

COMPARING SCHOLARSHIP: THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORKS THAT LINKS ALEVIS WITH EITHER SHI`ISM OR SUNNISM

ALEVİLİĞİ ŞİİLİK VEYA SÜNNİLİK İLE BAĞDAŞTIRAN MODERN AKADEMİK
ESERLERİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ANALİZİ

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COMPARING SCHOLARSHIP: THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORKS THAT LINKS ALEVIS WITH EITHER SHI`ISM OR SUNNISM*

Abstract

The Alevi, as major minority religious group in Turkey, has attracted the attention of the scholars, particularly by the second half of the twentieth century. Although the number of academic studies on Alevism have dramatically increased, the question of whether Alevism is a branch of Shi`ism has not been thoroughly explored. The majority of recent works have automatically classified Alevism as Shi`ite due to the shared religious doctrines by the two groups. They did not, however, interrogate those Shi`ite currents as to how they are applied and perceived in Shi`ism and Alevism. By using a comparative study of religion methodology, this paper will address to the notions of “heterodoxy”, “orthodoxy”, “metadoxy” in terms of how they have become central discourses in the Alevi based literature, and then the latest critics on these matters will be explored. Given that this article while presenting the diversity of views on Alevism, aims to question Alevism’s so-called links to Shi`ism.

Keywords: History of Islamic Sects, Alevism, Shi`ite, Sectarianism, Heterodoxy, Orthodoxy

ALEVİLİĞİ ŞİİLİK VEYA SÜNNİLİK İLE BAĞDAŞTIRAN MODERN AKADEMİK ESERLERİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR ANALİZİ

Öz

Türkiye’de temel dini azınlık grubu teşkil eden Aleviler özellikle yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısı itibarıyla araştırmacıların ilgisini kendilerine çekmişlerdir. Alevilikle ilgili akademik çalışmaların sayısı önemli ölçüde artmış olsa da Aleviliğin Şia’nın bir kolu olup olmadığı sorusu henüz layıkıyla tetkik edilmemiştir. Modern dönemde Alevilik hakkında yapılan çalışmaların ekseriyeti Alevilik ve Şia’nın ortak dini motiflerine vurgu yaparak Aleviliği Şia’nın bir alt dalı olarak sınıflandırmaktadır. Ancak yapılan bu çalışmalar söz konusu olan Şii eğilimlerin Alevilikte ve Şiilikte nasıl algılandıkları ve ne şekilde uygulandıkları konusunu tahkik etmemişlerdir. Bu çalışmamızda öncelikle karşılaştırmalı din metodunu kullanarak “Heterodoks”, “Ortodoks” ve “Metadoks” kavramlarını inceleyecek, bu kavramların nasıl ve ne şekilde Alevilik ile ilgili çalışmaların temel odak noktası olduğunu irdeleyeceğiz. Akabinde bu terimlere yöneltilen eleştirilere yer vermekle birlikte bu eleştirilerin mahiyetini tetkik edeceğiz. Araştırmanın ikinci bölümünde ise Alevilik hakkında öne sürülen farklı görüşlere yer verilecektir. Çalışmamızın temel amacı Alevilik hakkında ortaya atılan görüşlerden biri olan Aleviliği Şiilik olarak yorumlayan düşünceleri ele almak ve Aleviliğin Şiilik ile sözde bağlantısını sorgulamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam Mezhepleri Tarihi, Alevilik, Şia, Mezhepçilik, Heterodoks, Ortodoks

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INTRODUCTION

The question of “what Alevism really is in terms of sectarian discourses?” is centered at the heart of this paper. The current scholarships on Alevism offer different views on the nature of the Alevi belief. Debates over the definition of Alevism varied as follows: Alevism is a religion apart from Islam, a method [way of life],¹ a mystic movement, a cultural phenomenon,² a secular and nationalist structure,³ an ethno-religious group, or a sect of Islam, particularly Shi`ism.⁴

The Alevi constitute the largest and geographically expanded minority religious group in Turkey. As yet, there appears no official record delineating the number of Alevi living in Turkey. Estimates claim that they range between 15 to 25 percent of the total population of the Turkish state. Despite the strong historical, cultural, political and religious presence of the Alevi community existing from the late fifteenth century,⁵ the interest in studying Alevism at an academic level was begun only by the twentieth century. Since then, even though there has been scholarly interest in the Alevi religion, there has appeared no detailed text that I know of which explains Alevi beliefs from the ground up and situates them within the current sectarian landscape. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to fill this gap.

By using a comparative study of religion methodology, this research seeks to provide an explanation of the unresolved religious identity of the Alevi through comparing and contrasting the most recent scholarship that either links Alevism with Shi`ism or Sunnism. While engaging in analyzing the contemporary approaches on Alevi belief, the particular focus of this research is to understand, decode, and theorize the status of Alevism in conjunction with and separate from Sunnism and Shi`ism.

Therefore, my main questions center on the dispute over the identification and classification of Alevi Islam as somehow Shi`i, despite their differ-

¹ For some scholars, Alevism is not even a religious phenomenon, but simply a philosophical nascence. For this information, see Turabi Saltık, et al. *Anadolu Alevi Kültü ve Sol'un "Politikası,"* (İstanbul: Sorun Yayınları, 2007),

² For some scholars, Alevism is a lifestyle—it is not a religious entity but a cultural formation. For them, the tie between Islam and Alevism is too weak. So Alevism cannot be attached to Islam. The views of Nejat Birdoğan and Lütfi Kaleli can be mentioned here as examples.

³ Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam,* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2013, 15-23.

⁴ The thoughts that associate Alevi with Shi`ite Islam will further be explained in the following part.

⁵ From the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century, Alevi had come to be known as Kızılbaş. The name Kızılbaş was given to them on account of their red hat.

ences in the central religious beliefs. Why is it challenging to accept that Islam is more than Sunnism and Shi`ism? Why does every new religious movement within Islam have to be part of either of the two? How can we talk about religious pluralism in Islam if we associate every religious group with either Sunnism or Shi`ism?

