

The Alevis' Ambivalent Encounter With Modernity. Islam, Reform and Ethnopolitics In Turkey (19th-20th cc.)

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This paper studies a little known example of how religion and social change were connected in the process of “national modernization” in a land that was, as home of the caliph, the center of the Muslim world. Turkification and Islamization are the major demographic changes in Asia Minor during the 20th century. They resulted from politics that impacted first on the Anatolian Christians but threatened also the Alevis. Changing from a Muslim to a Turkish nationalism and declaring itself laicist, the Kemalist movement, heir of the Young Turks, won over many Alevis after 1924, an important heterodox Muslim minority that constitutes about a quarter of Turkey’s population.² But contrary to the egalitarian idea of the Republic, founded in 1923, the Sunni Muslims continued to dominate national and regional power relations. They retained control over public resources and determined the contents of the unitary “national culture”. Significantly, in mid-February 2002 a tribunal in Ankara ordered the closing down of the Cultural Association of the Alevis and Bektashis, the most important Alevi umbrella organization, for “separatism”.³ Since the 19th century the Alevis, especially the Eastern Alevis, looked towards modernity from the West because it promised liberal rights and fundamental social change.

Looking toward modernity: continuity and change in the 19th and 20th centuries

The Anatolian Alevis are a large religious minority living amongst the majoritarian Sunnis in today’s Turkey. They formed the most important non-Sunni Islamic group in Ottoman Asia Minor. Nominally Muslim, they were not grouped in the recognized non-Muslim

¹ Many thanks to Aron Rodrigue (Stanford University) and Christoph Maier (Zurich University) for having read and stylistically polished this text.

² Official data are not available.

³ “Protection and dissemination of non-Turkish culture”, cf. Keetman, Jan, “Die fortdauernde Ächtung der türkischen Aleviten”, *Basler Zeitung*, 22.2.2002. The decision of the Court of 13 February is fully published on www.alevi.com.

communities (*millet*) like the Christians and the Jews. “Alevi” is the term for a number of different groups whose common characteristics are the adoration of Ali, the fourth caliph; their refusal of the Sharia; and an age-old history of marginalization under the Sultans after 1500. Alevism largely was a rural phenomenon. Did the Alevis’ situation fundamentally change with the reform era after 1839 and the new state? At any rate, they were not really among the winners in modern Turkey, even if they welcomed the principles of the Republic, founded in 1923, and even more so the abolition of the caliphate (1924). Their on-going under-representation in state and army, their over-representation among the extra-parliamentary opposition and the high percentage of Alevis among the migrants within and out of Turkey are signs of a failed or partially failed integration into the Republic.

This fact has not only to do with the absence of proper development of the countryside, where the Alevis lived, especially before the mid-twentieth century, but particularly with the character of the Young Turkish state foundation between 1913 and 1923. Intrinsically - as the result of “Muslim nationalism”⁴ - this foundation could not succeed in overcoming the age-old socio-religious hierarchies. The Muslim nationalism of the Young Turks’ Committee Union and Progress (CUP) had a clear Sunni stance. Their ethnopolitics⁵ served the restoration of central and imperial power in behalf of the existing dominant Sunni group (*millet-i hakime*). After the triumphant victory of Muslim nationalism and the eviction of most of the Christian remnants in provincial Asia Minor (1919-22), the Kemalists, themselves Young Turks, integrated Islam into the secular republic via their Directorate of Religion (Diyamet İşleri Başkanlığı). This phenomenon is wrongly called laicism (*laiklik*). In the self-understanding of a large majority of Turkish nationalists, Sunni identity was and remained a crucial element of Turkishness.

Thus we are confronted with a paradox: modernity deepened traditional rifts. But this is in fact generally true for socio-political landscapes shaped by modern right-wing movements, with ethno-nationalist reference, like that of the Young Turks. Right-wing actors use modernist weapons of social and ethnical “technology”, but essentially react against the universalism and cosmopolitanism claimed by the Enlightenment’s modernity.

⁴ Cf. Zürcher, Erik Jan, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics 1908-1838”, in K. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today's Turkey*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 150-79.

