THE CHANGING LEADERSHIP ROLES OF DEDES IN THE ALEVİ MOVEMENT

Ethnographic Studies on Alevi Associations in Turkey and Germany from the 1990s to the Present

Deniz Coşan Eke
What is the function of clerical leadership in Alevism based on sociocultural and political understandings? To answer that complex question, Deniz Cosan Eke examines the political, cultural, and religious debates surrounding Alevis and the Alevi movement in relation to the ideas and claims of the Turkish state, Alevi communities in Turkey, and migrant Alevi communities in Germany. The book, which focuses on the emergence of collective emotions in religious rituals, the struggle of religious groups in migration processes, and the leadership role of clergy in social movements, is of great interest to a wide readership.

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Mina & Aylin
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Most of the interviews in this research were conducted in Turkish, with the rest conducted in German. All transcripts were then translated into English. The original terms in the Turkish and German languages are italicised, and the transcription is based on Turkish spelling and pronunciation. Arabic words are used as pronounced in Turkish.

Notes on the Research Participants

I informed the participants about the research basis of this thesis. Participation was strictly voluntary, and they could refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time. All participants gave their consent verbally during the fieldwork, including interviews. Most of them did not want to share their names and some of the conversations, and some even wished to withdraw completely, due to security fears. Therefore, most of the names, identities and conversations have been anonymised, which also means that some of the events, interactions and relationships cannot be mentioned.
1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In 1993, an Islamic extremist group set fire to Hotel Madımak in Sivas, Turkey, where Alevi1 had assembled for a cultural festival to commemorate Pir Sultan Abdal.2 Thirty-seven people (thirty-three of which were of Alevi background) lost their lives that day in what the Alevi community would later refer to as the ‘Massacre of 2 July’, or ‘Sivas Massacre’. This atrocity made a substantial impact, not only on the Alevi community, but also on my own personal life.

When the Sivas Massacre occurred, I was 14 years old and living with my family in Izmir, one of the largest cities in Turkey, where I attended a Saz3 course in the Pir Sultan Abdal Dernegi4. With mixed feelings, I watched the Sivas Massacre on TV, together with all of my family. My mother said to me nervously, “You are not going

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1 Alevi is a religious and cultural community that have settled mainly in Turkey, but they can be also defined as a transnational community as a result of increasing international migration. Alevis is the second largest religious belief after the Sunni version of Islam, and Alevis are estimated at between 12 and 15 million in number. Alevis, which has been influenced by a variety of religions and cultures, including Shamanism, Bektashism, Zoroastrism, Universalism, Sufism, Manichaeism and Christianity, among others, can be distinguished from all other Islamic belief systems (Uluçay, 1993). Indeed, Alevis is used as an “umbrella term” (Bruinessen, 2002) to define a large number of different heterodox communities, including Nusayris, Bektahs, Abdals, Tahtacis, Yörük and Kurdish Alevis.

2 Pir Sultan Abdal is one of the most important historical and religious figures in both Alevi rituals and the struggle for Alevi identity. He was a pir, a rank of dede, i.e., a religious leader in Alevism, and lived in Sivas between 1480 and 1550. He was popular thanks to his Alevi poems and because of his rebellious temperament against the Ottoman governors. Due to his religious convictions, he was hanged by Hızir Pasha, who ruled the region (Korkmaz, 2005; Avci, 2006).

3 Saz or Bağlama, known as the sacred ritual instrument in Alevism, literally means a ‘plucked folk lute with frets’.

4 The main differences between this organisation and the others are that it is a leftist organisation and struggles not only for the religious and cultural rights of Alevis, but also for social injustice in Turkey. It can organise different protests to defend ‘the rights of the other’ in Turkey, such as Kurdish groups, poor groups, etc. The organisation was established first in 1988,
on the Saz course, forget it,” before advising my siblings and me not to tell anyone that we were Alevi. I remember the massacre leaving me worried and anxious.

My family and I watched news reports on the Sivas Massacre for a long time, in an attempt to understand who was responsible for it. According to police reports, 15,000 fundamentalist Islamists had gathered in Sivas and shouted, “Death to secularists!” (Turkish Politics, July 2nd, 2013). After the incident, 190 suspects were arrested and 124 tried in court. As for the hotel, a kebab restaurant was opened a few months later on the ground floor, even though the Alevi community demanded that it should be turned into a “museum of shame” (Aktion Press, July 2nd, 2015).

Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir (2012), a social scientist and visitor to the Madımak Hotel, expressed her feelings thus:

“What scared me the most was not the traumatic story of the place but rather the blatant indifference in the air. There was not a single monument, a single reminder of the event itself in sight; quite to the contrary, the hotel had a feeling of complete normalcy, as if nothing extraordinary happened there.”

Since the ‘real’ perpetrators of the massacre had not been found by 2012, the Criminal Court declared that the Sivas should be dropped, due to the statutes of limitations, on 13 March 2012 (Hurriyet Daily News, March 12th, 2013). On that very day, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey, said, “May this bring good fortune.” Over the following days, many Alevis protested against the verdict, and almost 10,000 people in Istanbul marched in the streets, declaring “We will not forget Madımak, we will not let you forget Madımak” (Open Democracy, July 5th, 2013).

Despite many killings of Alevis in Turkey, the Sivas Massacre represented a turning point for the Alevi movement for a number of diverse reasons. First, it constituted one of the worst violent civil crimes against cultural and religious diversity in the history of Turkey. Second, many Alevis were able to follow judicial process, which received widespread attention thanks to the increase in communication and social media. Third, the government and some media institutions protected those responsible for the massacre: suspects were nominated for job positions by supporters of the atrocity, many of the lawyers for the accused became deputies for the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi-RP) and for the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP) and others fled to Europe (Hürriyet News, October 10th, 2011).

After the incident, many Alevis organised a number of protests in big cities and came together to protect themselves against possible future occurrences of similar

in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, but now there are 75 branches in different cities across the country.