1. NATIONALIZATION OR SUNNITIZATION: THE PHENOMENA OF HETERODOXY, ORTHODOXY AND METADOXY

Beginning with the works of Fuad Köprülü, a Turkish historian and politician, scholars started using a new term, “heterodox Islam,” as opposed to orthodox Sunni Islam. For those scholars, while Sunni Islam represents an orthodox form of Islam, which is the institutionalized form of a religion, heterodox Islam shows up outside of the institutionalized forms in a religion that is simply an un-mosqued Islamic form that to some extent is tied to the ancient Turkish religion and tradition. In another words, when the Turks adopted Islam, they did not abandon their pre-Islamic traditions, rituals, and doctrines, such as their belief in the presence of the sky god (*gök tanrı*) but replaced them with the dogma of Ali.⁶ Therefore, when Islamic teaching was blended with pre-Islamic religions, there appeared a new form of Islam: “heterodox Islam.”⁷

Köprülü’s approach was adopted by Irène Mélikoff (1917 – 2009), the French Turkologist. She defined the heterodox Islam as an intense mystical combination of pre-Islamic elements of Central Asia including Christianity, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and especially Shamanism, were clustered.⁸ Since it reflects a complex mixture of various religious tenets, it is a syncretic form of Islam.⁹ And then this approach was taken by A. Yaşar Ocak, a Turkish historian, as he points out three major characteristics of heterodox Islam that distinguish it from Sunni Islam.

The first is the political dimension: In Turkish history, Sunni Islam has been chosen as a formal religious sect [*mazhab*] of the state; however, het-

⁶ Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion*, Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Gary Leiser, (University of Utah Press, 1993), 6, footnote 25.

⁷ Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, Translated, edited and with an introduction by Gary Leiser and Ropert Dankoff, Foreword by Devin DeWeese, (London: Routledge 2006), foreword-xvi.

⁸ Unveiled women are participants of the central rituals. Ritual dance (namely *sema* in terms of Alevi belief) in company with religious hymn is the essential part of a religious ceremony. Saints are believed to perform miracles.

⁹ Irène Mélikoff, *Sur Les Traces du Soujisme Turc. Recherches sur l’Islam populaire en Anatolie*, (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1992). For the Turkish translation of the work, see Irène Mélikoff, *Uyur Idik Uyardılar: Alevilik-Bektaşilik Araştırmaları*, (İstanbul: Demos Yayınları, 2006), 25.

erodox Islam represents the ideology of a group of people who are not part of the state bureaucracy. In other words, heterodox Islam exists in opposition to the state religion. The second is the social dimension: overall, Sunni Islam is the religious preference of the settled people while heterodox Islam constitutes the beliefs of nomads. The third and last is the theological dimension: Sunni Islam has been developed systematically and written down; whereas heterodox Islam is non-systematic and includes non-Islamic myths and doctrines. Basically the heterodox Islam represents an intense mystical composition, which includes pre-Islamic elements, which is mixed with various other religious doctrines.¹⁰

According to this theory, Alevism and Bektaşism are the only two forms of heterodox Islam, which carries an idiosyncratic belief of Islam that is solely peculiar to Turks.¹¹ At this point, I propose that the phrase “heterodox Islam” was originated in order to assimilate Alevis to the Turkish nation. The fact that the saying of “heterodox Islam” was represented as a form of Turkish Islam endorses my argument. “Heterodox Islam” has not been represented as a different religion from Islam or a new kind of sect [*mazhab*], but was described as a popular Turkish Islam [*Türk Halk İslamı*].¹² This Islamic form is unique to Turks with its non-traditional, non-costumed and un-mosqued characteristics. It is unlikely to claim that people deserted all other pre-Islamic traditions and embraced Islam when Islam expanded around the world. Hence, it is probable to say that every culture approached Islam differently and remolded it with their pre-Islamic rituals. Even if there are some established rules, the religious ceremonies and rituals differ from one culture to another all around the Islamic world. When we consider the range of Islamic countries, there appear everywhere a variety of traditional cultural doctrines which have been combined with Islam, but we do not see them described as “Arab Islam,” “Persian Islam,” “Hindu Islam,” “African Islam,” etc., In the eyes of some Turkish scholars, pure Turkish Islam is considered to be Alevism. I argue here that the position held by Köprülü and Mélikoff, was also promoted by the Turkish state

¹⁰ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türkiyede tarihin saptırılması sürecinde Türk sufilğine bakışlar: Ahmed-i Yes- evi, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş-i Veli, Ahilik, Alevilik-Bektaşilik: yaklaşım, yöntem ve yorum denemeleri*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1996), 16-19.

¹¹ Irène Mélikoff, “Bektashi/Kızılbaş: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences,” in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives: Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul*, (November 25-27, 1996), edited by Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, 7; Irène Mélikoff, and İlhan C. Erseven, *Tuttum Aynayı Yüzüme Ali Göründü Gözüme*, (İstanbul: ANT, 1997), 50.

¹² Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, foreword-xvi; Mélikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar*, 25.

that situated Alevi in line with the Turkish national identity, conceiving of Alevi as integral to the Turkish nation, and associating their religiosity with Sunni Islam.¹³

2. CRITICS OF HETERODOXY AND ORTHODOXY

Köprülü's formulation of 'heterodox' Islam in describing the nonconformist nature of Alevi Islam, has ever since become the view of predominate scholarship. Although the majority of the following scholarships have rooted for it, a number of outstanding scholars, like Cemal Kafadar, Ahmet Karamustafa, Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, Rıza Yıldırım, studying the early Sufi movements in Anatolia and Islamization of Anatolia, categorically criticized this theory.

Karamustafa has developed an alternative theory counter to Köprülü's sharp description of the Islamization of Anatolia, according to which Anatolian Turkish religiosity developed as a continuum of the pre-Islamic cultural and religious dogmas of the Turks that lived in Central Asia. Köprülü's view has been criticized due to its inadequacy to perceive the activeness of the religious lives of local Anatolians.¹⁴ Rather, Karamustafa offered the new notion of 'vernacular Islam' to explain the religious atmosphere for the local Turkish speakers in Anatolia. The term 'vernacular' was associated with dervish piety, which while probably not the main source, was certainly an essential one in the formation of the religious belief and rites of vernacular Turkish speakers.¹⁵

Not only did *abdal* piety refashion the vernacular Turkish speakers' religious tendency from the early twelfth to the end of the fifteenth century in Anatolia, but its anomalous features — formed outside of learned traditions and *sharia* based religious creed — played a central role in the birth and development of what is today called the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition. Hence unlike many other scholars, Karamustafa traces the history of the birth of the Alevi belief back to the beginning of the twelfth century when the Islamization and Turkification of Anatolia begun. The divinization of

¹³ For further information of how the Turkish State has attempted to assimilate Alevi Islam into Sunni Islam, see Dressler, *Writing Religion*, xii-xvii, xiv.