⁵ “Ethnopolitics” can be defined as “the role of ethnic identity in developing political institutions, and the role ethnic identity plays in the struggle for political dominance in a state”. Cf. Stoll, Heather M.,

The Alevis early looked towards modernity from the West because it promised fundamental change. They set their hopes in modernity first in terms of welfare within an egalitarian, non-theocratic pluralistic society, later in terms of socialist change and of a secularized, liberal and individual way of life. Their expectations were frustrated when confronted with the type of modernity brought to them by Sultan Abdulhamid (1876-1909), the Young Turks (1908-1918) and the Republic. Thus, until the 1960s, they were contained in their traditional social - tribal or non-tribal - and spiritual structures. The republican way of modernity turned out to be unitary (not only in a political but also in an ethno-cultural sense) and hierarchical (by *de facto* maintaining the domination of the Sunni and Turk element in society through institutions, laws and personal networks). So the setbacks experienced by the Alevis did not arise from the confrontation with modernity in general but in its particularly Turkish form. One piece of evidence for this is the fact that in Europe Alevi migrants from a rural background are usually more easily integrated into European society than Sunnis from a similar background. In provincial Turkey the contrary is the case.⁶

"Western" and "Eastern" Alevism in Anatolia

In the 20th century migration, urbanization and Westernization were the principal factors of change for the Alevis. Westernization was not only welcomed on a technological or ideological level, but also affected ideas of social and individual life. However, the ambivalent attitude towards authorities - still ultimately seen in the old tradition as *Yezid*,⁷ "Prince of this world" - persevered non-withstanding the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. This point is particularly true for the Eastern Alevis, made up of Turkish-, Kurmandji- and Zaza-speakers. As non-Turks and non-Sunnis they experienced twofold exclusion from a state traditionally based on Sunnism and, since 1913, on Turkishness.

"Ethnopolitics in the Middle East", *Michigan Journal of Political Science*, n° 20, Winter 1996, <http://www.umich.edu/~mjps/20/ethno.html>.

⁶ Cf. Shankland, David, *Islam and society in Turkey*, Cambridgeshire: The Eothen Press, 1999, p. 135; idem, "Social change and culture: responses to modernization in an Alevi village in Anatolia", in: Hann, Chris (ed.), *When history accelerates: essays on rapid social change, complexity and creativity*, London: The Athlone Press, 1994, pp. 238-254.

⁷ Yazîd I. ibn Mu'âwiya, sixth caliph (680-83), considered as responsible for the tragedy of Kerbela (680).

The strong orientation towards the West has been an interesting element of continuity among Alevis (or Kizilbash)⁸ throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It began with the Eastern Kizilbash's movement towards Protestantism in the mid-19th century (a phenomenon not to be confused with pietist conversion, but which constituted the Eastern Alevis' hopeful turning to the "puritan modernity" of the American missionaries). It can still be seen nowadays in documents of a high diplomatic level such as the Alevi petitions to the European Union and the first mention of their "heterodox Islam" in the Report from the Commission On Turkey's Progress Towards Accession.⁹ Long before 11 September 2001, there was a sympathetic link between official authorities and Alevi representatives in towns like Basel, Cologne or Berlin. The Alevi's particular position between East and West, Islam and Christianity, Turkish Muslim diaspora and secular European society is the result of a long social, religious and intellectual history that can only be told in a fragmentary way in this paper.

I shall put the emphasis on the multi-ethnic Eastern Alevis, not on the majority of Turkish Alevis in Anatolia affiliated with the Bektashiye whom I call Western Alevis. In my view it is appropriate to distinguish between two separate historical developments among the Anatolian Alevis since the 16th century. Too often, I think, Bektashi-led Western Alevis are taken as a general model of Anatolian Alevism. In terms of historical understanding, it can be helpful to choose a perspective focussing on an Alevism not fashioned by the Bektashiye. As a matter of fact, international research of the last two decades has been concerned mostly with the Western Alevis.¹⁰ Research in Turkey before the 1990s, beginning with the scholars affiliated to the Unionists 80 years ago, exclusively dealt with Western Alevis. The hypothesis of Aleviness as genuine Turkishness developed there corresponded to the ethno-nationalist need for prehistorical origins.¹¹ The revision of this hypothesis in the second half of the 20th century put the emphasis not on the heathen shamanist, but the pre-Ottoman Islamic component, thus promoting the politically important Turko-Islamic synthesis.