5 Kebab is a dish consisting of grilled meat and vegetables.
violence. This led to the establishment of solidarity-based associations and allowed Alevis to have a voice in the public sphere through many organisations based in Turkey and Europe (today, the Alevi community has a presence in Australia, Canada and North America). The tragic incident in Sivas caused the Alevi community to blend into the Alevi movement in a transnational space; moreover, Sivas Massacre was used strategically to symbolise congregational rituals and practices, and even though it has been defined as a catalyst for the flourishing of Alevi organisations, violent attacks are still perpetrated on the community.

On 12 March 1995, a person sprayed gunfire into an Alevi coffee house in Gaziosmanpaşa, a poor district in Istanbul inhabited primarily by Alevis. When locals gathered to protest against the attack, the police reacted by shooting into the crowd, following which the Alevis responded with nationwide demonstrations. During these protests, 20 Alevi activists were killed, one of which was a dede (Alevi religious leader). The criminal incidents in Sivas and the Gazi district prompted Alevis to seek security in solidarity networks and to create an international support group.

At the time, I was a high school student and experienced great anxiety about being an Alevi in Turkey. I was afraid to reveal my identity whenever a discussion about Alevism occurred, and a personal memory about that time is worth sharing. In 1980, another massacre took place in Turkey, in the city of Çorum, the hometown of a close friend of mine. Some nationalist and extreme Islamist groups were responsible for the incident, in which more than 60 Alevis were killed and almost 200 seriously injured (Alemdar & Çorbacıoğlu, 2012). After this event, my friend's family moved to Izmir, to escape from the radical religious and political groups running rife in the city. When I learned that her family had warned her not to disclose her Alevi identity, I recalled my family's reaction after the Sivas Massacre. Sharing our emotions and memories about being Alevi in Turkey marked the beginning of our close friendship.

The Sivas Massacre is also discussed as a turning point for the Alevi movement in contemporary Alevi literature. However, this brutal event forced me to alienate myself from my identity, in tandem with many Alevi children and young people in Turkey. Thereafter, I stopped going to Alevi events, and I took no part in religious and/or cultural activities in my community. Through the present project, I have discovered that many participants in my research recounted similar stories because of feeling powerlessness to protect themselves – and the fear of oppression. The first time I attended a cem ritual, i.e., an Alevi religious and cultural ceremony, was after I started my PhD research in 2011 in Germany.

Two factors motivated me to explore this research issue in more depth through a PhD thesis. First, after relocating to Germany for personal reasons, I realised that Alevis had a more positive image compared to the Sunni community originating from Turkey, as well as Turkish immigrants in general. In my personal conversa-
tions in Germany, I met with people who had emigrated from various countries and who claimed that Alevis seemed ‘different’ from Turkish immigrants. If one is not familiar with Alevis, or has only little information about them, members of the Alevi community are perceived as ‘good’ Turks, because they seem to integrate more easily into European culture than ‘other’ immigrants from Turkey. Indeed, it is possible to find a good deal of news about Alevis in Germany that helps support their positive perception (Die Welt, March 4th, 2011). However, according to Kira Kosnick, the representation of Alevis in the media is used as a kind of self-representation strategy by Alevi organisations looking to stress the differences between them and the Sunni community. Among these differences are the fact that Alevis do not pray in mosques, they celebrate joint religious ceremonies for women and men and Alevi women do not wear headscarves. As Kosnick writes:

“All of these dimensions, which among Sunni Turks tend to be interpreted as morally suspect and non-Islamic, turn Alevi beliefs and practices into a kind of Islam that in the German context tends to be interpreted as progressive and tolerant” (2004: 990).

Unlike the generally negative image of – and scientific results relating to – the integration of Turkish immigrants in Germany (Berlin Institute for Population and Development, 2009; Ruß-Sattar, 2014; Green, 2003; Der Spiegel, 2009), Alevis have been described as a successful example of an immigrant group in the country, because of their tendency to adjust to the integration policies of German society (Masicard, 2006; Deutsche Welle, February 9th, 2011). On the one hand, as Mandel (1989) remarks, the migration process from Turkey to Germany has caused “reversal hierarchies” for Alevis, in that the negative image they have among the majority of Sunni groups, and their status in Turkey, contrasts with the positive reputation they have in their new homeland. On the other hand, Alevis do not oppose German integration policies (Hoßmann & Karsch, 2011), and in contrast to this, they wish to be recognised as being equal to their German counterparts. The most important aspect of this strategy is the concerted effort to use the legal-institutional framework for better adaptation to German society. Sökefeld (2005: 150) uses the term “institutional integration” for this process and expands on this notion to incorporate a dialogue with civil society organisations and other religious communities. He also claims that the institutional integration strategy is used by Alevis in order to emphasise the differences between their culture and faith. One example is represented by Alevi religious classes in German schools, based on this strategy (Sökefeld, 2008).

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6 According to the index of the Berlin Institute for Population and Development (2009), Turks compared with other immigrants are defined as a “failed integrated” group in Germany (Ruß-Sattar, 2014; Green, 2003; Der Spiegel, January 26th, 2009).
In addition to the positive perceptions of Alevism in Germany, my second factor for writing this dissertation is related to another matter close to my heart: the existing labour migration of Turks to Germany. After the labour recruitment treaties that Turkey signed with different Western European countries in 1961 (İçduyuğ, 2012; Oakland, 2008. Martin, 1991), my grandfather, who was one amongst 525,000 males ‘guest workers’ (Yöntem & McDonald 2008), travelled to Germany in 1968.

In line with Germany’s expectations of these guest workers, he wanted to earn money for a while and then return to his native village; however, he had to postpone his plans because of the discrimination his family experienced in Turkey. In addition, my uncle was a high school student in Ankara and lived with his own uncle (my grandfather’s brother) while completing his education. My grandfather’s brother suggested that my uncle should go to Germany, because he was the victim of violence and ritual humiliation meted out by radical Sunni and nationalist groups in Ankara for being an Alevi. In 1982, my grandfather invited my grandmother and my uncle (one of their five children) to move to Germany, according to family reunification regulations in the country. After almost 30 years, my grandparents returned to their homeland, but my uncle graduated from university and settled down in Germany. When my grandparents moved back to Turkey, the rest of their children went to live with my grandfather's family. My grandparents sent their savings back to their family in Turkey, to cover childcare expenses and to promote different investments, such as real estate and financial assets (similar situations can be found in Bettin, Giulia & Paçacı Elitok, Seçil & Straubhaar, Thomas, 2012).