¹⁴ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia," 329-342, in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism, and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*. Edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, (The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Brill, 2014), 329.

¹⁵ Karamustafa, "Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia," 330.

the human [in the case of Alevi rite, veneration of Ali] has been the central religious norm of the *abdals* religiosity. This tenant has shaped the religious learning of numerous Turkish nomads.¹⁶

Kafadar must be mentioned here as one of the leading scholars who rejected Köprülü's thesis and offered an alternative theory. He questions the representation of Sunni Islam as orthodoxy with its institutionalized form of a religion and Shi'ite Islam with heterodoxy that shows up outside of the institutionalized forms.¹⁷ Contrary to the theory of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, Kafadar suggests to conceptualize a new term "metadoxy — a state of being beyond doxies, a combination of being doxy-naive and not being doxy-minded" — for the period from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries in which the content of the terms orthodoxy and heterodoxy were not yet established in Anatolia.¹⁸

Karakaya-Stump also criticizes the well-received view of Köprülü, according to which the pre-Islamic Turkish customs were the most effective factors in the development and formation of the Anatolian Turkish tribe's religious stance.¹⁹ As for that, pre-Islamic Turkish religions underwent a transformation by the Turkmen tribes of Anatolia from Central Asia to Anatolia. Such claim paved the way in fashioning the nationalistic approach in description of Alevi-Bektaşî tradition as if it was the pure representative of Turkish folk Islam, also defined as 'heterodox' Islam. This view naturally links the origin of Alevi belief to the Central Asian Yesevi tradition. This is where Karakaya-Stump comes to the forefront and offers an alternative origin, the Iraqi-born Vefa'i order, for Alevism/Kızılbaşism. This theory turns upside-down the nationalistic formulation that treats the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition as sole representative of Turkish folk Islam.²⁰

Additionally, Yıldırım while criticizing Köprülü's twofold approach on the conceptualization of Alevism and Shi'ism as 'heterodoxy' and Sunnism as 'orthodoxy,' states that the religious environment of thirteenth and fourteenth century Anatolia exposed a heterogeneous setting of religiosities.

¹⁶ Karamustafa, "Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia," 338-9; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, (1994), 95.

¹⁷ The modern scholarship with the influence of Köprülü characterized Sunni Islam with orthodoxy and Shi'ism with heterodoxy.

¹⁸ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (1995), 76.

¹⁹ Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The Vefa'iyye, The Bektashiyye and Genealogies of "Heterodox" Islam in Anatolia: Rethinking The Köprülü Paradigm," *Turcica* 44, (2012-2013), 279-300, 279-280. doi: 10.2143/TURC.44.0.2988853. 279-280.

²⁰ Mélikoff and Ocak sided with Köprülü in relating Alevi belief with pre-Islamic Turkish customs.

Hence it cannot be divided as merely heterodox on the one side and orthodox on the other side.²¹

To a certain extent this research is in an agreement with the proposed critics in relating 'heterodoxy' with Shi'ism, and 'orthodoxy' with Sunnism. I argue here that any act or sign of belief which remains outside of Sunnism does not necessarily mean the beliefs Shi'i. Baba'is cannot be labeled as Shi'ite just because the Baba'is differed in their religious understanding from the Sunni Islam. The formulation of the notions heterodoxy and orthodoxy along the sectarian disputes as Sunni and Shi'ite Islam initiates the problems. Hence when some particular item of faith is considered as heterodoxy, then automatically it is regarded as Shi'i.

3. ASSOCIATING/DISASSOCIATING ALEVISM WITH/FROM SHI'ISM

Due to the reverence for Ali, the reciting of the names of the Twelve *Imams* and their holding a particular place for the martyrs of the Karbala tragedy in the *cem* [gathering] ritual has led many of the current scholarship trend to lump all of the Alevi groups in Anatolia together as Shi'ite.²² The common information provided by those scholarship is that with the influence of the Safavids in the sixteenth century, some Turkmen tribes/the Kızılbaş converted to Shi'ism. Although they remained Shi'is to the present day, they also began to be called Alevis.²³

Association of Alevism with Shi'ism has been initially proposed by Franz Babinger. *Der Islam in Kleinasien: Neue Wege der Islamforschung* is the first controversial book devoted to the construction of the Shi'ite elements in the early religious history of Anatolia, published in 1922 by Franz Babinger.²⁴ He commenced a debate on the Shi'itization of Anatolia dur-

²¹ Rıza Yıldırım, "Sunni Orthodox vs Shi'ite Heterodox?: A reappraisal of Islamic Piety," in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, by A. C. S. Peacock, Bruno De Nicola, and Sara Nur Yıldız, Ashgate Publishing, (2015), 290.

²² Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans: 1*, Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1929, 156; Heinz Halm, *Shi'ism*, Translated by Janet Watson and Marian Hill, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 132-133; Hans-Lukas Kieser, "The Antolian Alevi's Ambivalent Encounter with Modernity in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Turkey," in *The Other Shiites: from the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, Monsutti, Alessandro, Silvia Naef, and Farian Sabahi, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 41-58; Altan Gökalp, "Une Minorité Chiite En Anatolie: Les Alevi," in *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 35, no. 3-4, (1980), (748-763), 748; George E. White, *The Shia Turks*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1908), Rıza Zelyut, *Öz kaynaklara Göre Alevilik, 7th ed.*, (İstanbul: 1992); Teoman Şahin, *Alevilere Söylenen Yalanlar*, (Ankara: 1995). For further information on Teoman Şahin and his Shi'te propaganda, see Orhan Türkdoğan, *Alevi-Bektaşî Kimliği: Sosyo-antropolojik Araştırma*, (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1995), 280.

²³ Halm, *Shi'ism*, 132-133.

