

ARTICLE

A retrospective reading of the journal *Yurtseverler Birliği* published in Berlin from 1982 to 1989: the decade that transformed Alevism

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Abstract

This article aims to demonstrate that the “Alevi Revival,” commonly described as the sudden increase in visibility of Alevis in Turkey in the early 1990s, was actually the result of a decade-long transformation experienced by Alevis in Europe since the late 1970s. This historical contextualization is not entirely novel but is typically only framed in reference to certain milestone events. The present article substantiates this approach based on an analysis of nine issues of *Yurtseverler Birliği*, one of the earliest Alevi political journals, published from 1982 to 1989 in Berlin and not yet studied. The evolving discourse surrounding Alevism in this journal’s issues provides the earliest substantial evidence for understanding the emergence and evolution of strategies employed to promote the visibility of Alevism from the 1980s to the 1990s. By the end of this period, the strategy of “making Alevism known” had become dominant in defining Alevism in Europe, in contrast to heterogeneous approaches to framing Alevism in Turkey. In this sense, the “Alevi Manifesto,” an open letter published in 1990 in Turkey, and the first Alevi Culture Week, organized a year before in Germany, should be regarded as outcomes of the preexisting context rather than the Revival’s initiation.

Keywords: Alevism; Alevi Revival; anthropology of visibility; transnational migration; Turkey

Introduction: a journey to the formative years of the Alevi movement in Europe

The main objective of this article is to demonstrate that the phenomenon known as *Alevi Uyanışı* (the Alevi Revival) (Çamuroğlu 1998), *Alevi Rönesansı* (the Alevi Renaissance) (Neyzi 2003, 111), or *Alevilik Patlaması* (the Explosion of Alevism) (Vorhoff 2003, 93), commonly described as a process of Alevis suddenly gaining visibility in Turkey in the early 1990s (Erdemir 2005), was actually the result of a decade-long transformation that Alevis in Europe had been undergoing since the late 1970s. During this period, Alevis in Europe were compelled to redefine Alevism in



order to make their belief culture visible in response to various social issues, such as migration from rural areas to cities in Turkey and the emergence of urbanized first-generation Alevi, and political challenges, such as the emergence of Turkish-Islamic synthesis as the new state ideology in Turkey.

To establish this argument, it is first necessary to adopt a holistic perspective and focus on the experiences of Alevi in Europe and Turkey during the 1980s and their efforts to “keep Alevism alive” in changing circumstances, especially after the military coup of September 12, 1980. In the wake of social and political developments in Europe and Turkey, these efforts, which emerged independently and spontaneously in various localities, were initially articulated through migratory social and familial networks. In the 1990s, however, these efforts evolved into a transnational political movement, particularly after the Sivas Massacre of July 2, 1993, in which thirty-three Alevi lost their lives. When Alevi were confronted by this unexpected tragedy, the discourse that had evolved in Europe regarding the definition and representation of Alevism was already well established. This discourse of “making Alevism known” became dominant and formed an important basis for the emergence of today’s transnational Alevi movement.

In this article, I explore the circumstances surrounding the emergence of this discourse by analyzing nine issues of *Yurtseverler Birliği*, which was published from 1982 to 1989 in Berlin and is one of the earliest examples of Alevi political journalism. During the course of my research in Berlin in 2009, I discovered this journal in the residence of one of the individuals I interviewed. This journal was not previously known to me, but I was able to gather all of its issues in 2021 while I was in Germany for a sabbatical year. This journal, which has not been studied before, provides significant material for understanding how strategies for making Alevism known developed and became dominant in the contest of definitions of the 1980s. Considering the diverse approaches to the question of defining Alevism, it is important to recognize that this process of redefinition involved contestation with other actors, such as left-wing political groups and Kurdish and Turkish nationalist movements, who sought to shape the definition of Alevism according to their own agendas in Turkey, and particularly with Alevi actors aligned with the state’s discourse.

To provide a comprehensive contextual analysis of the discursive shift seen in this journal, I will first discuss three key periods, moving back and forth between Europe and Turkey: the period from 1982, when the first issue of *Yurtseverler Birliği* was published, to the 1987 referendum in Turkey; from that referendum to the first Alevi Culture Week organized in Hamburg in 1989; and, finally, from 1989 to the Sivas Massacre of July 2, 1993. This historical contextualization offers an analytical basis for tracing how the discourse of “making Alevism known” developed. Thus, the analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Alevi Revival, moving beyond the confines of standard milestone events to consider the Revival as a gradual transformation of responses that emerged in different localities, initially disparate or loosely connected. The subsequent interactions among these localities, over the course of a decade, led to the formation of a cohesive transnational political entity that transcended social and political boundaries between Europe as a migration context and Turkey as a homeland.

Emergence of the Alevi movement in the context of migration in Europe since the 1960s

Prior to addressing the *Yurtseverler Birliği* journal as material that marks the transformation of the narratives shaping Alevi historiography as a significant historical juncture, it is essential to acknowledge that the formation of Alevi organizations in Europe commenced during the early phases of the migration process in the 1960s. However, as Sökefeld (2003) emphasizes, early forms of Alevi organizations were different from those that emerged at the end of the 1980s in terms of their ways of narrating Alevism in the context of migration. To explain this difference, Sökefeld and Schwalgin (2000, 12) propose a distinction between the “institutions of Alevis” and “Alevi institutions.” The former were established and predominantly joined by Alevis, who nevertheless did not express or perform Alevism publicly. The latter were associations established with the objective of promoting and publicizing Alevism openly. As Sökefeld (2008, 65) discusses, in the transition from the former type of institution to the latter, Alevism was also re-narrated with more of a focus on its religious elements than its cultural aspects.