My grandparents’ family would visit us every year while they were living in Germany, and they would tell us of the nation’s discipline in the workplace and its justice system, which they perceived to be better than in Turkey. Also, my grandparents told us enthusiastically that they participated in their first cem ritual in Hamburg in 1989, organised as part of the ‘Alevis in Germany’ (2004: 138). I remember that my grandfather had shared with us his memory of this impressive cem ritual he had attended, and this and other stories my grandparents told me unconsciously created positive perceptions in my mind toward Alevis in Germany. Additionally, my own experiences in the country, as mentioned above, also encouraged me to explore Alevism in my dissertation.

In the first section of this introduction, before I discuss the fieldwork element of my research, I briefly acknowledge that my own personal and emotional expe-

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7 Migrant workers were called initially fremdarbeiter (foreign workers) and then later Gastarbeiter (guest workers) because German politicians thought that they had temporary status in Germany, and they would soon return to their home countries (Müller, 2006).
periences influenced the research project. The reason is that one of the aims of this dissertation is to explore how emotions that are felt personally or individually can simultaneously contribute to the emergence of collective actions. On the one hand, emotions in this research are generally used to explore a way of thinking about how cultural, economic, and political changes and disadvantageous positions have produced anxiety in the lives of Alevis living in Turkey and Germany. On the other hand, emotions such as “collective effervescence” (Durkheim, 1912 in Scheve, 2011) and “emotional energy” (Collins, 2004 in Scheve, 2011) in religious rituals are investigated, to determine how collective emotions contribute to the emergence of a collective conscience and thus lead to the reinforcement of group ties and social solidarity.

Although emotions play a central role in daily life, anthropologists have tended either to give them little consideration or to deal mainly with certain emotions, such as rapport and compassion in fieldwork, used to gain informants’ trust (some exceptions can be found in the following studies: Lutz, 1988; Lindholm, 1988, 2005). According to Durkheim and Mauss (1963), it is difficult to study emotions, because they are fluid, mixed and not easily defined and analysed. Due to the relations of emotions with irrationality and sentimentality, emotions in anthropological research used to be considered risky, because they might undermine the validity of participant observation (Lindholm, 2005). However, since the late 1990s, important critical studies have been carried out on emotions and affect theories regarding cultural, political, religious, and cultural transformations in different disciplines of the social sciences (Massumi, 1995; Sedgwick, 1995; Clough, 2007; Athanasiou & Yannakopoulos, 2008). These theoretical approaches, referred to as the ‘affective turn’, make it possible to consider new ways of exploring the influence of emotions in the analysis of the intergroup solidarity of political and religious groups and their collective actions. The reason for this, as stated by Cornel du Toit (2014:6), is that “the affective turn expands our understanding of emotion to include judgement, thought and appraisal.” In this research, I argue that emotions can represent social cohesion and the reproduction of social solidarity that drives collective actions. The focus of my discussion is thus the increasing role of emotion in religious rituals, and its effects on the organisation of a religious group.

More specifically, I argue that the collective memory of Alevis, such as their migration stories, both internal and international, and the traumatic events that brought the group together, such as the Sivas and Çorum massacres, are nurtured by collective emotions such as fear of oppression and humiliation, or inter-group emotions such as trust and self-awareness of shared feelings. In my research, I observe that the bond between dedes (the religious leaders of Alevism) and talips (followers of these dedes) is highly emotional in nature. Dedes’ followers pay allegiance to their leaders. Concurrently, the charismatic authority of dedes, who have special power and knowledge that is unavailable to talips, can be characterised by
impermanence and movement, very much like emotions. What I explore herein are the collective emotions of Alevis in the religious rituals that are conducted by dedes. Also, I seek to show how the emotional bond between dedes and talips influences the leadership roles of the former in the transnational Alevi movement.

1.2 Aims and Scope of the Research

In Alevism, a dede (which literally means ‘grandfather’) can be defined generally both as a leader who solves social problems and as a leader in the spiritual sense. Fundamentally, a dede is a “kinship-oriented, genealogically-based authority, ascribed status, and dedes are only men” (Sökefeld 2002:164). Both the definition of a dede and the legitimacy thereof in the Alevi community are debatable. For this reason, a prominent question of the current study involves explicating the various roles of the dede. The majority of Alevis believe that they belong to an ocakzâde or an ocak (hearth), and that their families’ genealogies go back to descendants of the Prophet Mohammed and the family of Imam Ali. In addition to an ocakzâde dede, there is also a dikme (planted) dede, who does not have any inherited authority (not genealogically based). Differently from the ocakzâde dede, the dikme dede can conduct a cem ritual assigned by an ocakzâde dede. In addition, some Alevis define dedes according to the ideas of the Çelebis of Hacı Bektaşı Veli, or Dergah. Dedes in the Dergah are not heritage-based, and they can become a Bektaşi with the help of a mürşid. (This aspect will be explained in more detail in the following chapter).

The dede, a religious leader unique to Alevism, conducts the cem, and participants are called talips. The talip belongs to a particular dede lineage (ocak), and the relationship between dedes and their talips is based on consent and involves whole families. Also, every dede is the talip of another dede, who in turn is his pir or mürşit. Dedes are responsible for listening to the problems of their talips, and they are supposed to give them advice in the cem ritual and carry out moral, juridical and educational functions. The performance of Alevi religious and cultural rituals has been sporadic for a long time, and there are two main reasons for this issue. First, no legal mechanism has recognised the existence of Alevism as a system of distinct cultural and religious beliefs, which would otherwise secure its religious contents and functions from the state in Turkey. Second, internal and international migrations, and their consequences, have weakened or dissolved the basic institutions of Alevism (Massicard 2005: 109). For example, the traditional ties between the dede

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8 Dergah is a place where Bektaşi dervishes and babas lived and performed their daily and religious duties.
9 Mürşid, Pir and Rehber are the three hierarchies of dedes.
and the *talip* lineages were broken by the intensification of the non-religious activities of Alevism. With the breaking of these lineages, *talips* had little possibility of contacting a *dede* to talk about their problems.