⁸ As they were normally called before 1900. This term refers only to the rural Alevis, especially the Eastern Alevis, not to the Bektashis.

⁹ 8 November 2000, p. 18, http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_11_00/pdf/en/tu_en.pdf.

¹⁰ Cf. the substantial chapter on Alevis in the Republic of Turkey in Shankland, *Islam and society*, pp. 132-168, where he complains this lack (p. 135).

¹¹ Cf. notably Baha Sait Bey, "Türkiye'de Alevi Zümreleri", *Türk Yurdu*, September, October, November 1926; Köprülü, Fuad, "Bemerkungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasiens", *Mitteilungen zur Osmanischen Geschichte*, vol. 1, Wien, 1922, pp. 203-222, here p. 215.

The existence or non-existence of the organizational affiliation of the *dede* (hereditary priest) with the Bektashiye is the main distinctive feature between what I call “Western” and “Eastern” Alevism and that constitutes a distinct social history since the battle of Tchaldiran (1516). Eastern Alevis do not have any common organizational roof. Different dede lineages exist, one independent from the other. However the Dersim became somewhat like a center.¹² For its age-old autonomy from the Ottoman state and the undisputed influence of its dedes, called Seyits, it enjoyed the reputation of being “purely” Alevi. Dedes generally are said to be descendants of the family of the prophet through his son-in-law Ali. That is the meaning of the term “Seyit”. The title of privilege, *berat*, or the genealogical tree, *shecere*, by which the Eastern Alevi dedes claim written legitimacy, do not come from the Bektashi order, but from spiritual centers like Erdebil, Kerbela and Meset. Sometimes they also probably got titles of privilege from Ottoman religious officials (*nakibüleshraf*).¹³ The Eastern Alevi dedes are proud of their independence from a Bektashi organization they call biased toward the Sunni sultanate. They boast about own affiliations as much older, they say, than is the Bektashiye. Despite this reserve they respect Hadji Bektash Veli as a saint of their own. In the Eastern Alevism the Turkish language has not the same exclusive importance as liturgical language as is the case for Western Alevis. Naturally the Alevi populations’ other mother tongues - Kurmandj and Zaza Kurdish - disputed the place of Turkish in the *djem* (the Alevis’ liturgical assembly with important social functions). Another important difference is the special symbiosis with the Christians, especially the Armenians, in Eastern Anatolia that led to more developed interreligious practices and even the fact that some Eastern Alevis got Armenian *kirves* (godparent of circumcision). We must also consider the fact that an important number of rural Armenian Christians, under growing pressure from their Sunni neighbours and the state, looked for protection by Alevi tribes. They were absorbed by them in the second half of the 19th and the first quart of the 20th century.¹⁴ These Armenians became Alevis not through

¹² Cf. Trowbridge, Stephen van Rensselaer, “The Alevis, or Deifiers of Ali”, *Harvard Theological Review*, no. 2, pp. 340-353, 1909, here pp. 343 and 345.

¹³ Cf. Neubauer, Anna, *Dede'ye ziyaret (Visite au dede). La figure du dede chez les Alévis de la région d'Adiyaman, Turquie*, mémoire de licence en ethnologie (unpublished), Université de Neuchâtel, 2001, pp. 61-62.

¹⁴ Substantial informations on the Eastern Alevis can be found in Bayrak, Mehmed (ed.), *Alevilik ve Kürtler (Inceleme - Arastirma - Belgeler)*, Wuppertal: Özge, 1997; Gezik, Erdal, *Dinsel, Etnik ve Politik Sorunlar Baglaminda Alevi Kürtler*, Ankara: Kalan, 2000; Sahnüseyinoglu, H. Nedim, *Anadolu Kültür Mozayiginden bir Kesit Baliyan*, Ankara: Ürün, 1996; Moosa, Matti, *Extremist Shiites: the Ghulat sects*, Syracuse (N.Y.): Syracuse Univ. Press, 1988, pp. 432-47; van Bruinessen, Martin, “Aslini inkar eden

outright conversion, but through a gradual process of integration into existing rural communities.