Süleyman Cem was the driving force behind the establishment of the first Alevi initiative, the Union of Turkish Workers (Türk Ameleler Birliği; TALEB), which originated in Munich from a small family circle at the end of the 1960s. Cultural events including concerts and ceremonies were organized by this small initiative, with the participation of *ozans* (minstrels) and *dedes* (Alevi spiritual leaders) from Turkey. However, their activities were not publicized; rather, they were attended by networks of acquainted families in their localities. At the beginning of the 1970s, Cem visited local Alevi communities in different cities in Germany to assist them in establishing their own branches. The majority of Alevis who participated in these meetings expressed opposition to the open use of the term “Alevi” in their associational titles, pointing to the situation of Alevis in Turkey. In accordance with Turkish legislation of the time, the formation of organizations bearing names such as “Alevi” or “Kurdish” was prohibited on the grounds that it would constitute a “separatist” narrative challenging the formation of a cohesive national identity. Through these discussions, they reached a consensus on a name; the Union of Patriots (UoP; *Yurtseverler Birliği*), which was selected on the grounds that “Alevis are devoted to Anatolia as their homeland” (Cem 1982, 2).

Cem had personal relationships with the Unity Party of Turkey (UPT; *Türkiye Birlik Partisi*), established in 1966, and he attempted to link the UoP with this political party. Despite the absence of any explicit declaration of Alevism by its leaders, the UPT came to be identified as an “Alevi party.” The official framework of the party was initially established on the principles of republican secularism. However, in the 1970s, there was a notable shift toward a more left-wing political orientation in parallel with the increasing political polarization in Turkey (Ata 2007, 80–83). Cem was successful in building connections between the newly emerging “institutions of Alevis” in Germany and the UPT. He would also be a parliamentary candidate for Ankara from the UPT in the 1977 general elections.

At the invitation of the UoP, Mustafa Timisi, the leader of the UPT, undertook a series of visits to Germany in the 1970s to gain political support from Alevis living in Europe. This period was characterized by significant political polarization between

left-wing and right-wing politics in Turkey, eventually giving rise to a series of pogrom-like attacks targeting Alevis in middle-sized Anatolian cities such as Malatya (1978), Maraş (1978), Çorum (1980), and Sivas (1980). In response to these attacks in Turkey, Alevis in Europe began establishing the first form of “Alevi institutions,” citing a perceived lack of sufficient support from left-wing politics as the primary motivation for their actions. The most prevalent descriptions of the initial motivations for making such decisions in this period involved feelings of “being left alone” and “being abandoned” (Tosun 2002, 32). The UoP was able to establish support for itself rapidly in nearly twenty different German cities based on preexisting Alevi hometown solidarity networks that had been formed during the initial stages of migration to Europe. The Federation did not overtly promote and publicize Alevism; rather, it articulated its demands within the context of secular-leftist discourse, aligning with the prevailing political climate in Turkey. The relationship between the UPT as a political party and the UoP as a federation included limited financial support based on remittances for the former, while the latter derived a sense of moral strength from efforts to address the demands of Alevis in their homeland. However, this (largely symbolic) relationship came to a definitive end with the dissolution of all political parties and associations in Turkey following the military coup of 1980.

In this period, Alevis in Europe temporarily fell silent. To develop new strategies for navigating the challenges of expressing and practicing Alevism in the context of migration, a group of twelve Alevis from different organizational backgrounds came together to form a small collective called the Alevi Culture Group (ACG; Alevi Kültür Grubu) in Hamburg in 1988 (Kaplan 2009; Sökefeld 2008). The ACG maintained that the recognition of Alevism in Germany as an independent belief community was imperative for ensuring the consideration of their demands. They further asserted that achieving visibility in the public domain was a prerequisite for such recognition. “Making Alevism known” (*Aleviliği tanıtmak*) was the first strategy that they developed to achieve their fundamental objective (Sökefeld 2008, 184). Previous activities undertaken by predecessor organizations established by Alevis in Europe before the late 1980s were not designed to make Alevism visible; rather, they simply aimed to “keep Alevism alive” (*Aleviliği yaşatmak*) (Zirh 2018). The ACG contested this traditionalist inclination and resolved to organize a cultural festival with the explicit objective of proclaiming their presence within the category of “Turkish immigrants.” This new strategy was clearly stated in the ACG’s inaugural speech, which identified three primary groups as their target audiences: the Alevi and the Sunni communities in Germany, and also the German public at large:

Alevism, with an estimated twenty million adherents, represents a significant branch of the Islamic tradition in Turkey . . . Alevis conceal their identity due to concerns about being marginalized by Sunnis. Alevism is not a novel phenomenon; it is a cultural heritage spanning centuries . . . A foreign worker may be considered a migrant if their society, as well as German society, accepts the phenomenon of migration. This is also the case for Alevis. It is necessary that they accept their Alevi identity and that others develop an acquaintance with their Aleviness . . . We understand diversity within a society as a social dynamic. In the country we are living in [i.e. Germany], the various Christian

traditions, including Catholicism and Protestantism, coexist in a manner that may be described as harmonious and even in a state of solidarity. We believe that, one day, Alevi and Sunni will be tolerant of each other (a copy of the original leaflet prepared for the ACG's inaugural event in 1989, from my personal archive).

