillations, and its celestial trajectory. For instance, among the Alevi community affiliated with the Hubyar Sultan Hearth in Tokat, a distinct semah ceremonial practice is observed. This entails the engagement of three dervishes in orchestrating the revolutions of three female participants. Characterized by its high-velocity gyration, reminiscent of a wheel in swift rotation, this phase of the semah is evocative of the frenetic movement of a fly. This particular manifestation of the semah, observed within the Hubyar Sultan Hearth, serves as an archetypal model influencing the wider regional semah practices (Ersoy, 2019). From a cultural perspective Alevi tradition cannot separated by the original Turkish culture, however from religious perspective the way they practicing by blend culture and religion going too far against the form of Islam.

Alevism, a distinct religious and cultural tradition with influences from Islam, Sufism, and local beliefs, has a variety of festivals and observances that hold significance for its followers. These festivals are an important part of Alevi identity and provide opportunities for community bonding, spiritual reflection, and the commemoration of historical events. The Alevis festivals are contains religious and cultural, such as Gadir Hum, the event of Ghadir Khumm in Islamic tradition, when Prophet Muhammad is said to have appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib

as his successor. This festival highlights the importance of Ali among Alevis, and it's a time for reflection on his role in Alevi-Bektashi beliefs. Then the Nevruz festival is a spring festival celebrated by various cultures, including Alevis. It marks the beginning of spring and is often associated with renewal, growth, and the victory of light over darkness. Alevi communities gather to participate in communal rituals, including lighting bonfires, performing traditional dances like the halay, and reciting meaningful poetry. On the 6th or 7th of May, Alevis celebrating Hıdırellez. Hıdırellez is celebrated as a period of regeneration and transformation. It is thought that on this day, Hızır and Ilyas come together and determine the destiny of individuals for the upcoming year.

Hıdırellez signifies a time of changing and new beginnings. It's believed that wishes made on this day may come true, and the convergence of Hızır and Ilyas emphasizes the intertwining of the mystical and material realms. Alevi communities mark the occasion with outdoor celebrations, festivities and practices that involve praying for good changes in their lives. On the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, holds significance for both Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as Alevis. While it has various historical and religious meanings, for Alevis, it's often a day of mourning and remembrance. The events of Ashura are interpreted through the Alevi perspective, emphasizing themes of justice, resistance, and solidarity. For Alevis, Ashura is a day of sorrowful remembrance. They remember the death of Husayn and the sorrow of Karbala. This day symbolizes the values of self-sacrifice, the fight against oppression, and the significance of standing by our principles. The Alevis also celebrate Karbela, its similar to Ashura, Kerbela commemorates the Battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Husayn, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, in the Shia tradition.

This event is remembered by Alevis in their own way, reflecting their distinct understanding of history and spirituality. Another festival is Cem, Cem ceremonies are central to Alevi worship practices. They are not held on specific dates but are important gatherings where Alevis engage in spiritual rituals, including recitation of poetry (*deyiş*), music, and dance (*semah*). Cem ceremonies are aimed at fostering a sense of unity, equality, and spiritual connection among participants. The other interesting festival is Pir Sultan Abdal festival. This festival honors the 16th-century Alevi poet and mystic Pir Sultan Abdal. It takes place annually in Sivas, Turkey, and includes poetry readings, musical performances, discussions, and cultural events that celebrate Alevi identity and heritage. Each festival in Alevism carries specific spiritual, cultural,

and social meanings that contribute to the holistic understanding of Alevi beliefs and identity.