As a result of these processes, the social status and authority of *dedes* in Alevism have been reduced. At this point, the question is: why do Alevis need *dedes*? Recently, the Alevi community has started to discuss, among other things, the training of *dedes*, their demands for regular salaries, which should be financed by the Turkish government, and the exclusive conduct of the *cem* by *dedes*. These discussions show that the *dede* as an Alevi religious leader maintains a central position in the tradition. As a result of my personal interest in *dedes*, I have analysed recent literature about Alevism (published in the last 20 years), and I have noticed that research on the religious leaders and their changing roles in the movement is still inadequate in terms of both social and cultural anthropology, as well as the social science literature (except for Sökefeld 2002; Dressler 2006, 2013; Yaman 1998; Karakaya-Strump 2010, 2012), even though *dedes* are accepted as one of the basic social conventions in Alevism (Yaman & Erdemir, 2006). Also, when I began to investigate the literature for information on the religious leaders and their effect on collective political action (Platt & Lilley, 1994; Morris & Staggenborg, 2002; Wessinger, 2014; Yukl, 2002), I noticed that leadership in a community, society or organisation that is deeply embedded in the sociocultural context has lately received increasing attention (Johnson, 2007; Dorfman, 1996; Lewis, 1974; Gelfand, Erez & Aycan, 2007). Furthermore, the literature reviews show that the effects of leadership are rooted in the emotional connections at play in leader-follower interactions, which include respect, trust, and loyalty to leaders, and these affect the attitudes and activities of their followers (Lindholm, 2013; Murphy, 2008).

By conducting such ethnographic research, including the analysis of religious, political, and emotional expressions, and the relationship between religious representations and the self-representations of religious leaders, I have tried to analyse how ‘culture-specific’ attitudes and religious faiths influence leadership and how leaders are transformed into ‘transnational’ figures. The main aim of this dissertation is to promote a dialogue with those in leading positions as religious leaders in their own socio-cultural settings, and to explore the power and authority of leaders who have transitioned from local to transnational religious organisations.

In my research, I have noticed that the Alevi movement as a social group faces the dilemma of how to reconcile leadership roles with the equality discourse of Alevism. Many of the informants I interviewed rejected on principle the hierarchical position of the *dede* as a leader, arguing mainly that, according to Alevi beliefs, *dedes* are not political leaders but only religious figures by nature, and that it is the organisational context that makes them political. However, it is difficult to eliminate both the need for leadership functions and the effects of *dedes* as leaders on the Alevi faith and its organisations. I argue herein that *dedes* are not only religious
leaders, but they can also influence the Alevi social movement in relational terms. As expressed by Diana (2003), who explains the relation between leadership and relational terms in social movements,

“Leadership roles need not entail control over a unified organization, or explicit recognition of charisma from followers. They may also, far less obtrusively, result from certain actors’ location at the center of exchanges of practical and symbolic resources among movement organizations. This will not generate domination, if by that we mean actors’ capacity to impose sanctions over others in order to control their behavior, but rather varying degrees of influence” (2003: 107).

According to this perspective, the leadership role of dedes can be associated with their abilities to establish connections with both followers, who can relate to the ocak with whom they share a communal membership or an Alevi association membership, and the different Alevi associations and political institutions. I have applied to the dedes the definitions of Diana and Della Porta (2006: 143) about leaders in a social movement. I claim that their actor abilities lead them to operate as de facto movement ‘representatives’, albeit actually, in this research, some are chosen as proactive leadership models who motivate their followers by organising them to participate in Alevi social movements.

In sum, the roles of dedes have developed from being only religious leaders in Alevism, through to being representatives of Alevis in their struggle for recognition. As my findings demonstrate, Alevi organisations tend to involve the negotiations of integration policies in Germany and the recognition of Alevism by ‘Alevi Opening (Alevi Açılımı)’ policies in Turkey. In this context, dedes have existed as representatives of the Alevi community in all official meetings organised by the Turkish and German governments. In so doing, these governments have acknowledged the religious identity of the Alevi community, and the dedes have also been accepted primarily as religious leaders, though I argue that in this guise they have also supported and represented the political struggle of Alevis.

Following the development of transnational networks among Alevis over the last decade, dedes’ participation in political debates has started to increase. In connection with this process, they have acquired a role as mediators in conflicts concerning not only religion, but also socio-cultural and political issues in Turkey. Recently, they have started to act as mediators or political actors between members of their community, Alevi associations, the government and society more generally, to solve problems and conflicts. Furthermore, because of their charismatic authority, empowered with exceptional qualities, dedes are still perceived as more trustworthy among Alevis than other state authorities, such as headmen or mayors in their local settings, despite the fact that dedes’ authority has decreased as a result of migration and their duties originally were confined mostly to the celebration of cem rituals (Shah, 2013; Markussen, 2000).
The main reason why dedes have taken up a mediator role is that Alevi districts in Turkey are stigmatised as being particularly insecure, due to their resistance and struggle against state policies, and vice versa, caused by the suppression and violence exerted by the Turkish state (Göker, 2002; Yonucu, 2013). Unlike the situation of Alevis in Turkey, as I mentioned briefly above, German Alevi communities, by means of their associations, have started their struggle for recognition with ‘institutional integration’ in some provinces (Bundesländer, as the states of Germany are called). In light of “the politicisation of immigrant integration,” the representatives of minority religion groups and the rise of the visibility of their religious leaders have become increasingly involved in integration politics in Germany, in order to solve social and political tensions revolving around immigrants in the country (Verbeek & Scholten, 2014). I claim, therefore, that dedes can contribute to the governance of religious and cultural diversity because of their role as mediators in the context of the revival of religious organisations in both countries.