Mandel (1989, 43) argues that the historical confrontation between Alevism and Sunnism became “triangulated” and “complicated” with the involvement of “Germans” in the context of migration. This new situation for Alevi in Europe is evident in this quote. As they emerged into the public domain, Alevi were compelled to engage with this new actor (Sökefeld 2008, 37), which entailed the necessity of defining Alevism. It was clearly emphasized that Alevi demands were distinct from those of the Sunni Muslim community. The ACG proposed to the German public that Alevism should be regarded as a form of “integrated modern Islam” and that Alevi should be considered “non-dogmatic Muslims” (Massicard 2003, 136; see also Kosnic, 2004, 991). In this context, for instance, the Rushdie Affair of 1989 constituted a pivotal moment in the heightened visibility of Islam in Europe. In response to the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, which was deemed blasphemous by Islamic scholars, various Muslim communities throughout Europe organized large-scale demonstrations in which copies of the novel were burned. In contrast, Atamer Topçuoğlu, the chairman of the recently established Alevi association in the Netherlands, was vocal in his assertions to the press that Alevi, who historically espoused universal human rights and freedom of speech, were opposed to those demonstrations (statements from printed materials obtained from an associational archive).

The Alevi Culture Week, constituting the first occasion on which Alevi attempted to gain a foothold in the public domain, had meaningful consequences. First of all, a decade of silence was brought to an end. Following the Culture Week, the ACG established the Alevi Cultural Centre (Alevi Kültür Merkezi) in Hamburg in 1989 (Çoşan Eke 2021; Sökefeld 2008). This was the first initiative in Europe to adopt the designation “Alevi” in its associational title. Members of the ACG commenced visits to Alevi communities throughout Germany, with the objective of explaining the rationale behind their new strategy of making Alevism visible in Europe. Until the “Sivas Massacre” of 1993, this first initiative facilitated the establishment of numerous organizations across Europe and fostered the development of institutional relations with Alevi in Turkey by organizing joint events. In the aftermath of Sivas, a European-wide federation was established, thereby enabling the struggle for the rights of Alevi in Turkey to be taken to a continental level (Çoşan Eke 2021; Özkul 2019; Zirh 2008).

Alevi: unexpected guests of Turkey's democratization after the military coup of September 12, 1980

In the same period of time, Alevism was emerging as a prominent topic on the political agenda in Turkey, unfolding in parallel with developments in Europe and not entirely independent of them. The third referendum on constitutional amendments in the history of the Turkish Republic, held on September 6, 1987, was regarded as a

pivotal juncture in the country's arduous process of democratic consolidation following the military coup of 1980. The sole purpose of the referendum was to ask the public whether to lift the political ban imposed by the 1982 constitution on the leaders of political parties that were closed after the coup. Following the referendum, general elections were held on November 29, 1987, which many considered to be the first elections free of military tutelage. During this period, the Alevi community in Turkey was identified as a political entity with the potential to influence electoral outcomes. According to popular media reports in this period, Alevis constituted 15–20 percent of the total electorate (Zirh 2023).

Leading political journals of the time acknowledged this phenomenon and would soon feature it prominently on their front pages. For example, the first special issue on Alevism by *Yeni Gündem* was published on August 23, 1987, with the title “What is happening to Alevism? Religious and social customs and political positions are changing.” Another special issue was released by *Nokta* just after the referendum, on September 27, 1987, with the title “Alevism is fading into history: a story of religious, cultural, and political extinction . . .” As a consequence of the political mobilization in which Alevis were unexpectedly involved, the Social Democratic Populist Party (Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti; SHP) emerged as the leading party with 38.4 percent of votes in metropolitan cities and 28.7 percent of the votes throughout Turkey in the local elections held on March 26, 1989. The SHP's emphasis on democratization enabled the party to unite a number of disparate political groups, including left-wing groups and Alevis and Kurds, who had been adversely affected by the military regime (Ata 2021). Following this local election, a further special issue on Alevis was published by *Nokta* on May 13, 1990, three years after the previous one. However, this time the title reflected the political mobilization surrounding the question of Alevism in Turkey and the visibility that Alevis had gained: “Alevis: We will no longer be silent.”

This phenomenon of visibility, which would appear to have occurred within the last three years according to these journals, did not emerge spontaneously; rather, it was a gradual process that matured with the experiences of Alevis in Turkey from the 1970s to the 1980s. As they were systematically targeted by a series of pogrom-like attacks, a strong feeling of “being abandoned” by their political allies gradually developed in this period. Following the military coup, which resulted in the closure of all associations, organizations, and political parties in Turkey, Alevis were deprived of the discourses and channels that would have enabled them to make their voices heard. In the mid-1980s, which I characterize as a period of “reconsideration,” Alevism instead gained a greater number of outlets for cultural expression, particularly in the field of music, as a result of their estrangement from left-wing organizations.

For example, Arif Sağ's album *İnsan Olmaya Geldim* (I Came to Be Human) was released in 1983 following his public concert in İstanbul in 1982, which was one of the earliest instances of Alevism being performed in the public domain. Muhlis Akarsu, Arif Sağ, and Musa Eroğlu prepared a seven-volume *Muhabbetler* (traditional Alevi musical gatherings) series based on traditional Alevi songs, some of which were songs actually performed during Alevi rituals. Adil Arslan released an instrumental album, *Doğu Batı Divanı* (The East-West Divan), in Berlin in 1986; it was subsequently released in Turkey in 1991. Hasret Gültekin, the son of an immigrant family in Germany,

released his first album in 1987 when he was sixteen years old, titled *Gün Olaydı* (Sunlight Had Been to Be). Gültekin tragically lost his life along with thirty-three other Alevi participants in an attack on an Alevi culture festival held in Sivas in 1993.