²⁴ Franz Babinger, "Der Islam in Kleinasien. Neue Wege der Islamforschung," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, (1922), 126. *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 13, 2016): 146-147; the Turkish translation of the study was published in Darülfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi

ing the reigns of the Seljuks. According to Babinger, the Seljuks met with Shi'ism during their journey from Transoxiana and Iran to Anatolia. While the Alevi creed was quite prevalent, claimed Babinger, Sunnism was not welcomed in either of the countries. Counter to the common consensus, Babinger claims that the Seljuks did not perform Sunni Islam, but rather embraced the Alevi creed and made it the official religion of the state. Babinger uses the terms Alevism and Shi'ism interchangeably and probably meant Shi'ism by the term of Alevi. Unlike popular belief, Babinger traced the Shi'itization of the Safavid back to the Sufi Shaikh Safi al-Din, who considered being the founder of the order.

F. Hasluck, an English archaeologist, followed in Babinger's footsteps and developed his own argument in which he overemphasizes the influence of Christianity on the Turks' conversion of Islam. It is even claimed that the heterodox religious practices performed by the Turkmen tribes supposed to have been originally Christian and that later on reemerged in Shi'ite Islam.²⁵ For him, Shi'ism serves as a liaison between Christianity, paganism and "Mohammedanism" — that was for Hasluck Sunni Islam.²⁶

Momen appears to have been another scholar who labels the Alevi/Kızılbaş belief as Shi'ite. Momen lists the Bektaşî and the Kızılbaş, as one of the four main Shi'ite groups in Turkey. The other three are listed as: the Nusayri Alawi community, Arabic-speaking group centered on the Mediterranean coast between Anatakya and Mersin; Ahl-i Haqq, mainly the Kurdish-speaking group who were predominant in south-east Turkey; and the final group is the Azeri Turkish refugees from Russian Azerbaijan.²⁷

There appear many other scholars particularly Westerners who hold onto the idea that Alevism is a branch of Shi'ism without questioning the sectarian identification of the Alevi community as how do they acknowledge their religious identity.²⁸ According to the majority of those scholars

Mecmuası (DFEM) in 1922; Gray Leiser shortly summarized the mentioned article in the introduction of Köprülü's well-cited work "Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion."

²⁵ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, 125. Hasluck has been criticized owing to a lack of materials on the Turks and Islam in his research. Köprülü, for instance, states that Haslucks predominantly cited from the Western and Christian sources, but not from the classical Turkish and Islamic books. Hence his inferences cannot be dependable completely. See Frederick William Hasluck, *Bektaşîlik İncelemeleri*. Translated into Turkish by Ragıp Özdem, (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2012), 19.

²⁶ Hasluck often uses the term Mohammedanian to refer to Islam, particularly Sunni Islam. What is quite interesting here is that he does not correlate the term Mohammedanian with Shi'ism but associates it solely with Sunnism. I argue that this is one way for him to distinguish Shi'ism from the mainstream Islam owing to its characteristic as it was originated based on multiple religious dogmas.

²⁷ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shii Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 269.

²⁸ For those scholars, see Heinz Halm. *Shi'ism*; Stefan Winter. *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman*

who relate Alevi with Shi'ism, Alevism was formed through the influence of the Twelver Shi'ism. A few Alevi intellectuals, not many, also supports the view associating Alevism with Twelver Shi'ism.²⁹ In this respect, a radical approach was taken by Rıza Yörüköglü who claims that people, who do not believe in the Imamate doctrine, could not be regarded as Muslims.³⁰

In this regard, Alevism naturally have been linked to the Jafari *fiqh* [Jafari school of thought] of Shi'ite Islam. Due to the activities of a few known Jafari mosques, such as the Ahl al-bayt mosque in Çorum and the Zeynebiyye mosque in Istanbul, the effort of associating the Alevi belief with Jafari/Shi'ite denomination has been sustained. The mosques not only pursue to transform the Alevi society into Twelver Shi'ite Islam, but also distance the Alevi from the Bektāşī.³¹ Other than the followers of these two mosques and some individual examples, neither the Jafaris in Turkey want to be categorized as Alevi, nor do the Alevi want to be called anything but 'Alevi'.³² Especially after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Alevi of Turkey have become more cautious in distancing themselves from Shi'ism. That is primarily because, according to them, Shi'ite practice of Iran illustrates a radical image that can never be correspond with the Alevi way of life.³³

This academic trend is despite the fact that Alevism not only rejects the formal laws of mainstream Sunni Islam, but also rejects the established doctrines of mainstream Shi'ism [that is, both Sevener and Twelver Shi'ism]. That is why I propose that through associating Alevi religiosity either with Sunnism or Shi'ism, current researches on Alevism has demonstrated a sectarian bias. Yet to date, however, there are few individual examples on the Alevi community that acknowledge a social, cultural, and more importantly a sectarian tie with the Shi'is. I argue that labeling the Alevi community all together as Shi'ite is the common mistake held by the majority of current scholarship, especially by the non-Turkish outsider academics. While there appear some individual examples who relate themselves with

Rule, 1516-1788, Cambridge University Press, 2010; White, *The Shia Turks*, 1908; Colin Imber, "The Persecution of Ottoman Shi'ites According to the Muhimme Defterleri, 1565-1585," *Der Islam* 56/2 (1979); Gökalp, *Une Minorité Chiite En Anatolie*, 748.

²⁹ Zelyut, *Öz kaynaklara Göre Alevilik*, 6.

³⁰ Rıza Yörüköglü, "Alevilik," in *Alevilik Budur* by Ö. Uluçay, (Adana: 1993), 68-74.

³¹ İlyas Üzümlü, *Günümüz Aleviliği*, (İstanbul: TDV İSAM Yayınları, 2000), 57-59.

³² Kabir Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey*, Stanford, (California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 54.

³³ Türkdoğan, *Alevi-Bektāşī Kimliği*, 111; David Shankland, *The Alevi in Turkey, The emergence of a secular Islamic tradition*, Routledge Curzon, (London and New York, 2003), 24.

either Sunnis³⁴ or Shi'ite, in a broader sense, the Alevi community do not establish a sectarian tie with either of the two. They rather prioritize their Alevi identity as separate from the institutionalized forms of Sunnism and Shi'ism.³⁵

4. THE CONFUSION OVER WHICH BRANCHES OF SHI'ISM INFLUENCED ALEVISM

Scholars that acknowledge the Shi'ite sentiments blended in Alevi Islam collide regarding the question of which branch or branches of Shi'ism had influenced Alevism. There appeared four different suggestions: Twelver Shi'ism, Ismaili Shi'ism, Zaydism, or the Nusayris of Syria.