### Contradictions of Alevism in Turkey Over Time

Before discussing the contradictions that occur within the Alevi community, the data regarding the distribution of Alevi settlements in Turkey are as follows (table 1 and graphic 1):

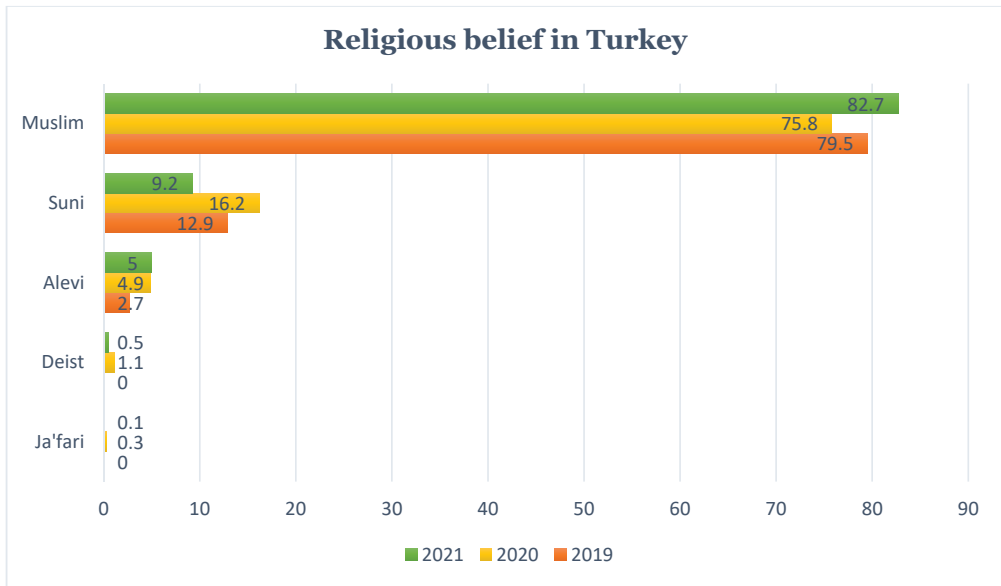
**Table 1.**  
*Alevi settlements in Turkey*

City	Total of settlements	City	Total of settlements	City	Total of settlements
Sivas	534	Muş	47	Aydın	28
Tunceli	388	Gümüşhane	44	Bursa	27
Erzincan	317	Manisa	41	Ardahan	24
Tokat	225	Adana	39	Edirne	23
Çorum	211	Eskişehir	39	Kırıkkale	23
K. Maraş	161	Mersin	37	Afyon	21
Malatya	159	Kayseri	37	Muğla	19
Amasya	113	Ordu	37	Çanakkale	17
Erzurum	112	Ankara	36	Denizli	15
Yozgat	88	Samsun	35	Kırklareli	13
Bingöl	78	Gaziantep	33	Nevşehir	12
Adıyaman	77	İzmir	33	Giresun	11
Hatay	76	Antalya	32	Bayburt	9
Elazığ	61	Kars	31	Çankırı	8
Balıkesir	49	Kütahya	31	İsparta	8
Aksaray	8	Sinop	6	Düzce	4
Osmaniye	8	Tekirdağ	6	Bilecik	3
Diyarbakir	7	Kocaeli	5	Kilis	3
Burdur	6	Zonguldak	4	Konya	2
Şanlıurfa	6	Niğde	1		
Yalova	2	Trabzon	1		

City	Total of settlements	City	Total of settlements	City	Total of settlements
Kırşehir	1	Uşak	1		

Note: <https://www.aleviforum.net/Konu-turkiye-alevi-koyleri-haritasi.html>.

**Graphic 1.**  
 Religious Belief in Turkey



Note: <https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/turkiye-egilimleri-web-basin.pdf>.

In 2013, Rasim Bozbuğa estimated the Alevi population in Turkey to be between 4.5 million and 6 million, based on the number of Alevi settlements in Turkey, making up 6-8% of Turkey’s total population of 76.5 million in 2013. However, this number is often disputed because the population of Turkey itself has not been clearly revealed, making it difficult to provide a clear figure for the Alevi population, and there are no official or unofficial sources that can be trusted to provide detailed and valid information on Alevi settlements in Turkey (Bozbuğa, 2013). According to Musu Kulu, deputy chairman of the DAD (Democratic Alevi Dernekleri), 25 million Alevi people in Turkey have no legal guarantees, and the Alevi population will reach 25 million by 2022 (Erbil, 2022). The majority of the Turkish population predominantly adheres