According to Sökefeld, “in contrast to the dede-centered Alevism whose hidden religious practices were mainly a rural affair, associational Alevism is situated most importantly in urban centers” (2002: 183). The intent of the current study is to take this statement a step further, by claiming that dedes can regain significance and authority in the Alevi community through their mediator and/or transnational roles in reoriented Alevism through diasporic relations and transnational networks. Furthermore, I argue that dedes who revitalise emotional connections with Alevis in transnational contexts have started to reclaim their authority and power in the struggle for recognition. I observe that the changing leadership role of dedes is revitalising dede-talip interactions and motivating the Alevi community to recreate their collective entities in transnational social spaces.

The existing religious leadership attributed to dedes is based on the feelings and higher spiritual practices of leaders (Fernando et al., 2009). When dedes can combine their spirituality with individual moral improvement and a collective effort for complete social reconstruction (Yulk, 2002), they can increase their influence over their followers’ lives as well as the future of Alevi organisations within the transnational movement. This argument is based on my observations that the use of transnational connections has positively influenced the effectiveness of dedes and the revival of the emotional bonds between them and talips. In support of this claim, I illustrate how some of the informant dedes in my research have regularly visited different European cities as guests of their ocak’s talips or members of the Alevi community, in order to perform their rituals, especially cem rituals.

The recent strengthening of religious leaders as political actors across the proliferation of religious organisations and the political system can be associated with the rise of neoliberal practices in Turkey and across Europe that have caused a revival of religion in public life (Yavuz, 2004; Gauthier & Martikainen & Woodhead, 2013; Wilson & Steger, 2013; Sandıkçı et al., 2015). It became obvious to me that a
thorough understanding of the dede institution could only be articulated through gaining an understanding of the wider context within which the dynamics and directions of Alevism occur. It is for this reason that the dede institution in the Alevi faith has to be explored through the lens of how the global intersects with the local in the experiences of individual agents. This research briefly presents an example of the impact of religious leaders on social movements, by questioning the leadership role of dedes both as a unique religious authority in Alevism and also as a kind of ‘new’ political actor in the transnational Alevi movement context. The emergence of collective emotions in rituals, the identification of groups in migration processes, including literature on transnational communities and the diaspora, and the effects of the leadership roles of religious figures on social movements are the main aspects of my research. In the following chapters, I explain in detail various aspects of Alevi foundations in terms of the leadership role of dedes in the local, national, and transnational Alevi environments, as well as the religious and cultural activities they conduct.

1.3 Methodology

The quality of the current research project is ensured by a rigorous review of the existing literature on the topic and by a methodological process that includes participant observation, in-depth interviews, and narrative analysis, all of which highlights the nexus between religious, socio-political, cultural, and emotional barriers that Alevis face in their struggle for identity.

In conducting this study, my aims are to analyse the political, cultural, and religious debates surrounding dedes in relation to claims made by the Turkish government, Alevi communities in Turkey and Alevi immigrant populations in Germany. The first criterion I use is based on Turkey’s failure to recognise the Alevi community as a distinct cultural and belief structure within society. The Alevi people in Turkey primarily demand “non-discriminat[ory] treatment” from the Turkish state (Erdemir et al., 2010a), and they refuse to be regarded as an inferior group because of their socio-cultural differences and religious rituals. They perceive their sense of social exclusion and lack of recognition as depriving them of their social, political, and cultural rights (Erdemir et al., 2010b). As a consequence, the struggle for recognition in Turkey that began in the 1990s can be seen as a leading factor in the Alevi movement.

Germany, as one of the largest European bases for Alevis, and also as the most important transnational connection, is different in many ways from its Turkish counterpart. The main distinctions include political and social rights, policies regarding cultural and religious diversity and the form of Alevi organisations. Alevi immigrants in Germany have included local, national, and transnational processes
in forming their identity, because immigrants in this country classify their social existence and their cultural and religious identity by using more than one national legal and political framework. Alevi organisations, which started in Germany and then spread to other European countries, have played a salient role in setting up networks of solidarity as well as a sense of connectedness and association in a transnational social space. As Faist (2000: 321) proposes, transnational immigrant organisations contribute to forging a new mix of “exit” and “voice” in nationally bounded civil societies, and ever more in those that are transnationally interlinked.

In this research, the changing role of dedes is analysed within the context of the Turkish state, the Alevi community in Turkey and the immigrant Alevi community in Germany, even though Alevism is defined differently in each context and expectations about the roles of dedes also vary. This research provides empirical data about the changing leadership position of dedes in the transnational Alevi movement.

Fieldwork Locations

Methodological aspects of this research include long-term ethnographic fieldwork carried out at different Alevi associations and mainly in two countries (Turkey and Germany) and various cities. The fieldwork lasted from February 2012 to September 2017. In Turkey, it was financed by the “Global Cultures – Connecting Worlds” (GCCW) funding programme, run by the Ludwig-Maximilians University, Faculty for the Study of Culture (DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service IPID4all program), while the research in Germany was not financed by any institution. The GCCW allowance was not supposed to provide direct research funding but to enable me to support myself during my stay in Turkey.

a. Fieldwork in Turkey

The nine months I spent in Turkey during my research were both impressive and intensive, and I combined my personal experiences, relations and knowledge accumulated as a Turkish citizen for 28 years. During the fieldwork, from 2014 to 2017, I stayed in different cities and places: from June to August 2014 (two and half months), from July to October 2015 (three months), from December to January 2015 (one month) from July to August 2016 (one month) and from August to September 2017 (one month). I stayed mainly in three cities, namely Ankara, Izmir, and Istanbul, but I also went to Yozgat (Bahadin), Nevşehir (Hacıbektaş), Çorum, Manisa (Hamza Baba) and Aydın (Didim) to attend religious and cultural rituals with the dedes who took part in my research.