Köprülü particularly emphasizes the influence of Ismaili current in the spread of Shi'ite/*batini* ideas and Alid loyalty in Anatolia. For Köprülü, there is no sign of the emergence of the Twelver Shi'ism in the early history of Anatolia, but the Ismaili propaganda was quite prevalent.³⁶ Ocak also argues that the Safavi religious orientation was colored with the Ismaili elements. He presumes that despite the Safavid propaganda, which is based on the Imamiyya current of Shi'ism, the Shi'ite elements emergent within the Alevi religion coincides not with the Imamiyya current, but with the Nizari Ismaili current.³⁷

Cahen takes a different position with respect to the Shi'ite sentiments existing in the Alevi belief. The fundamental characteristic of Alevis — exaggerated devotion to Ali — was introduced into Asia Minor by propagandists of the Alid sects like the Nusayris of Syria and the Ali-ilahis of eastern Iran. Although he states that this is not more than a pure speculation, it is a strong possibility that needs to be elaborated.³⁸ Hasluck relates the Alevis

³⁴ For the examples of some individual Alevis' Sunnitization, see Türkdoğan. *Alevi-Bektaşî Kimliği: Sosyo-antropolojik Araştırma*, 243.

³⁵ When the official websites of a number of Alevi unions, organizations, associations, and foundations are viewed carefully, it becomes obvious that the majority of Alevi communities, while regarding themselves as Muslims, do not see themselves as part of one of the Sunni or Shi'ite denominations. A number of official Alevi organizations' websites had been examined in the concluding part of the PhD thesis titled "Why Label Alevi Islam as Shi'ite?: A Comparative Inquiry into Alevi Identity Outside of the Sunni-Shi'ite Framework," Rice University, 2018.

³⁶ Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 14-15, footnote, 53.

³⁷ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Islam's Second Aspect in Turkey's History: Rethinking the Shi'a Element in Anatolia, or Some Comments on the Isma'ili Influences," in Hoca, *'allame, Puits De Science: Essays in Honor of Kemal H. Karpat*, by Kemal Karpat, H. Kaan Durukan, Robert W. Zens, and Akile Z. Durukan, (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2010), 22-23.

³⁸ Claude Cahen, and P. M. Holt, *The Formation of Turkey: The Seljukid Sultanate of Rum: Eleventh to Fourteenth Century*, Harlow, (England: Longman, 2001), 166.

of Turkey with the Nusayris of Syria. To him, Alevi belief is beyond the dogmas of the mainstream Shi'ite sects.³⁹

An entirely different line of scholarship was presented by Momen. The Safavid, according to Momen, played the most direct role in the Shi'itization of the Kızılbaş. The Safavids, however, claimed to be Twelver Shi'is, and as asserted by Momen, ran their propaganda on the basis of a Zaydi-style Imamate.⁴⁰ Another scholar who associates the Alevi with the Zaydi is Ismail Kaygusuz arguing that one of Zayd's three remaining sons carried Zayd's bloodline and legacy to Anatolia.⁴¹

5. THE QUESTIONS OVER THE IDENTIFICATION OF ALEVISM AS SHI'ITE

Although the majority of current scholarly researches acknowledge some Shi'ite elements appear in the Alevi belief system — unlike Babinger, Hasluck, Momen, H. Halm, S. Winter, Gökalp, etc. who recognize Alevi as a Shi'ite community — scholars are actively puzzling over just how to regard the relationship of Alevism to Shi'ism. One position although subjects Alevism to Shi'ism, it does not specify Alevism as a branch of Shi'ism.⁴² Karin Vorhoff can be listed as one of those scholars who associate Alevism with Shi'ism without labeling it as Shi'ite. Karin Vorhoff addresses the problems of labeling Alevism as Shi'ite. She put forwards the question of how can Alevism be claimed as being Jafari/Twelver Shi'ite while it rejects the fundamental doctrines of Shi'ism.⁴³

Karakaya-Stump likewise recognizes the common religious aspects shared by the Alevi/Kızılbaş and the Imami Shi'is. However, she is cautious to distance the Alevi belief from the mainstream Shi'ism due to the

³⁹ Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 156.

⁴⁰ Momen, *An Introduction to Shii Islam*, 108.

⁴¹ İsmail Kaygusuz, *Alevilik İnanç, Kültür, Siyaset Tarihi ve Uluları*, (İstanbul: Alev Yayınevi, 1995), 55.

⁴² Gloria L. Clarke can be mentioned as one of those scholars. Based on the writing of Clarke, it can be understood that she sides with the view that the spread of Shi'ism in Anatolia actualized through the Sufi-Shi'ite admixture. With the inspiration of Köprülü and Mélikoff, she traces the birth of Alevism back to the very beginning of Bektaşism without separating the first from the latter. See Gloria L. Clarke, *The World of the Alevi Issues of Culture and Identity*, (New York: AVC Publication, 1999), 37-86.

⁴³ Karin Vorhoff, "Let's Reclaim Our History and Culture! Imagining Alevi Community in Contemporary Turkey," *Die Welt des Islams*, (1998), 220. *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 13, 2016), 237; Karin Vorhoff, "Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives: Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul*, (November 25-27, 1996), edited by Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, 29; Karin Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation Und Neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in Der Türkei Der Gegenwart*, (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 1995), 105-107.

fact that Alevi Islam promoted a type of mystical teaching that is neither welcomed in the mainstream Shi`ite nor Sunni faith.⁴⁴

Sönmez Kutlu, on the other side, categorically distinguishes Alevi belief from Shi`ite Islam⁴⁵. A parallel approach can be observed in the works written by recent Alevi intellectuals who are highly critical of the view connecting Alevism with Shi`ism. Cemal Şener is one of those Alevi scholars who perseveringly distinguishes Alevism from Shi`ism.⁴⁶ Another Alevi scholar and writer — Baki Öz, claims that the view subjecting Alevism to Shi`ism has no historical base.⁴⁷ It is also suggested by Fuat Bozkurt that the view that links Alevism to Shi`ism is ideologically motivated propaganda that not only intended to assimilate Alevism, but also causes the corruption of the Alevi identity.⁴⁸