to Sunni Islam, and even the state's understanding of Islam and the traditions within Turkish society largely align with Sunni teachings. Therefore, it's not surprising that the emergence of other religious groups, such as the Shia or the Alevi community, creates contradictions within society. These contradictions arise because these groups are perceived to have interpretations that deviate from orthodox Islam (Köse & Tuğsuz, 2021). The numerous differences in religious beliefs among Alevis have led to pronounced contradictions within the community. Throughout history, the geographical region of Anatolia has been a host to the Alevi community. Many conflicts have arisen between the Alevi group and the society in this region, resulting in the Alevi community in Anatolia migrating to various other areas. During the Ottoman period, the Alevi group was marginalized from its homeland due to social tensions, and the massacres of Alevi tribes by the government of Sultan Yavuz Sultan Salim were inevitable. Later, during the era of the Republic, the Alevi community underwent migration due to political and economic developments. Forced relocations of the Alevi group also occurred, resulting in numerous casualties during their period of displacement (Araz, 2016).

In the 1990s, Alevi activists began to emphasize the differences between Sunni Islam and Alevism, and during this period, the Alevi resurgence also started with the emergence of various publications written by Alevi authors. However, this resurgence was misused by those who opposed Alevism. Discrimination against the Alevi group occurred in almost every field. In the social realm, there were instances such as the rejection of marriages between Alevi and Sunni groups and Sunni individuals refusing food offered by Alevi individuals. In the economic sphere, unfair treatment or termination from jobs often happens to Alevi groups. Discrimination also extended to the political sphere, where opinions, complaints, or proposed solutions from the Alevi group were not heard (Naf'an & Yumitro, 2022).

Rejection of Alevism has persisted from the past to the present, carried out by both the state and society in various ways. The AKP (Justice and Development Party), for instance, has refused to acknowledge the demands put forth by the Alevi community and has instead sought to encourage them to worship in ways similar to Sunni Islam. There is rejection of Alevi demands to recognize Cemevis as places of worship and the rejection of registering Alevism as a religious affiliation on identity cards. Discrimination against the Alevi community includes instances like Alevi workers being dismissed from their jobs and the tragic killing of 33 Alevis in the Madımak Hotel in Sivas (Kenanoğlu, 2016).

The Alevi group desires a country that separates religion and state interests, a democratic state with no discrimination, considering all citizens equal before the law, where all religious beliefs are treated equally and granted freedom. To achieve this aspiration, the Alevi group employs various methods, such as taking to the streets in protest, demonstrating, going on hunger strikes, and holding workshops. However, all of these efforts have yielded no results. During the early period of the Turkish Republic, many Alevi groups faced oppression and exclusion; Alevi beliefs were prohibited; Sufi groups were suppressed; and massacres occurred in Dersim, Maraş, Çorum, and Sivas (Celalattin, 2022).

In contemporary Alevism groups, there are common debates about the nature of the Alevi group, including: 1. Whether Alevism is a sect or a religion, 2. The relationship between Shia and Alevism, 3. Whether Alevism is in contradiction with Islam or within the scope of Islam, 4. Recognition of the identity of the *cemevi* (Alevi place of worship). The religious understanding within the Alevi group is influenced by Shia understanding, Sufism, and Turkmenistan traditions. The identity of the Alevism group is considered to be within the scope of Islam, but the beliefs of Alevism-Bektashi are partially part of their sub-main identity. One similarity between Alevism and Shia is their shared affection for the family of Prophet Muhammad (Ahl al-Bayt) (Arslan, 2022).