Bridging the two shores of the Revival: the “Alevi Manifesto” of 1990

As Alevism experienced a cultural renaissance in a sense, Alevis in Turkey began to express themselves by referring to their belief culture without resorting to strict left-wing discourses. Alevis in Europe were observing this process closely and were not at ease with the unexpected increase in visibility of Alevism in Turkey for three main reasons. First of all, the new strategy of “making Alevism known” was perceived by leftist politicians and the Kurdish movement as a form of “religious reactionism” and “a divisive force” within the broader political mobilization in Europe. Consequently, Alevis in Europe were accused of operating in alignment with the political interests of the Turkish state and their newly established associations were subject to a variety of pressures from their former allies (Kaçmaz 2018).

Second, in Turkey, the Turkish state endeavored to address the unanticipated visibility of Alevism by portraying Alevism as a mere cultural and folkloric phenomenon, without acknowledging Alevi demands for official recognition. The process of unexpected visibility for Alevis in Turkey attracted the attention of a number of political actors, consequently triggering a contest over the definition of Alevism along three main fault lines immanent to the ethos of the Republic: republican secularism; political Islam; Kurdish and Turkish nationalisms. The roots of this contest concerning the definition of Alevism can be traced back to the early days of the Republic, when discussions arose regarding the accommodation of Alevis within the formation of the new national identity (Dressler 2015; Markussen 2005; Massicard 2013). As Erman and Göker (2000) demonstrate in their seminal work, each of these diverse (and contesting) approaches to defining Alevism found its organizational expression in the newly emerging Alevi movement in Turkey. Alevis in Europe, on the other hand, were seeking a narrative that could convey Alevism in a manner that was independent of the political pressures that sought to define Alevism in accordance with their own agendas and in opposition to each other.

Third, as political Islam began to gain wide ground in Turkey in the wake of the coup, its influence also became discernible in immigrant neighborhoods across Europe. For example, Wilpert (1990) observes that, toward the second half of the 1980s, Sunni members of immigrant communities exerted pressure on families that did not enroll their children in the recently established Qur’anic courses provided by overseas religious officials dispatched by the Turkish government. Wilpert (1990, 100) conceptualizes this new situation as “neighborhood pressure,” which has had a significant impact on Alevi communities. In this period, comparable pressure also began to be felt for Turkish-language classes (Rigoni 2003). In accordance with the agreement signed between Turkey and Germany in 1976, civil-servant teachers were sent from Turkey to provide “mother-tongue teaching” at German public schools for periods of five years. This “heritage teaching” was done with the objective of ensuring that the children of immigrants would not be estranged from the language and culture of their homeland (Küppers et al. 2014). However, the profile of these teachers underwent a dramatic transformation in the aftermath of the military coup.

The teachers selected for these positions after the coup were required to adhere to the specific right-wing nationalist and conservative ideological framework formally endorsed by the military regime. Consequently, immigrant children from Alevi and Kurdish families were subjected to discriminatory and humiliating acts by politically motivated teachers, mirroring the experiences of their non-immigrant relatives in Turkey.

At the end of this period, during which Alevis in Turkey and Europe experienced comparable processes of reconsideration independently but concurrently, an open letter was published by *Cumhuriyet*, a secular republican newspaper, on May 12, 1990, in Turkey. The letter, later known as the “Alevi Manifesto,” was signed by hundreds of artists, academics, and intellectuals, the majority of whom were not Alevi. The objective of the letter was to outline the predicaments encountered by Alevis as Turkish citizens while simultaneously articulating their demands to the Turkish government. The letter stated that the number of Alevis in Turkey was “20 million” and defined them as belonging to a belief community that constitutes “a branch of Islam living in Turkey.” According to the signatories, “the recognition of Alevi teachings will be a source of peace and prosperity for Turkey” and the time had come “to name the oppression [that Alevis faced during the history] openly . . . [Alevis] should be able to say openly ‘I am Alevi’.” It is one of their natural human rights” (Selçuk et al. 1992, 229–230). However, a little-known aspect of the political mobilization around the question of Alevism in Turkey from the late 1980s to the 1990s is the influence of the Alevi movement that had started organizing in Europe, centered in Germany, since the mid-1970s. The letter known as the “Alevi Manifesto” was actually based on the opening speech of the first Alevi Cultural Week organized in 1989 in Hamburg (Sökefeld 2003).