In the following pages I want to explain the Alevi, especially Eastern Alevi experience of modernity in three parts.

Onset of modernity in Eastern Anatolia during the 19th century¹⁵

From their beginning in the second quart of the 19th century, the Ottoman Reforms (Tanzimat) were ambivalent for Alevis and other Ottoman groups that hoped their status would be improved through fundamental reforms. The interdiction of the Bektashiye in 1826, the official explanation of this interdiction, and the appointment of members of the Naqshbendi order in the Bektashi organization early proved the Sunnizing restoration inherent to the Tanzimat, despite the European fashioned declarations of equality and progress. In fact, the proclaimed religious liberty was only very partly realized in the eastern provinces. From the 1820s beyond the reign of Abdulhamid there was open or subliminal nostalgia for the “sane” heyday of the orthodox Muslim Empire in the 16th century.

The Alevis’ first breakdown of confidence in their socio-religious system dominated by hereditary priests took place in the second half of the 19th century. Missionaries, who seemed to be in touch with high diplomatic quarters, built prestigious schools and hospitals. In their self-confident puritan habitus, they penetrated the countryside and explained God and the world. The result was a movement toward Protestantism among Eastern Alevis, which was immediately repressed by the Ottoman authorities. This movement, however, had a strong and lasting symbolic impact. In the same period the Armenian educational renaissance took place, and the Ottoman state implemented its policies of centralizing and modernizing administration, army, education and health, but with uneven success in the Eastern provinces.

haramzadedir!’ Le débat sur l’identité ethnique des Alévis kurdes”, *Etudes Kurdes*, no. 3, Paris: Harmattan, October 2001, pp. 7-40, (English original online http://members.tripod.com/zaza_kirmanc/research/martinvan.htm). Kieser, Hans-Lukas, “L’Alévisme kurde”, in: Hamit Bozarslan (ed.), *Les Kurdes et les Etats*, pp. 57-76, Paris, 1994 (= *Peuples Méditerranéens / Mediterranean Peoples*, no. 68-69); idem, *Der verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938*, Zürich: Chronos, 2000 (chapters 1.5, 2.6.3 and 3.6); Neubauer, *Dede*.

¹⁵ For more detailed information on the Alevis’ encounter with Ottoman reforms and the missionaries’ “Protestant modernity” see my “Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia. The Interactions Between

Under Sultan Abdulhamid these endeavours were closely related to the harsh politics of Muslim unity, which escalated in the large-scale anti-Armenian pogroms of the 1890s.

Abdulhamid himself implemented more effectively than any reformist before him centralizing and modernizing concepts. He tried actively to integrate the Alevi and other heterodox groups such as the Yazidis into the *ümmet* (Muslim community), i. e. to Sunnitize them. He succeeded in reintegrating the Sunni Kurds by giving numerous tribes the status of privileged cavalry units, the so-called *Hamidiye*. Abdulhamid founded an elite school for sons of tribal chiefs (the *Mekteb-i Ashiret*), and sent out his own Hanefi missionaries to mobilize the provincial Muslims for his politics. It seems that this little-known semi-official network played an important role in the extensive anti-Armenian pogroms in 1895 and 1896,¹⁶ a violence that was explicitly directed against the Armenian national movement but that had a clear anti-Protestant tinge. It is an important aspect of the negative and tragic evolution in that region, that the “Puritan” and the Ottoman, especially Hamidian models of modernity clashed in the Fin de siècle and thus could not lead to a creative synergy.

The Alevi reactions to the reforms introduced by the state were mixed. They welcomed the Tanzimat proclamation of equality, but feared the state’s tighter control and its demand for taxes and soldiers. They naturally distrusted Abdulhamid’s re-instatement of the Caliphate, and they suffered under the *Hamidiye*-militias. In part, however, they were also winners of the expropriation of many Armenians during the pogroms, even if they themselves never participated in the slaughter. Some Dersim chiefs also sent their sons to the *Mekteb-i Ashiret*. The request of some Alevi tribes however of being entitled as *Hamidiye* was declined with the argument that only Sunnis could be accepted.¹⁷

Alevi and Missionaries in Ottoman Anatolia”, *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 41, no. 1, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 89-111, and *Der verpasste Friede*, pp. 69-79 and 167-170.