Throughout the reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, many Alevis held out hope for their equality as citizens in comparison to the Sunni majority, especially in the face of the promised secularization of the Turkish state. The connection between Republic and Alevis was clear enough, it was seen as a sign of solidarity that Atatürk visited Hacıbektaş in 1919, symbolizing a bond between the Republic and Alevis (Massiacard 2015). The status of the Alevis during establishment of the Turkish Republic still changeless, the light of secularization was not bright as promises. Modernization unfortunately forced all people to disengage to their beliefs, which means Alevis should disengage to their ritual and leave the concept of *baba*. Secularism in Turkey does not necessitate equivalency between religions and sects, and instead, Alevism is specifically excluded (Massicard, 2019).

Furthermore, the Republic's relationship with Alevis continued to keep Alevism at a distance in the process of modernisation and identity formation. Despite Alevis being viewed as the keepers of Turkishness and the embodiment of pre-Islamic Turkish history, they were simultaneously viewed as an impediment to modernization (Elhan, 2022). Even though the Alevis appeared as supporter of the Turkish Republic, it was not changing their position and their privileged

in the society. The institution of the state shows its intent to control religion through its secularist ambition. Nevertheless, this has not been a defining trait for every administration. As governments have changed, some of them have been more lenient towards Islam and even intertwined it with religion (Gedik, n.d.). Despite advocating their dedication to the original values of the Republic, particularly its secularism, Alevism were still impeded by legal and institutional roadblocks that prevented them from following their traditional values and lifestyles during the early Republican era.

As time unveil the past, the fact that the position of Alevis has never changed. In the early 1960s, the development of urban areas and modernization caused a shift in the traditional Alevi identity and social systems. Today, most of the Alevis population lives in cities and is organized around new institutions. The process of modernization and rapid urbanization has had a significant impact on the meaning of today's Alevi identity. Alevi activists had attempts to establish Alevi non-governmental organizations throughout the 1960s (Massicard, 2019). The research of Alevism has become popular in the 1980's. Since the 1980s, two main types of Alevism have been observed: traditional and modern. Alevi scholars perceived them as part of the same thread, with traditional Alevism defined by the Alevi identity. Both were accepted as an integrated whole. Highlighting that they did not gain "equal rights" in the past, the modernized Alevis declared that they experienced unfairness and even experienced major massacres. They invoked this as a rationale for their founding. They argued that the wrongs perpetrated against them were rectified with the citizenship rights conferred by the Republic. For this reason, they embraced modernity with the Republic, and they mentioned that Alevism also overlaps with modern discourse, and that this discourse was in the doctrines of Alevism centuries ago.

Alevi radicalization arises due to several factors such as historical trauma, regional conflicts, failures in achieving national transformation, lack of a strong and just order that could influence the Alevi community, fear of victimization, and alienation from societal life. The younger Alevi generation exposed to these factors tends to adopt extreme ideologies. Alevi youth engaging in radicalism and joining leftist movements face imprisonment on terrorism charges and many are forced to leave their own countries (Çakır, 2023).

Alevis and Sunnis are separated in social life and even in political life, the two faiths are divided. Most Alevis follow left-wing politics, which is why they are often described as Atheists, Marxists and Communists, but Sunnis support right-wing politics, which results in them being labeled as fanatics, sharia



supporters, reactionaries, idealists and nationalists. The reason why Alevism and Sunniism are generally divided is because of political interests, The split in politics and the separation in social life has exposed Alevism to discrimination (Canpolat, 2023).

## **Formation of Alevi Identity in Turkey**

In 2009 and 2010, the Alevi group organized workshops in an effort to establish closer ties with the government. However, these meetings did not yield positive results. The Alevi community demanded recognition from the government, while the government sought to define Alevism within the context of Islam. The Alevi group began engaging in political and social realms and aligning themselves with leftist movements in the 1960s. In the 1990s, the Alevi group began displaying their identity by capitalizing on opportunities to shape social, cultural, and political movements. During the 1990s, the Alevi group attempted to establish the Peace Party under the leadership of Ali Haydar Vaziroğlu, which generated debate but did not come to fruition. To avoid massacres like the Sivas massacre and to gain cultural recognition and citizenship status in public life, the Alevi community chose to engage in politics within the secular republic (Orhan, 2021).