Köprülü, however, lacks in explaining the Safavid influence on the Alevi/Kızılbaş community, he is highly critical of Babinger's sayings on the Alevi belief. Köprülü argues that the Turks who were defined by some scholars — particularly referring to Babinger — as Shi`ite were in fact extremely inclined to Sunnism. Those Alevi tendencies such as glorifying Ali and *ahl al-bayt* were merged in Sunni fold of Islam without being regarded as Shi`ite. Köprülü stated, "Affection for Ali and the Prophet's family was an unchanging principle among the Turks and the widespread *tariqas*. From the earliest times, the heroic deeds of Ali were adopted and popularized in the literature of the Anatolian Turks. Indeed, they have not lost their appeal up to the present time."⁴⁹

Pro-Alevi sayings, according to Köprülü, does not make any individual a Shi`ite, but those Shi`ites who adore Ali could be regarded as Alevi.⁵⁰ The argument — those elements such as reverence for Ali and *ahl al-bayt*, lament for the martyrs of the Karbala tragedy, were specified as Shi`ite by the latter, must not be taken as a sign of Shi`ism — as formulated by Köprülü was also borrowed by Mélikoff and was upgraded by her. She states that those

⁴⁴ Karakaya-Stump, "The *Vefa'iyye*, The Bektashiyye and Genealogies of "Heterodox" Islam In Anatolia," 279-280, footnote, 2.

⁴⁵ Sönmez Kutlu, *Alevilik- Bektaşilik Yazıları: Aleviliğin Yazılı Kaynakları, Tezkire-i Şeyh Safi*, (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2008).

⁴⁶ Cemal Şener, *Alevilik Olayı: Toplumsal Bir Başkaldırının Kısa Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Etik Yayınları, 2010).

⁴⁷ Baki Öz, *Alevilik Nedir?*, (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2001), 167-200.

⁴⁸ Fuat Bozkurt, "State-Community Relations in the Restructuring of Alevism," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives: Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul*, (November 25-27, 1996), edited by Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005, 100-114.

⁴⁹ Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 6/ 40-41, footnote, 22.

⁵⁰ Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 6, footnote, 22.

Shi`ite currents originally had a deeper meaning subjected to old Turkish customs. They resembled to the pro-Islamic Turkish traditions. That is why Shi`ite creeds were readily acknowledged by the Turkish tribes — particularly the Bektaşis and the Kızılbaş. Pro-Ali phrases appeared to have been the unifying point between the ancient customs with Shi`ite terminology. For the very reason, the Turks had no problem to blend them with their old customs. Hence they should not be traced back to Shi`ism.⁵¹ So according to Mélikoff, neither Alevism/Kızılbaşism nor Bektaşism must be regarded within the fold of Shi`ite Islam, but the Safavi propaganda specified them as Shi`ite.⁵²

Unlike previous scholars, Babayan highlights the role of the *ghulat*⁵³ belief on the Shi`itization of the Kızılbaş. She states that Ismail, to gain the total obedience of the Kızılbaş, deliberately played on the *ghulat* spirit of the Kızılbaş.⁵⁴ The *ghuluww*, stated Babayan, was one of the initial religious resources of the Safavids before the official recognition of the Twelver Shi`ism. And it played the most central role in the formation of the Safavid and the Kızılbaş Islam.⁵⁵

The Safavids adopted Imami Shi`ism right after they felt politically secure enough in their new role as shahs and even though the teaching of Imamism was not corresponding to the nature of the Kızılbaş belief. When Ismail established his empire, he approached to the Imamite *ulama* in defiance of the Kızılbaş Islam. Hence, soon afterwards, Shah Ismail declared

⁵¹ Mélikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar*, 97; Mélikoff, *Hacı Bektaş*, 84.

⁵² Mélikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar*, 54.

⁵³ *Ghulat* means exaggerators. The term has been used to describe any minority religious group that appeared to ascribe divine characteristics to the Islamic figures, particularly to the family of Prophet Muhammad.

⁵⁴ Under the influence of Michel Mazzaoui and Sa`id Arjomand, she defines the religiosity of the Kızılbaş as *ghuluww* but not as Shi`ite. Kathryn Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran*, UMI, 1993, 9; Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids: Shi`ism, Sufism and the Ghulat*, (Weisbaden, 1972); Sa`id Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (Ghuluww), Sufism, Sunnism in Safavid Iran 1501-1522," in *Journal of Asian History* 15, (1981).

⁵⁵ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxiv; The word *ghuluww* is derived from the Arabic root "gh-l-w" literally to exceed the proper boundary, hence *ghali/ghulat* is rendered incorrectly as extremist. Exaggerator is a more correct rendering of the word. The *ghulat* is specified as those Shi`is who deify the Imam Ali and the rest of the Imams. See Wadad al-Qadi, "The Development of the Term *Ghulat* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya," in *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World*, ed. Etan Kohlberg, volume 33, Ashgate/Variorum, 2003. The common trend in scholarship, on the other hand, erroneously claimed that the *ghulat* spirit represents the extremist form of Shi`ism; For this information, see Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: the Ghulat sects*, Syracuse, (N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988), xiii; Moosa therefore regards the Kızılbaş, the Bektaşis and the Alevis as extremist *ghulat* groups.

Imamite Shi'ism, the religion of his realms and the conflict between the Kızılbaş Islam and Imamism got off the ground.⁵⁶

The theory of Jean Aubin, supported by Babayan, states that the adoption of Imamite Shi'ism by Shah Ismail as an official religion of the state, was the fall of the Kızılbaş state, but not the rise. In another words, the Kızılbaş had no role in the choice of Imami Shi'ism for the Safavid state.⁵⁷ Therefore, the Kızılbaş religiosity and *ghulat*-inspired other movements were marginalized.⁵⁸