However, this Alevi-focused political mobilization and the unexpected visibility that the Alevis gained would not end well for them. On July 2, 1993, a mass attack was orchestrated against an Alevi cultural festival in Sivas, one of the Anatolian cities with a significantly mixed Alevi and Sunni population. The hotel that was hosting festival participants from other cities was set on fire and thirty-three people, mostly Alevis, aged between twelve and sixty-two years, lost their lives. Two years after the violence in Sivas, on March 12, 1995, unidentified perpetrators entered the Gazi neighborhood of İstanbul, opened fire in a teahouse, and subsequently fled the scene of the shooting; the attack resulted in the death of a dede and injuries to ten other individuals. The Sivas and the Gazi “massacres,” as they are described by Alevis, constituted a pivotal moment for the community, prompting the realization that their precarious position in Turkey was susceptible to violence and that the state was not prepared to safeguard their interests (Çaylı 2022; Özata 2020; Soileau 2005; Yildiz and Verkuyten 2011). In response to these incidents, Alevis began establishing associations that directly incorporated the word “Alevi” into their names across Europe and Turkey. Sökefeld (2006, 276) characterizes this as the “mushrooming” period. In Germany, for example, the number of such associations increased from twenty to 120 between 1993 and 1998 (Gülçiçek 2018; Kaçmaz 2018). Recent studies on the Alevi community in the United Kingdom demonstrate that the mobilization that emerged in Germany constituted a formative ground for subsequent transnational processes, producing a repertoire of strategies centered on “making Alevism known” that later structured the visibility of

Alevism not only in Turkey but also in other countries that Alevis reside (Hanoglu 2023; Jenkins and Cetin 2019; Lord 2020).

As a result, independent and spontaneous mobilizations that had occurred in various localities in the wake of the military coup of 1980 and were initially articulated through transnational migratory social and familial networks evolved into a transnational political movement in the period from the first Alevi Cultural Week organized in 1989 in Europe to the publication of the “Alevi Manifesto” in 1990 in Turkey. I argue that the discourse of “making Alevism known” that developed in this period provided significant grounds for the emergence of this transnational mobilization. In the remainder of this article, I focus on the nine issues of the journal introduced above to analyze the formation process of this discourse.

A journal in Berlin: reframing the self-designation from “Anatolian people” to “Alevis”

Berlin has been the cultural, social, and political capital of migration from Turkey to Europe in every sense, and this is also true for the Alevi movement (Gültekin 2025; Kaya 1998; Kosnic, 2004). The journal that I discovered during my research in Berlin in 2009 provides crucial and previously unstudied insights that facilitate a better understanding of the transformation of the narratives shaping Alevi historiography. The journal’s full title is *Avrupa Türkiyeli Yurtseverler Birliği Federasyonu Yayın Organı*, or “Official Media Organ of the Federation of the Union of Turkish Patriots in Europe,” and it is subtitled “Our Path Is the Path of Democratic People’s Power” (*Yolumuz Demokratik Halk İktidarı Yoludur*). The journal was published eight times at irregular intervals between 1982 and 1989: the first publication in 1982; the second again in 1982; the third, titled as a joint issue comprising the third and fourth issues, again in 1982; the fourth publication, titled as the fifth issue, again in 1982; the sixth issue in 1983; the seventh issue again in 1983; the eighth issue in 1987; and the ninth issue, titled as a special issue, in 1989.

The initial issues placed significant emphasis on discussions of organizational purposes and the question of how to position the UoP relative to other political organizations that existed in Europe at that time. A definitive demarcation was established in these initial issues with explicit statements about “who we are” and “who are we against.” For example, the following statement from Mustafa Timisi, the leader of the UPT, was quoted on the front cover of the journal’s inaugural issue:

The solution to the unrest we currently experience is to return to our intrinsic selves. To anticipate a solution from external sources is to perpetuate a self-deception. It is imperative that we identify the solution and the source of hope within ourselves (1982, year 1, issue 1, 1).

In an unsigned editorial letter proclaiming the journal’s motivation, the purpose of the association was explained as follows:

The Union of Patriots is an organization that aims to foster solidarity and collaboration within the democratic, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, anti-feudal

ranks, with the objective of combating imperialism, fascism, feudalism, and all forms of reactionary ideology (1982, year 1, issue 1, 1).

In his inaugural editorial article, Süleyman Cem, as the chairman of the Federation, introduced the organization's "purposes and means" in a similar manner:

As the Federation of [the Union of Turkish Patriots] in Europe, we believe that we will find all progressive, patriotic, revolutionary, and democratic individuals on our side in the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, anti-chauvinist, and anti-feudal struggle. And we say "long live fully independent democratic Turkey" (1982, year 1, issue 1, 3).

The concluding sentence represents the most significant left-wing slogan of the period. In another unsigned inaugural declaration, the main principles of the Federation were explained as follows: "the ultimate goal is to establish a social order that is devoid of class distinctions and exploitation" in opposition to "all forms of national, chauvinistic, racist, and religious oppression." In this regard, it was also announced that the Federation reaffirmed "the principle of national self-determination for all nations" (1982, year 1, issue 2, 4). This framework, defining the aims and principles of the Federation while utilizing the left-wing political jargon of the period, was presented again in detail in the second issue with references to similar antagonistic concepts such as "the people" versus "fascism" (1982, year 1, issue 2, 5).

In the joint publication of the third and fourth issues, it was announced that the name of the Federation was changed from *Avrupa Türkiyeli Yurtseverler Birliği Federasyonu* (Federation of the Union of Turkish Patriots in Europe) to *Demokratik Yurtseverler Birliği Federasyonu* (Federation of the Democratic Patriotic Union) at the third general meeting, held in Munich in April 1982 (1982, year 1, joint issue 3–4, 2). The resolutions adopted at that meeting are also significant in understanding the objectives that the Federation set at that time: "taking part in anti-fascist action unions without compromising our principles," "taking a stand against xenophobia [in Europe]," "focusing on the social problems of foreign workers," "undertaking the necessary struggle for Turkey to attain democracy," "to continue organizing in Germany and in other countries in Europe," "to continue the active struggle against the unrealistic and despicable slanders thrown at the Alevi community," and "to reach the masses with cultural activities" (1982, year 1, joint issue 3–4, 3).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the May 1st Labor Day was addressed in considerable detail in this publication. It was announced that the Federation participated in demonstrations with its own organizational banner, and the text under this announcement proclaimed the following: "We, as the Federation of the Democratic Patriotic Union, are determined to continue our struggle against the forces that want to hinder them in the face of the rightful struggle of the workers" (1982, year 1, joint issue 3–4, 3). In the sixth issue, an unsigned statement titled "Our Path Is the Path of Democratic People's Power" positioned the Federation as an anti-fascist and anti-imperialist organization opposing imperialist the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European common market (1983, year 2, issue 6, 4). Following the publication of its seventh issue in the same year, the journal entered a