Alevism in Turkey has two essential pillars of demand, both debated widely: legal and perceptual. These demands stem from the Alevi community's sense of discrimination, leading to a fear of extinction. To counter this, the Alevi group endeavors to establish legal foundations to preserve their autonomy and culture. The goal of legalizing Alevi identity is to make it more visible and clear to the public, ensuring that the group is not treated differently. Meeting Alevi demands requires mobilizing society, not just strengthening legal or political efforts, as community recognition is crucial for reinforcing Alevi identity acceptance (Köse & Tuğsuz, 2021).

During the Seljuk and Ottoman empires, the Alevi group acquired a marginalized ethnic identity, which resulted in their exclusion and discrimination as a perceived different group. During the urbanization era, the search for Alevi group identity began challenging traditional values, and their belief structures underwent transformation and erosion. In the postmodern era, the Alevi group experienced globalization, urbanization, socio-ideological changes, and postmodernism, leading to various consequences (Erzincan, 2023). In this postmodern era, a massive transition took place as the Islamic-centered Ottoman Empire collapsed and was replaced by Kemal Atatürk's government,

which turned Turkey into a republic that adopted Western nationalism to build a modern national culture, thus making many policies transmogrified, In the Kemalist era, Alevi groups were praised by the secularist Kemalist elites, who believed that Alevism was the Turkish version of İslam without sharia and allies, and Alevism was a group that strongly supported secularism, which they believed was a condition for escaping İslamist discrimination (Hanoglu, 2020).

Since the 1990's, the legalization of Alevi group organizations has begun, and they adopted the name "Cemevi." In the 1980's, Alevi associations were established in Turkey, including Hacı Bektaş Association and Sultan Abdal Association (Levent, 2020). Categorized as Alevi associations in Turkey and Europe, there are around 2,000 associations, with 600 established in cities and towns and the remaining 1,400 in rural areas. Central city associations in Turkey comprise 360 associations, and there are an additional 240 associations in Europe. These associations vary in size from 50 to 5,000 members (Saraç 2014). An Alevi group organization in Turkey, the Zeynabiye movement, consists of Turkish Shia citizens from İğdir city and differs from Anatolian Alevis due to its affiliation with the Iranian Shia movement (Levent, 2020).

The popularity of the Alevi group in Turkey has grown over the years, prompting scholars to conduct research on the community. The increase in Alevi-focused research spans from 1990 to 2020 and is driven by factors such as political developments, political conflicts, Alevi-Sunni conflicts, technological and information advancements, global economic crises, and more. Research predominantly focuses on various aspects, including the religious, cultural, and geographical development of the Alevi community, gender equality within the Alevi community, and the historical background of the Alevi group. Most research touches upon the terminology used by the Alevi community, such as "Kızılbaş" referring to cultural and literary elements, and "Alevi Bektashi," indicating cultural symbols and Alevi terminology. The term "Alevi" is explored within political science, anthropology, sociology, and religious studies (Koçak & Koç, 2021).

The Alevi group's population in Turkey has spread to various provinces such as Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Tunceli, Malatya, Diyarbakir, Elazığ, and Sanliurfa. Despite their widespread population, this does not ensure that their identity has been recognized by the state. They still have to struggle to survive in their own ways (Sadık, 2020). The Alevi group in their quest for identity in life faces numerous upheavals, their relationship with state authority involves a lot of victimization, and they have been unable to materialize their group's structure.

This will later have an impact on the Alevi group's future generations, leading them to become marginalized (Geçgin, 2019).

Despite the difficulties in gaining legal recognition from the Turkish government, the Alevi community continues to grow, as evidenced by the large number of institutions, associations, websites and social media established by the Alevi community. Many Alevi cultures have developed in Turkish society, such as the distribution of sweets (*aşüre*) in Muharram, the establishment of which is not prohibited by the Turkish government, but they cannot request assistance or funding to build their institutions from the government.