During my fieldwork in Turkey, I stayed with my family and my husband’s relatives, most of whom are Alevi. This arrangement had many benefits, such as the fact that my immediate family and other relatives shared their complaints and feelings
about Alevi associations, the institution of dedes and Turkish state policies. Finally, the usage of the snowball sampling technique to contact dedes helped me reach many of them in a short time.

b. Fieldwork in Germany
The fieldwork I conducted in Germany was not limited to a specific amount of time, because I have been living in Munich since 2011, so most of it was carried out from home. On starting the PhD programme, I was a member of a number of Munich Alevi associations, where I regularly participated in many activities between 2011 and 2017.

From February 2013 to September 2017, I conducted my research in different cities. Hamburg was visited three times for almost 3 weeks, and I stayed at my relatives’ place. I went to Stuttgart twice for approximately one week, and I stayed at my relatives’ house. I also attended as a researcher a three-day course on dede-ana education in Dortmund, expenses for which were paid by the Dedeler-Analar Kurulu of AABF. I also went to Ulm and Augsburg, to attend rituals run by dedes and other activities arranged by Alevi organisations. There, I stayed with the relatives or followers of the dedes. I went to Rosenheim twice on daily trips, in order to talk with dedes and some members of the local Alevi community. During my fieldwork in both countries, my relatives, friends, and those who participated in the research helped me a lot. Moreover, I faced almost the same limitations and opportunities in both countries.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process during my fieldwork is divided mainly into three phases, to support the arguments. First, I met with many Alevis during different associations’ activities to explore their situation and their connections with dedes. These events included listening to conversations with the people who came to Cemevis, and attending religious rituals (animal sacrifices, weddings, funerals, and moments of worship). I also attended different social activities: breakfast and dinner meetings, panels, political meetings with different members of the Turkish or German Parliament, commemorations of Alevi massacres and different political protests in both countries. In addition, I attended some education programmes, such as the dede-ana education course in Germany and meetings between dedes, to which only they are usually admitted.

Second, I contacted some dedes who are immensely popular in Alevi associations and have more authority and power in Alevi movements, as well as transnational connections, than others. I planned to use the in-depth interview technique during my meetings with them, and this became an important criterion in this research: regardless of whether they were ocakzade or not, people who fulfilled and
practiced the role of a dede or worked for a dede institution were chosen. Herein, I provide information about their life stories and try to show how they became spiritual leaders and what they thought about Turkish state policies, their position within Alevi organisations and the transformation of Alevism in Turkey and Germany. Therefore, I followed and participated in the cultural activities and belief practices organised under the spiritual guidance of dedes. Some of these events were cem rituals, funeral rites, marriage ceremonies and conflict resolution meetings.

Specifically, I attended 28 cem rituals to explore the dedes' main role as religious leaders and to note the transformation of their position as political actors in the Alevi movement. It is important to understand that Alevis are communities with rural backgrounds and that their home villages still hold a very central place in the social, cultural and belief aspects of their lives. In this sense, an Alevi family living in Turkey or in Germany should be considered members of a wider community that is divided between different settings, such as villages, Turkish cities, and several European cities.

Within these local, national, and transnational connections, I tried to comprehend the functions involved in the leadership role of dedes in an Alevi movement grounded in sociocultural and political understandings.

Third, I conducted in-depth interviews with 24 dedes, 29 talips in Germany and 21 dedes and 27 talips in Turkey. After these conversations, for ethnographic presentation, I focused on two dedes: Cafer Kaplan (AABF-Germany) and Mehmet Turan (Hacı Bektaşi Veli Vakfı-Turkey). Biographical information about these dedes is offered in detail in the fourth chapter of the thesis. I spent most of the time following these two dedes in activities organised by them or for them. To attend their practices, especially the cem rituals that they conducted in Turkey and Germany, I went on some journeys with these dedes. With Cafer dede I met in Munich, Dortmund, and Hamburg and with Mehmet dede I met in Ankara, Yozgat (Bahadın) and Nevşehir (Hacıbektaş). There were also many other dedes who contributed to my research and whom I met in Munich, Hamburg, Dortmund, Rosenheim, Stuttgart, Ulm, Istanbul, Izmir, Nevşehir, Ankara, Yozgat and Çorum.

Following the in-depth interviews, I provide a detailed description of individual experiences and their meanings. Recounting the life experiences of dedes through a narrative approach helps to understand their perceptions and viewpoints regarding their influence over and roles in the Alevi movement. The narrative approach as a qualitative and interpretive research method contributed to understanding both the individuals and the context in which they live and operate for the investigation of their identity. Although dedes were chosen for “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990:16), in order to interrogate the direction and the transformation of the Alevi movement, I designed my research in a nonlinear and iterative (repetition) way, in order to be able to observe the influences of dedes on their followers.
In the context of this study, a “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus, 1995) serves the purpose of exploring the multi-stranded relations and influence of dedes in the Alevi movement. Therefore, the analysis is based on my ethnographic experience as a participant observer of Alevi religious and cultural events, ceremonies, festivals such as Hacı Bektaş-i Veli festivals, Sivas and Çorum massacre commemorations, Hamza Baba festivals, Muhabet (conversation) nights, etc. Alevi share their values because their culture is constituted by these activities. Their festivals are also an important tradition because they represent a cultural legacy to be passed down from generation to generation. Moreover, participant observation was enriched by local meetings, field notes, discussions, and informal conversations with members of Alevi organisations in Turkey and in Germany.

In addition, I followed some Alevi journals (Alevilerin Sesi, Hacı Bektaş-i Veli Dergisi, Plural-BDAJ (Alevi Gençler Dergisi), Alevi television channels (YOL, TV10, CemTV) and Alevi web pages (the official pages of Alevi institutions as well as the Facebook and Twitter pages of some members’ Alevi associations), to explore the reasons for and effects of their emotional reactions in terms of both their intersubjective relations and within their sociocultural and political dimensions. One of the interesting points in my fieldwork is that many of the participants living in Turkey and Germany invited me to join their Facebook pages. Even though I thought that, as Bauman (2016) claims, social media does not help us to develop a “real” dialogue, I noticed that this virtual connection was one of the ways through which I could easily achieve proximity with the researched people, and so it proved useful when we met again during activities or at Alevi association events.