period of prolonged inactivity, with its seventh publication, constituting the eighth issue, being released in 1987. There was no explanation for this four-year hiatus beyond a cursory mention of the repression that occurred under the post-coup military regime in Turkey in an unsigned editorial letter titled “As the Union of Patriots Reemerges” (1987, year 3, issue 8, 2).

The gradual development of a feeling of “being abandoned” by their political allies and the emergence of the strategy of “making Alevism known” as a response to that insecurity can be clearly traced in the issues of the journal published in Berlin between 1982 and 1989. For example, in the first four issues, a series of articles titled “Anatolian People’s Movements” (*Anadolu Halk Haraketleri*) appeared, penned by an author named “A. Cem,” who described “Alevi” as an umbrella term, like “a tree with a multitude of branches” encompassing various regional self-designations employed by local communities to indicate their Alevism, such as Tahtacı, Çepni, and Kızılbaş. According to this series, the common feature of these communities is the pursuit of “a social order of equality, brotherhood, loving and being loved, respecting social laws and freedoms, free from grudges and hostility” rather than a unified belief culture (1982, year 1, issue 1, 14–17). In the second part of this series, “A. Cem” attempts to frame Alevism as a form of proto-communism specific to Anatolia:

The people of Anatolia, who have historically been subjected to oppression, are the true revolutionary Anatolian people. They are known as Alevis, a designation used by the ruling powers to describe a group of people who gathered around Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli [a founding saint from the thirteenth century] and his philosophy. This philosophy aimed to maintain a balance between reproduction and consumption, benefiting the people. However, the ruling powers sought to prevent this gathering by providing religious justifications. As a result, Alevism has become an integral part of the cultural history of the Anatolian people (1982, year 1, issue 2, 8–10).

A. Cem also drew parallels between Alevism and other historical examples such as the Huguenot Protestants in the sixteenth century in France and the Indonesian mass killings of 1965–1966 with the aim of situating Alevis in the history of Anatolia in the context of comparable instances of hate-based political violence targeting Alevi communities in the second part of the 1970s (1982, year 1, joint issue 3–4, 15–17).

In a subsequent issue, Süleyman Cem argued that the political violence perpetrated against Alevis throughout Ottoman history cannot be attributed to the Alevi understanding of God differing from that of Sunni orthodoxy due to the simple fact that the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire were not subjected to a similar degree of violence. According to him: “Then the problem is not a problem of faith. The problem is the continuation of the system of exploitation and the prevention of progressive revolutionary development. In short, it is a class struggle.” However, he also asserted that this historical dimension of Alevism was not adequately addressed or was even completely ignored by left-wing political organizations in Turkey (1982, year 1, issue 5, 8–11).

In the journal’s sixth issue, the attacks against Alevis in Maraş in 1978 were discussed in detail. Although the word “Alevism” was not used directly in the introductory article, the subtext of Alevis being abandoned in the face of these attacks

with reference to Karbala in 680 dominated the entire article (1983, year 2, issue 6, 3). This issue also included an article opposing the religious courses based solely on Sunni Islam that were made compulsory in Turkey by the military regime. That article concluded as follows without directly referring to Alevi: "We say 'no' to religion lessons that do not include all ethnic cultures and beliefs living in Turkey" (1983, year 2, issue 6, 8).

This constituted an attempt to reframe Alevism as a philosophy or culture – not a belief system – of the oppressed Anatolian people who resisted the Empire throughout history in struggles for surplus value with reference to the German Peasants' War of the sixteenth century. In doing so, the founders of the Alevi movement intended to preclude leftist organizations from leveling accusations of acting religiously by establishing their own organizations in Europe. This narrative would later be known as the "left-oriented Alevism thesis," theorized fully by Rıza Yörükoğlu (1991), the leader of the Communist Party of Turkey (Voice of the Worker) operating from London, in his book titled *Okunacak En Büyük Kitap İnsandır* (The Greatest Book to Read Is the Human).

This dominant tone of the journal's first seven issues, with explicit reference to Alevism, changed dramatically with the eighth issue, published in 1987 four years after the seventh. An unsigned article titled "Why and for Whom Should We Work?" concluded as follows: "We say that both the internal dynamics of the Alevi community and its indivisible historical integrity towards the outside must be protected and ways for its further development must be explored" (1987, year 3, issue 8, 7). In this issue, many incidents in which Alevi were subjected to injustice and oppression throughout history were memorialized with reference to the events in Maraş in 1978 in order to draw attention to the current danger: "In short, their aim is the complete elimination of the traditions and beliefs of the Alevi culture" (1987, year 3, issue 8, 22). In another article, a clear response was given to the left-wing criticism that Alevi were acting religiously in setting up their own organization:

Alevism is neither a religion nor a sect. Alevism, with its progressive culture, is the unity of those who waged a historical war against reactionary governments, transformed the revolutionary resistance into a social uprising for the power of the oppressed, and continue their struggle (1987, year 3, issue 8, 41).