### **Policies for Alevisme in Turkey**

Structurally, there is no Turkish government policy on the Alevi sect that prohibits or accepts the Alevi sect, but unwritten policies can be found in Turkish society. This unwritten policy is in the form of the Turkish government's treatment of Alevism and the treatment of society and community organizations in dealing with Alevism. The Turkish nation is united by the common language, descent and civic values inherent in the Turkish nation, but after the democratization of the formation of the character of the Turkish nation based on the majority of the Turkish population who are conservative Sunnis, therefore the Alevi population, which was previously considered a member of the nation of the descendants of the Turkish tribe in the pre-democratization period, turned into a heterodox sect. Since the adoption of the Turkish synthesis of Islam in the 1980s, to be a member of Turkey, one must be a Muslim, but the Muslims in question are the majority Muslims spread across Central Asia who follow Sunni Islam (Watters, 2015).

Since 2002, the AKP, the Justice and Development Party, has been the ruling party in the Parliament of the Turkish government, and Alevis have been cautious about approaching the party because of its nationalist and conservative social base. In the 2002 elections, no Alevi MPs were elected, but in the 2007 elections, three Alevi MPs were elected: Hüseyin Tuğcu, Reha Çamuroğlu, and İbrahim Yiğit. In 2011, İbrahim Yiğit became the only Alevi MP to become a member of the Justice and Development Party group. The AKP Party then adopted policies regarding Alevis because it needed the AKP Party to develop development policies regarding Alevis (Karakaya-Stump, 2018) which has been ruling Turkey since 2002, was founded by a splinter group from within the Islamist Virtue Party (FP. In 1994, Alevis petitioned the Turkish Supreme National Assembly to change an article in the constitution but were unsuccessful.

Then, on January 26, 2004, Alevis filed a petition to abolish compulsory religious education classes as discriminatory; the petition was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights, but no progress was made (Dilek, 2006). (Aydın et al., 2006) Non-Muslim religious communities and Alevi Muslim communities are not officially recognized. Alevi places of worship (Cemevi) do not receive any state support because they are not recognized as places of worship and it is very difficult to open a Cemevi as a place of worship.

The AKP party is the party that opened up to the Alevi, de-securitized Alevi issues and then re-securitized Alevi issues (I. Yilmaz, 2015). The securitization of Turkish Alevis is ranked as domestic securitization. During the Kemalist government, Alevis were securitized, they were considered a threat to Turkey and the homogeneity of the nation because the Kemalist government group wanted to form a secular Suni Muslim Turkish state (I. Yilmaz & Barry, 2020). In order to realize the goal of becoming a member of the EU, the AKP Party began to carry out various programs such as stating to try to solve the problems of minorities in society, the AKP hoped that the issues of minority groups could be de-securitized through the Democratic opening, the AKP began to approach the Alevi and consult, apologize to the Alevis about the mistakes that had been made by the State to Alevism and even the AKP increased the visibility of Alevism and Alevis on Turkish state television, but the policy did not last long because Turkey's democratic position towards the Alevi deteriorated after 2011. (I. Yilmaz & Barry, 2020). Due to the deterioration of the AKP's relationship with the Alevi, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) began to antagonize the Alevi and criticism of Alevism began to increase when the government portrayed Alevism in a negative light.

According to Cafer Yesil, one of the policies made by the Turkish government to solve the problems of the Alevi community was to organize workshops held in accordance with the President's instructions in 2008, 2009 and 2010. According to Mehmet Ali Ayyıldız, in 2018, under the instruction of the President and coordinated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Interior and the governors, a study was conducted on the demands of Alevis and the needs of Alevis (Taşdemir, 2022).