Ghuluww, according to Babayan, does not explicitly mean Shi'ism.⁵⁹ *Ghuluww* was a belief system in which a cluster of various religious traditions mingled. The *ghuluww* belief was regarded as heretical by the mainstream Islamic movements.⁶⁰ The *ghulat* movements, stated Babayan, existed even before the nature of the Shi'ite Islam was articulated. The examples of Kaysaniyya (beginning with Mukhtar, d. 67/687) and the Abu Muslimiyya (beginning in 137/755 A.D. with the death of Abu Muslim) were the initial representation of the *ghulat* movements. The idea of anticipated messiah (*Mahdi*) and Alid cause are the common themes of the both *ghulat* groups and the Shi'ism. For the very reason, the distinct lines of demarcation between *ghuluww* and Imamism were yet not clarified. The Alid cause played the most direct role in the unification of the Shi'ism and the *ghulat*. While in the early periods, those *ghulat* groups were not related to Shi'ism, later on they either accepted Ismaili or Imami Shi'ism.⁶¹ By the twelfth century, the *ghulat* ideas of *ghayba* and *raja* had already become an integral part of orthodox Shi'ism.⁶² The anticipated *khuruj* of the Mahdi had become an accepted cultural paradigm both by the *ghulat* groups and Shi'ism.⁶³ Because of the Alid oppositional stance toward mainstream Islam, Shi'ism and *ghuluww* intermingled. Just as *ghuluww* was grafted onto the Shi'i, Shi'ism was grafted onto the *ghulat*. So far, Babayan's theory

⁵⁶ For this information, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran*, (Cambridge, Mass: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 2002), xxxii-xxxiii; Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 5; Babayan, *The Safavid Synthesis*, 137.

⁵⁷ Jean Aubin, "La Politique Religieuse Des Safavides," in *Le Shi'isme Imamite*, Colloque de Strasbourg, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 240; Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 5.

⁵⁸ Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 17.

⁵⁹ Kathryn Babayan "The Safavid Synthesis: from Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies* 27, (1994), 135-161.

⁶⁰ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxiv.

⁶¹ Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 25- 28.

⁶² For detailed information, see Mudarrisi Tabatabai, and Sayyid Husayn, *An introduction to Shi'i Law*, (London: Ithaca press 1984), 40.

⁶³ Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 27-30.

seems to be the most feasible one. I propose that recent scholarship attributed any group like Baba`i movement to Shi`ism when its religious stance do not perfectly map with Sunni doctrine. However, the presence of other religious formations like *ghuluww* should be re-considered as a possible motivational force behind the non-Sunni sentiments in Anatolia.

Farhad Daftary also highlights the point that the conflict between the Safavids and the Kızılbaş began with the proclamation of the Twelver Shi`ism as the official religion of the state. The advent of the Safavids and the proclamation of Twelver Shi`ism as the state religion of Safavid Persian in 906/1501 promised yet more favorable opportunities for the activities of the Nizaris and other Shi`i movements in Persia. The Safavids, however, soon adopted a rigorous religious policy that aimed to suppress the popular types of Sufism and various Shi`i movements that fell outside of the boundaries of Itha`asharism. This policy was directed even against the Kızılbaş, who had brought the Safavid dynasty into power.⁶⁴ Hence, under the reigns of the subsequent Safavid shahs, the loyalty to the Safavid house had been shaken and the language of rebellion against Safavid absolutism emanated. Eventually the first Kızılbaş revolt, the Dervish Rıza rebellion against the Safavid autocracy, occurred only seven years after the successful revolution of 906/1501.⁶⁵

Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, a scholar in religion and history, on the other side, approaches to the issue from a very different angle. Despite the fact that Alevism like Bektaşims and Rafidism have displayed pro-Shi`ite sentiments, he neither recognizes Alevism as a branch of Shi`ism nor regard Alevis as Shi`ite due to the following matters. First, Alevis do not recognize the fundamental beliefs of Twelver Shi`ite. Secondly, the religious leaning of Alevis rather corresponds with *batini* ideas.⁶⁶ Batinism, in contrast to Shi`ism, disregards religious rituals as they believe that religious principles are fabricated to organize the universe and that they are not essential to Islamic teaching. They rather concentrate on esoteric/mystic knowledge.⁶⁷ On the other side, Shi`ism, counter to Batinis, Rafidis and Alevis, are genu-

⁶⁴ Farhad Daftary, *The Isma`ilis, their history and doctrines*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 471.

⁶⁵ For a detailed description of this rebellion, see Babayan, *The Waning of the Qizilbash*, 4.

⁶⁶ Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Tarih Boyunca İslam Mezhepleri ve Siilik*, (İstanbul: Der yayınları, 1997), 87-91; Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, (İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1997), 272. I found four different currents associated with the notion Alevi: *batini*, the extreme Shia or *ghuluww*, Bektaşî, and Turkish shamanism. For this information, see Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Tasavvuf*, (İstanbul: Milenyum, 2000), 130-132.

⁶⁷ Gölpınarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, 125.

ine observer of religious services, which are believed to be ten: daily prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, alms-giving, *khums* (a required action in *fiqh* according to which people are behooved to give one fifth of the annual business income), *jihad*, *tawalla* (loving Muhammad and Ali and the ones who love Muhammad), *tabarra*, (hating the ones who do not love Muhammad and Ali), informing goodness and God's commands and restraining from evil-doing.⁶⁸

In addition to that Gölpinarlı is critical of the Safavid's policy, according to which, the Safavid had made concessions to Alevi in the practice of religious matters to keep them on their side. However, they claimed to rule Iran relying on the Jafari law, they did not abide with the real teaching of the Jafari jurisprudence in their relationship with the Alevi community. For example, Ardabil had become an equivalent of Mecca and Medina for the Alevi/Kızılbaş followers of the Safavid Iran. Further visiting of Ardabil had been considered equal to Hajj ritual. Such rites cannot correspond with the actual teaching of Jafarism⁶⁹ He further states that the loyalty of Alevi/Kızılbaş to Safavid Iran lasted when the Safavid hegemony ended in Iran.⁷⁰ Since then the Alevi/Kızılbaş belief has been formed through the teaching of the *dedes*.⁷¹ The *dedes* did not hold on to the Jafari jurisprudence, rather they minded the fondness of *ahl al-bayt*. Exaggeration of the fondness of *ahl al-bayt* is not the sign of Shi'ism, but rather the indication of *batini* influence.⁷²

Due to the lack of the properly systematized theology and jurisprudence, scholars are confused to locate Alevism within the Islamic circle. The question of whether Alevism is a sect, or a method, or a Sufi order, or a religion has not yet found a place. The primary Alevi documents like *Buyruks*, *Manaqibs*, *Velayetnames*, etc., are dealing with the theological subjects like God, its place for humanity, and its tie with human being. It, however, is a fact that matters related to *fiqh* [Islamic law] are not as definitive as it is for Sunnis and Shi'is. At this point, this paper throws a question about the nature and determinants of a sect? Were the categories of a sect determined

⁶⁸ Gölpinarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, 53-54.