The special issue titled "Alevism is Not a Secret" (*Alevilik Bir sır Değildir*), published in 1989, constituted the concluding phase of the transition from the utilization of left-wing jargon, which only implied Alevism without mentioning it by name, to explicit discussions of Alevism, foregrounding a series of rights-based demands concerning Alevi, as the following emotional excerpt indicates:

The Alevi intellectuals in this issue first came together like a natural event whose time had come and then, like a volcano ready to erupt, they left all the centers of (religious) reactionism . . . under angry lava. Just as Indians and Blacks are not ashamed of their colors, Anatolian Alevi shouted to the world with various slogans that they will no longer be ashamed of saying they are "Alevi" and that they will not hesitate to say that they are "Alevi." Just as being

human is not a crime or an excuse, being an Alevi is not an indulgence or a feeling of inferiority (1989, year 4, issue 9, 3).

In various articles included in this special issue, authors posited the necessity of the establishment of an Alevi political party and/or foundation with the objective of defending the rights of Alevis in Turkey. They argued that failure to do so would result in adverse consequences: “Alevis in Turkey are on the brink of enduring a period akin to that experienced by the Jews during the Nazi era in Germany” (1989, year 4, issue 9, 42). To avoid such an outcome, it was explicitly stated that Alevis were prepared to collaborate with “Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Circassians, Tatars, Arabs, and all minorities and marginalized communities” residing in Anatolia (1989, year 4, issue 9, 49).

Another important point to note is that the journal also reported on certain incidents related to the impact of the Turkish–Islamic synthesis, presented as the new official ideology of the Turkish state after the coup, on the lives of Alevis in Europe and Turkey. For example, in the seventh issue, Fethi Savaşçı, a member of the UoP, discussed the dual education problem faced by Alevi families in Germany. Savaşçı asserted that while the German education system strove to assimilate immigrant children from Turkey through educational pursuits, the influx of “militant teachers brainwashed by right-wing fanaticism” from Turkey was simultaneously attempting to impart a Sunni interpretation of Islam among the children of Alevi families (1983, year 2, issue 7, 3). It was also reported that Alevi youth were subjected to violence at a university in Van, Turkey, for not fasting during Ramadan (1987, year 3, issue 8, 37). This could be understood as an early indication that the Alevi movement emerging in Europe would adopt a defensive stance regarding the human rights violations committed against Alevis by framing these incidents not as a problem of secularism in Turkey but as deliberate attacks against Alevis.

The context of the transformation of the narratives shaping Alevi historiography in the 1980s

The transformation of the narratives shaping Alevi historiography in the 1980s can be observed in these issues of the journal, especially after the four-year hiatus, and should be contextualized within the changing political context that emerged in the wake of the military coup of September 12, 1980. While the coup is not explicitly addressed in the journal, in my interviews I gained insight into the coup’s impact on political organizations established by immigrants from Turkey in Europe. After the coup, tens of thousands of people left Turkey and sought asylum in Western European countries. These people, who had participated in political struggles, quickly organized themselves in Europe and launched a political mobilization against the military regime in Turkey, publishing newspapers and organizing demonstrations. The Turkish state perceived this political mobilization outside its territory as a threat and took steps to monitor it. For example, to provide (and simultaneously monitor) religious services for Turkish citizens in Europe, the Turkish–Islamic Union (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği; DİTİB) was established in Cologne in 1984 as the overseas organization of the Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), the only official institution providing religious services in Turkey.

This is also the reason why a considerable number of articles published in the journal in 1982 and 1983 remained unsigned. The editors of the journal were reluctant to disclose their identities publicly, primarily due to their fear of the military regime in Turkey. Some of the founding members of the UoP in Berlin I interviewed also explained that they were reluctant to travel to Turkey at that time and that they postponed their trips until a civilian administration was established in Turkey in the second half of the 1980s. Over the course of my long engagement with this field, I was able to observe a similar phenomenon among Alevis in Europe following the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, in Turkey. It is therefore no coincidence that a new issue of the journal was published in the wake of the third Turkish constitutional amendment referendum in 1987, four years after the previous issue had been published in 1983. The changing political landscape in Turkey and the emergence of Alevis in that new landscape as political subjects were extensively discussed with a focus on various concerns in the final issues of the journal published in 1987 and 1989. Moreover, in these final two issues, there was a notable increase in the explicit and assertive expression of Alevism. For example, an editorial letter described the primary objective of the Federation as “guardianship of Alevi culture” in the eighth issue (1987, year 3, issue 8, 3).

Some additional points pertaining to these issues of the journal published in Berlin from 1982 to 1989 are worth noting. These points are related to the explicit effort to elucidate and introduce the tenets of Alevism to the German public, to the thematic focuses covered in each issue, and to the repertoire of organizational activities developed in the 1980s. Already in the second issue, Süleyman Cem contributed an article written in German, titled “We are the Alevis” (*Wir sind die Aleviten*), to introduce Alevism to the German public while responding to two main questions: “Where do the Turkish Alevis come from?” and “How do Alevis live in Turkey today?” (1982, year 1, issue 2, 19–20). In this article, Cem briefly introduced Alevism by referring to a traditional Alevi motto stating that “one should endeavor to avoid divorce, refrain from deceit and dishonesty, and avoid any form of theft” and presented a concise historical overview of Alevism, from its origins in the early Islamic period to the Empire, from the perspective of Alevis. He then focused on recent and ongoing oppression and attacks faced by Alevis in Turkey as the main motivation for their decision to leave their homeland for Europe, making reference to the rise in both “Hanafi Hodjas” (political Islam) and “Gray Wolves” (a far-right political group). Although the extent to which this article reached the German public remains uncertain, its framework is nevertheless crucial for gaining further insight into the communication strategy that the Alevi movement would develop in subsequent years.