**Figure. 1.**

*The Book Cover with discussions about Alevi*

In the world of education, especially in higher education at our İlahiyat faculty, students study the history of the schools of Islam. One of the recommended books to read is *The History of the Schools of Islam*, written by Prof. Dr. Mustafa ÖZ (Figure. 1). The book discusses various Islamic schools of thought. If you look at the last page, there is a discussion about the Alevi sect. In this case, it can be said that there is no policy prohibiting the study of the Alevi sect in education.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the results of the analysis and conclusions, the researchers provide several recommendations for future planning and research. Recommendations for planning are directed towards the government, educational institutions, policymakers, and the public. Considering the many contradictions that have occurred within the Alevi community in Turkey, such as discrimination increasing over the years leading to radicalization among Alevi youth, fear of socializing in society, and a nomadic way of life, it is advisable to view them from a human rights perspective. The Alevi community has made efforts and

taken actions to be accepted by society; therefore, to minimize bloodshed in the future, it is important for us to embrace them and teach them the meaning of Islam. Given that the religious beliefs of the Alevi community have ties to ancient Turkish beliefs, Shiite teachings, and other religions, it is not surprising that it is difficult for them to change their beliefs. It requires the contribution and cooperation of the government and the surrounding community to embrace them.

In terms of religious beliefs, this group is clearly distinct from Sunni Islam, but from a social perspective, the Alevi community has contributed significantly to society. Within the academic world, the Alevi community serves as a learning resource, especially in courses on religious sect comparisons. This is one way to reduce contradictions and biases against the Alevi community through the introduction of their beliefs. Perhaps in the future, it is hoped that there will be other new plans, both from the community and the government, to address issues related to the Alevi community. Dialogue on work and humanity is very important. Important, the goal is to create an inner atmosphere of humanity not only seen from the the religious side only. Humanitarian dialogue can also help solve problems that occur in the institutions that have been established by the Alevi group. institutions that have been established by the Alevi group.

Religious moderation may be an effort as a form of tolerance towards the Alevi group, but if we look at the Alevi existence that still exists in Turkey and continues to grow, it can be said that moderation is a form of tolerance towards the Alevi group. and continues to grow, it can be said that diverse moderation may exist only in a handful of individual Alevi groups. only exists in a handful of individualism. I hope this writing can serve as a valuable recommendation without causing any misunderstandings or errors.

As for further research recommendations, they are aimed at academics and researchers. These recommendations are intended to complement previous research with the hope that this study can serve as a foundation for future research, especially those focusing on Alevi-related topics. The recommendations of this research are about the unwritten policies that apply in Turkey, especially for the Alevi group in Turkey, from the point of view of religious life". If we look at the title of this paper, it only covers the Alevi group in Turkey, and the author only includes a few explanations or comparisons of Alevi in Arap countries, in the sense that the author only focuses on the problems of the Turkish Alevi group. Therefore, researchers who want to develop this research are advised to include aspects that can support this research, such as updating existing

information, collecting new data through field studies, and it is better to make a more detailed comparison of Alevi from various other countries so that this research becomes comprehensive and detailed.

This research can provide the latest information for the Indonesian people about the Alevi group, which basically has the same beliefs as Shia, but they are not part of Shia. Considering that this research only uses the literature study method, it would be better if it were to be developed for field research because if you look at it, there are still few studies that discuss the topic of Alevi, especially in Indonesia, the uniqueness of belief in the mixture of religion and culture and the legality of this group has not been obtained until now, therefore research on Alevi is highly recommended for further discussion.

## **CLOSING**

The Turkish government does not write structured and official policies of acceptance or rejection of the Alevi community, but unwritten policies can be found in society, such as the continuation of the culture of distributing aşūra sweets, the provision of semah dance rituals that can be attended by the general public, the development of institutions, agencies and websites that voice the Alevi community in Turkish society without rejection, In other words, the Alevi community has been accepted by Turkish society, but until now the legalization of religious identity from the government has not been fulfilled because the requirements for religious recognition must belong to the Sunni Islam group, which is the belief of the majority of Turkish society. The beliefs of the Alevi community have an impact on the lives of Turkish society, namely that people are starting to be open to understanding Alevi culture, as evidenced by the implementation of festivals or rituals of the Alevi community in Turkish society, such as the Hıdırellez festival.

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