The Status of the Researcher

At the beginning of my research, I did not have to put in much effort to be accepted locally, because most of the people involved in the research trusted me once they knew that I was an Alevi. Thus, the majority of the participants in my research easily accepted me as an insider researcher, i.e., having a tendency to be familiar with the study’s informants. After a while, I noticed that their attitudes were not only connected to my position as an insider, but also many of them had prejudices against a non-Alevi researcher. Alevi who took part in my research see Alevism as totally different from other faiths and cultures, and they feel that it is not possible to explain the faith “correctly” if the researcher is not an Alevi and has not grown up within such a milieu. Many of the informants appreciated the fact that my research focused on Alevism and especially on the institute of dedes; however, some of them wanted to know why I was interested in this topic, especially those residing in Turkey. Some even expressed their concerns and were suspicious about my motivations, as they did not see me as a “real” insider.
Initially, I had thought myself an insider, because I believed that I had enough knowledge about the Alevi faith and culture, their lifestyles, relationships, social groups, and labour market to which they belonged. Nevertheless, after some time, I realised that my position was neither that of an insider nor of an outsider. My status in the research domain turned out to be both an assistance and a restriction in collecting data concerning what is considered “important” and/or “unimportant” (Langhout, 2006; Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Nonetheless, I can argue that being ‘in the middle’ or ‘between positions’ gave me more access in the fieldwork or during the research process to raise questions based on my research topic.

While my background as an Alevi had many advantages in establishing a rapport with the participants, the position of insider researcher could represent the risk of losing critical distance from and objectivity towards the researched groups (Denscombe, 2010). In the fieldwork, I was indeed positioned as an insider, but I did not have any idea about certain Alevi experiences before this research, and I chose sometimes to be ‘silent’ around them, in order to listen and understand (Breen, 2004).

As an insider, I supported through my position the Alevi discourse about the importance of women and gender equality as an educated Alevi woman. Although I did not reflect consciously on my marital status, the participants with whom I interacted often knew that I was married and that I was the mother of two children (my children were 5 and 2 years old when I made my fieldwork trip), because I took part in many Alevi activities with them in different cities in Turkey and Germany. As Coffey (1999) claims, if the research participants know the personal life of the researcher, this information can affect the research process. Even though most of the participants trusted me enough to share their ideas and emotions, I felt that my role as a mother and a ‘female’ were at first treated with scepticism by some people (Gill & Maclean, 2002). To illustrate this point, a small number of Alevi associations did not invite me to some of their activities at the beginning of the research, and when I asked them for an explanation, they argued that I could not attend because the activities took place too early in the morning or too late at night.

Another example is that they did not invite me to ‘Bayram Namazi (Eid Prayer)’, even as a researcher, because women cannot participate in it, which runs parallel to Sunni beliefs. Many people also stated that I could not do this research unless my husband gave me permission and took care of our children. Therefore, when they met him during some activities, people praised him because of his support for me and my research. In addition, when I was alone, they would normally call me by my name, but some of the participants called me ‘bacım’, ‘my sister’, if my husband and I attended together.

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10 Eid prayer is the special prayer offered to commemorate Islamic festivals. According to Islamic rules, women are supposed to pray in a different place to men.
Although I sometimes regarded my ‘female gender’ as a potential limitation, the fact that I was an insider researcher facilitated my access to information. Apart from my fieldwork experiences, I attempted to describe the gender boundaries in Alevism as another part of this study, in order to understand both the construction of emotional reactions and the connections to gender, as well as the meaning of gender in the religious and socio-cultural contexts of Alevism.

In summary, as mentioned above, my identity may first be defined as a non-static insider, but at the same time my other status, i.e., that of an educated woman, a mother or a researcher/student, created an invisible distance between me and the participants. Second, my position as a Turk-Alevi woman, and my ethnic identity, was more relevant than my religious beliefs in some situations. I was not completely accepted as an insider by some Kurd-Alevi people, whose native tongue was Kurdish. For instance, when I participated in a cem ritual organised by Kurd immigrants in Stuttgart, some Kurd-Alevi told me that I was incapable of understanding their feelings in a cem ritual performed in Turkish, because the ‘original’ cem rituals have to be conducted in Kurdish in their region.

Third, my own migration story does not fall within ‘real’ migration stories, such as those of guest workers, political asylum-seekers, or refugees. For this reason, those immigrants who had migrated without their family to Germany or had been born or grown up in the country, did not see me as a ‘complete’ insider. At the same time, I was not totally an insider in Turkey, either. In addition to my academic background, I have lived in Germany for a long time, and I am a doctoral student at a German university. Many times, the participants who lived in Turkey told me that I could not really understand their life conditions, because my life had been guaranteed as a result of living in Germany.

Finally, it must be noted that although I was close to the Alevi community as a result of my national and religious background, I had also lived outside of it and was sometimes away from the field, not only in Germany, but also in Turkey. I would like to emphasise that my two-sided position as a researcher concerns not only the same ethnic, national, or religious identities, but also emotional closeness or remoteness between the researcher and the researched group (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). As Gill and Maclean (2002) also suggest, my role in the research cannot be described as that of a machine recording and analysing data. Quite the contrary, the research includes the reflexivity of complex feelings and reactions that were transformed by continuous social interactions with the participants. As Ulin (1984, xi) summarises, “Fieldwork or participant observation has led many anthropologists to struggle with epistemological problems related to understanding other cultures as part of a dialectical process of self-understanding.” Therefore, I claim that emotional involvement as a key source of insights that can produce various levels of knowledge in the research may determine the insider/outsider or ‘middle/between’ positions of the researcher and the overall analysis.
Fieldwork Language

When I emigrated to Germany, I did not speak a word of the language. I initially thought that it would not represent a problem for the development of this project, as I would be conducting my research with Turkish immigrants (and therefore would speak Turkish). However, my inadequate knowledge of German and my immigrant position intermingled, and grasping the language was not as easy for me as I initially envisaged.