It can also be noted that there were recurring themes that the journal addressed with some regularity, including the (migrant) working-class struggle, (working) women’s rights, xenophobia against migrants, immigrant issues such as unemployment and housing, issues of (migrant) youth and their access to education, the rising threat of political Islam in Germany, and political developments in Turkey and other places in the world, particularly including political struggles in places such as El Salvador and Palestine.

In accordance with the strategy of making Alevism known, which gained prominence following the Alevi Culture Week held in 1989, events organized by Alevis

began being meticulously documented, particularly as video cameras became popularly available at the end of the 1980s. In contrast, it is hard to find information about the scope of activities undertaken by Alevi associations established in the 1970s. In this sense, the repertoire of activities organized by UoP branches in various cities, as presented in the journal, is another important point offering significant insight into the evolution of activities and services offered by Alevi organizations in Europe. In the journal, one of the earliest forms of services provided by newly established Alevi organizations appears to have been courses for the Anatolian lute (*bağlama*) and folkloric dances. This information is particularly significant considering the fact that music and traditional forms of dance constitute the fundamental elements of Alevi rituals. Another equally important detail is that the term “folk dance” was preferred to “*semah*” (Alevi ritual dance) in earlier issues of the journal, but that changed in the final two issues, with *semah* becoming the only term for such courses.

Other important organizational events that appeared in the journal were annual congresses held by local associations in cities such as Berlin, Cologne, Hamm, Nürnberg, and Munich. The frequent presence of these cities’ names in the issues of the journal can be understood as a nascent mapping of the transnational Alevi movement that would come to the fore in the 1990s. Moreover, in the journal’s news about organizational gatherings, it was announced that a decision had been made to organize “folk nights” (*halk geceleri*) in the upcoming period. Details were shared regarding the invitation of Alevi musicians from Turkey to perform at these gatherings. As this once again reveals, during the initial stages of the emergence of Alevi associations, terms such as “people” and “folk” were frequently employed in lieu of specific terminology that would directly indicate Alevism. In contrast, seminars and panel discussions on a range of topics related to Alevism constituted the most frequently organized events after these first years. It also appears that there was a focus on engaging in activities conducted in collaboration with other immigrant associations and German institutions against xenophobia, such as churches and municipalities.

Conclusion

In his longitudinal ethnographic studies that began in the early 1990s in Hamburg, Sökefeld (2003, 2008) examined the process by which newly emerging Alevi organizations from the late 1980s transformed the narratives shaping Alevism. This transformation was more in reference to the religious components of Alevism than to its cultural aspects and it occurred in response to the newly emerging cultural context of migration. Prior to this transformation, Alevis, in the context of migration since the 1960s, were articulating their demands in Turkey by employing terminology associated with left-wing secular politics, refraining from explicitly referencing their own belief system. However, as a consequence of various social and political developments, both in the context of Turkey and that of migration in Europe, that strategy became untenable in the pursuit of Alevi demands, particularly after the military coup of September 12, 1980.

In the literature on modern Alevism, three main events are said to mark the beginning of the “Alevi Revival,” as meticulously discussed by Sökefeld (2003): first, the Alevi Culture Week organized in 1989 in Hamburg; second, the open letter that

later came to be known as the “Alevi Manifesto,” published in 1990 in Turkey; and third, the “Sivas Massacre” in 1993 as a tragic event leading to the widespread adoption of the demands initially articulated in the first two of these events. To contextualize these three events in relation to each other, I have discussed three key periods while moving back and forth between Europe and Turkey: the period from 1982, when the first issue of *Yurtseverler Birliği* was published, to the 1987 referendum in Turkey; from the referendum to the first Alevi Culture Week organized in Hamburg in 1989; and, finally, from 1989 to the Sivas Massacre of July 2, 1993.

In doing so, my objective in this article has been to further develop the academic narrative on the Revival beyond the confines of a few milestone events by using empirical evidence provided by the nine issues of *Yurtseverler Birliği* published between 1982 and 1989 in Berlin. In this sense, the pivotal incidents discussed by Sökefeld should be regarded as the outcome of a preexisting process rather than the Revival’s initiation. In the period following the coup of 1980, Alevis began searching for answers regarding what to do next. Responses from Alevis, emerging simultaneously in different localities, gradually evolved from loosely connected local mobilizations into a transnational political strategy. A comprehensive analysis of *Yurtseverler Birliği*, constituting one of the earliest forms of Alevi political journalism and serving as a blueprint for this transformation, reveals how the discourse of “making Alevism known” developed in response to social and political developments in both Europe and Turkey during this period. This discourse later became dominant in defining Alevism in Europe, in contrast to heterogeneous approaches to framing Alevism in Turkey. This new definition, particularly in the aftermath of the Sivas Massacre of 1993, provided significant grounds for the emergence of the transnational Alevi movement, which has since been institutionalized through federations in at least ten European Union member states, uniting nearly 400 local associations across Europe.

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