⁶⁹ Gölpinarlı, *Tarih Boyunca İslâm Mezhepleri ve Sülük*, 149.

⁷⁰ Gölpinarlı, *Tarih Boyunca İslâm Mezhepleri ve Sülük*, 180.

⁷¹ The *dede* means father. *Dedes* are the primary religious leaders who lead the *cem* ritual (the principle Alevi ceremony practiced in a form of gathering of men and women).

⁷² Gölpinarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, 272. Gölpinarlı, unlike many other scholars, claims that Alevism cannot be considered as a *tariqa*. For further information, see Gölpinarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, 271; Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı, *Alevî-Bektâsî Nefesleri*, (Istanbul: Remzi, 1963), 4.

and by whom? Are these categories too clear? And what are those categories to define a group as a sect? Why cannot Alevism exist as free of Sunni/Shi`ite binaries?

However, the Alevi belief has not been institutionalized and systematized as Sunnism and Shi`ism, I argue here that the Alevi foundational communal ritual that is known as the *cem* [literally means gathering] with its established rules, is itself a sufficient factor that set apart the Alevi belief from the mainstream Sunnis and Shi`is. The *cem* ceremony, once a week, is performed in the form of gathering of both men and women in which they perform a type of dance under the supervision of a religious figure known as a *dede*, and to the accompaniment of music and alcoholic beverages.

Secondly, those Shi`ite currents also were common futures of the Sunni colored Sufi brotherhoods. Alevi tendencies had long been rather strong among even the most ardently Sunni orders such as the Yeseviye, Naqshibendiye and Mevleviyye. The saying of Galip Dede, a Mevlevi *shaykh*, ‘*Biz şah-ı vilayet kuluyuz hem Aleviyiz* [We are the men of Shah-i Vilayet and we are all Alevis] can be cited here to prove this point.⁷³ Further, traditions like honoring *ahl al-bayt*, blaming Yazid for the murder of Husayn, grieving for the martyrs of Karbala were not merely the common elements of the Sunni/Sufi orders living in the Ottoman realm. Even today, regardless of being a Sunni or Shi`ite, Muslims overall acknowledge those currents without assessing them as Shi`ite. These phenomena cannot be taken as a sign of Shi`ism. Hence, Alevism must be conceived outside of Sunni-Shi`ite parameters, not a religion in itself, but a separate sect of Islam that was heavily dominated by Sufi teaching.

CONCLUSION

Discussing Alevism within the currents of Sunni-Shi`ite discourses has been the subject of primary argument of this research. My main questions center on the dispute over the identification and classification of Alevism as either Shi`ite or close to Sunni. The minority religious groups recognizing Ali are usually listed as branches of Shi`ism. Since the Alevis in Turkey also perceive Ali as an important figure in their religious faith, they have also been considered as a branch of Shi`ism. I find it very important to discuss the question of the elements that characterize someone as a Shi`ite or Sun-

⁷³ Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 19-20, footnote, 79.

ni. Is it sufficient to identify a group as Shi'ite if they revere and honor Ali? Could acknowledgement of Ali be only a symbolic exotic characteristic of a group which is involved in the mystical teachings of Islam? How could Alevism be labeled as Shi'ite while rejecting its fundamental religious doctrines? It is important to note that almost all Sufi groups in Anatolia honor and respect Ali more than any other historical figure. If Shi'ism merely means loving and honoring Ali, Hasan and Husayn (the grandsons of Muhammad), then all Sunnis appear to be as Shi'ites.⁷⁴ I think, at this point, we need to redefine and reanalyze the concept of Shi'ism. What makes a person Shi'ite and what does not?

Researchers on Alevi Islam have proposed different views from one another concerning the Alevi religiosity. On the one side, one position served to tame the religiosity of Alevism and to convert them to Shi'ism without acknowledging the fact that Alevis neither recognized the fundamental doctrines of Shi'ism nor desire to be labeled as Shi'ite. Alevis insist on defining themselves as Alevi — neither Sunni nor Shi'ite. On the other side, I argue that modern knowledge on Alevism was constructed to assimilate the Alevis to the formal laws of the respective mainstream doctrines of Sunnism. My argument is undergirded by the recent works of Markus Dressler and Kabir Tambar⁷⁵ With a particular reference to Köprülü's writings, Dressler argues that the most existing modern scholarship on the Alevis fails to conceive of Alevi differences outside of this framework — attributing Alevism to Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam. The main purpose, according to Dressler, was to create a mono-religious Turkish nation-state.⁷⁶ Tambar, on the other side, argues that the Turkish state failed to recognize Alevism as a separate community, but associated its religiosity with Sunni Islam despite Alevi plea to the contrary.⁷⁷ Alevis, claimed Tambar, would prefer to be viewed apart from the Sunni majority. The effort of the Turkish state to adhere Alevis to Islam closer to Sunnism obstructs the possibility of apply-

⁷⁴ John Birge in his work *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* states that when he visited Turkey, he was very surprised to see that all these Sufi groups honor Ali, Hasan and Husayn, and they blame Yazid for the murder of Husayn. Therefore, he states that even if Turkey is a Sunni populated country, and even if these Sufi groups are called Sunni Sufi groups, they actually appear with to have Shi'ite tenets. That is probably why he discusses the Bektaşis within the concept of Shi'ism. See John Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, (London: Luzac & Co. [1937] 1965).

⁷⁵ Dressler, *Writing Religion*.; Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism*.

⁷⁶ Dressler, *Writing Religion*, 15-23.

⁷⁷ Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism*, 54; Unlike the Turkish state's claim, Alevis, according to Tambar, have historically adhered to at least some traditions of Islam closer to Shi'ism than to those followed by Turkey's Sunni majority. Kabir Tambar. "Iterations of Lament: Anachronism and affect in a Shi'i Islamic revival in Turkey," *American Ethnologist*, volume 38, no. 3, (2011), 486.

ing pluralism in a Sunni majority state. Hence, rather the forcing Alevism to converge on either Shi'ism or Sunnism, I argue to regard Alevism as an independent sect on its own right.

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