There are no studies on the socio-economic profile of Alevis in Germany, but even on this point I observed that their situation is not different from other immigrant groups originating from Turkey. Alevi communities in Germany tend to occupy the lower socio-economic class and do not tend to be much closer to native people in Germany in terms of their educational achievements. This is particularly disadvantageous for their children because immigrant youngsters grow up speaking another language, including local dialects, some emergent youth slang, or a mixture of all these, along with German or Turkish (Backus & Jørgensen & Pfaff. 2010). Moreover, some immigrants originating from Turkey adopt Turkish but use a German grammatical structure; indeed, the new version of this language has been referred to in the literature as “Türkendeutsch” (Androutsopoulos, 2001; Watzinger-Tharp, 2004; Özil & Hofmann & Dayıoğlu-Yücel, 2011) or Kanak Sprak (Zaimoğlu,1995).11

Even though being a native Turkish speaker allowed a good level of acceptance and trust with the older Alevi generations, my German was not good enough to communicate with second- and especially third-generation Alevi people during activities in Germany. Hence, I took an intensive language course at the university, and after I improved my language level, I was able to read German literature and better communicate with the younger cohort. Furthermore, I could take part in different activities conducted by Alevi associations in the German tongue. For example, in 2013, I attended Alevi weeks that celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Germany Alevi Federation in Hamburg and included seminars, workshops, cem rituals (one cem was conducted by Zeynel Aslan dede in German) and other activities in German for Alevi youths studying at the University of Hamburg.

Fieldwork Phases

In general, I used a voice recorder for all in-depth interviews, but some dedes – and also some of the participants visiting Alevi associations – had trouble talking

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11 ‘Kanak Sprak’ is the title of the book by Feridun Zaimoğlu, a German-Turkish author (Zaimoğlu, 1995), and refers to a mixture of languages used by non-native speakers, or roughly Turkish immigrants’ language in Germany.
when it was in a room or venue in Turkey. They did not want to directly explain
the reasons why they did not want to be recorded, but during conversations, I un-
derstood that they feared repercussions by the Turkish state (Al Monitor, November
was particularly interesting for me that most of the participants living in Ankara,
the capital of Turkey, did not allow me to record our interviews. As such, I took
notes of our conversations, after which I would go to a cafe or a restaurant to com-
plete the gaps in my transcription and jot down field notes concerning my own
commentary and my understanding of the ‘the facts’.

In Germany, I did not come across any problem tape-recording the interviews,
albeit some participants did not give permission to record the cem ritual with a
video camera, even though the dede who celebrated the cem, and the administra-
tion of the Alevi associations, had permitted me to do so. When I was unable to
use the camera for the cem, I noted all details in my mind after the ritual. Another
important point is that after some complaints about my recording of sacred ritu-
als, I used smaller electronic recording apparatus, such as a tape, video-recorder,
and camera, in order not to disturb people during the religious or cultural activ-
ity and also to record their natural behaviours, conversations and feelings during
the observation period. Videorecording and photographs provide opportunities for
discovering nuances or symbolism in these rituals.

In my research, one of the major difficulties was translating all records from
Turkish or German into English. Since there are many special religious terminolo-
gies in Alevism, which will be explained in another chapter, many participants used
old and somewhat ancient words spoken in different regions of Turkey and mixed
them with German words.

Briefly, I can separate my fieldwork mainly into two parts. First, I met with
dedes or attended activities all day long, or sometimes at night, in order to conduct
interviews or to join in with the activities. Second, following many conversations,
I documented daily tasks and field notes. I shared my interpretations with the
participants, in order to ensure accuracy.

The other difficulty in my research was that the pluralities of the conceptu-
alisation of Alevism complicated how I organised it, because concepts such as na-
tionalism, religion, culture, minorities, immigration, and citizenship all contribute
to defining Alevism in local, national, and transnational contexts. Actually, Shind-
deldecker (1998) argues that 32 different interpretations of Alevism can be found in
published books and articles on the subject of identity.

This plurality of definitions that appear in the public sphere, in the diaspora
and within the Alevi community should be seen also as the diverse nature of Alevi
identity, which is based on different ethnic origins, cultures and religious systems.
In this research, instead of making Alevism an ambiguous or a weak notion, its
pluralities can be analysed mainly through two theoretical approaches, namely con-
structivism, which explores beliefs and attitudes as being socially and culturally constructed by individuals, and intersectionality, which helps also to discuss spiritual issues with multiple interpretations of perceptions, experiences, and emotions of everyone living in the community. In my opinion, these approaches invite us to reflect on an awareness of the complexities and the nuances behind identities and social categories.

At another stage, the ‘data’ collection process is elaborated. Even though the research informants all participated voluntarily in my interviews, some of them did not want to talk about some issues or ignored some important details in their religion or culture. Thus, I reiterated some questions but in different ways, to be clearer. Besides, during the interviews, some informants’ narratives lost coherence and at times contradicted their ‘main’ arguments or hegemonic discourse about their faith. For example, most of the participants stated that the principles of Alevism protect and support gender equality, not only theoretically, but also in daily relations with each other, and yet, when I asked whether an ana, who is the mother, sister, or wife of the dede, can conduct a cem ritual, some of them resisted answering clearly or said, “It is impossible in Alevism.” Also, some of them avoided explaining their personal ideologies, recounting instead old and mythological stories and historical facts, to base their opinion on proof. Initially, I could not decide whether I would add these reactions and attitudes to the research, but nevertheless, I recognised that their responses implied controversial and resistant issues against change or transformation. Additionally, the points behind their resistance also reflected the various intersectional dimensions and transformations of Alevism.

In this first chapter, I have highlighted the extent to which my experiences, position and working principles in the fieldwork influenced all aspects of the research process – notably, the reasons and motivations for the research topic, the scope of the study, access to informants and the collection of data. Overall, I support the argument that the ethnographer’s experience should become a matter of particular interest in the research methodology (Ellis & Adams & Bochner, 2001; Hedican, 2001; Buroway, 2003).