¹⁶ Cf. Verheij, Jelle, “Die armenischen Massaker von 1894-1896: Anatomie und Hintergründe einer Krise”, in: H.-L. Kieser (ed.), *Die armenische Frage und die Schweiz 1896-1923*, Zürich: Chronos, 1999, pp. 69-129.

¹⁷ Cf. Sunar, Mehmet Mert, “Dogu Anadolu ve Kuzey Irak'ta Osmanli Devleti ve Asiretler: II. Abdülhamid'den II. Mesrutiyet'e”, in: *Kebikeç*, no. 10, Ankara, 2000, pp. 115-130, here p. 123; Deringil, Selim, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire. 1876-1909*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, pp. 68-111.

The Young Turks' right-wing modernism: Muslim nationalism, Turkism and imperial ambition

The Alevis enthusiastically welcomed the Young Turkish revolution of 1908 but experienced disappointment when five years later an anti-liberal single-party dictatorship was established that made use of Islamist propaganda. Thus what we have said with regard to the second half of the 19th century, is in essence also true for the decade of Young Turkish rule (1908-18). However, and this is the important difference, for the first time since the Kizilbash revolts in the sixteenth century, the watershed of 1908 briefly led the Alevis to an open and collective reaffirmation of their identity. Emulating their Armenian neighbours they even engaged in establishing village schools.¹⁸

For a Turkish nationalist like Riza Nur the fact that the “Kizilbash Turks” were then emphasising their own identity, separate to that of the Sunnis, was the result of “mendacious Armenian propaganda” during the Hamidian era.¹⁹ The later Kemalist Hasan Reşid Tankut, who was in 1914 a young official in the province of Sivas, pointed in his retrospective to the influence of the Christian missions and described the mission schools in Mamuretülaziz as “nothing other than stations set up in order to convey propaganda filled with hope to the Dersim”.²⁰ The Kurdish Alevi writer Mehmed Nuri Dersimi on the contrary, who went to highschool in Mamuretülaziz before World War 1, underlined the positive, modernizing and enlightening impact of these same institutions.²¹

The clash of different models of identity, reform and modernity is obvious too in the case of the international reform plan for the Eastern Provinces, a compromise and master piece of pluralist balancing, signed by the regime under pressure at the beginning of 1914. In applying the reforms, Hasan Reşid Tankut claimed that the Alevis would have voted side by side with the Armenians in the planned elections. That could have led to a comprehensive political reorganization of the Eastern Provinces. The Alevis and Armenians, hitherto isolated or clearly in the minority, would immediately have had a decisive influence not only on the economic and cultural, but also the political life in those regions.²²

¹⁸ Cf. White, George E., “The Alevi Turks of Asia Minor”, *Contemporary Review*, no. 104, p. 698.

¹⁹ Nur, Riza, *Hayat ve Hatiratim*, vol. 3: Riza Nur-Atatürk Kavgası, İstanbul: Isaret, 1992, p. 112.

²⁰ Tankut, Hasan R., “Zazalar Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkiler”, in: M. Bayrak, *Açık-Gizli/Resmi-Gayriresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri*, Ankara: Özge, 1994, pp. 409-490, here p. 472.

²¹ Dersimi, Mehmed Nuri, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, Aleppo, 1952, p. 45.

²² Tankut, Hasan R., “Dogu ve Güneydogu Bölgesi Üzerine Etno-Politik Bir İnceleme”, in: M. Bayrak, *Açık-Gizli/ Resmi-Gayriresmi Kürdoloji Belgeleri*, Ankara: Özge, 1994, pp. 218-232, here p. 219. Cf.

After the Balkan wars (1912/13) the CUP, which had established its dictatorial regime at the beginning of 1913, engaged in a holistic set of ethnopolitics for the ethno-religious homogenization of Asia Minor. These could be interpreted as a certain continuation of Abdulhamid's before-mentioned religious politics. But they had a new modernist character and concerned non-Muslims as well as Muslims. They began with the Turco-Bulgarian population transfer (November 1913), continued with the disguised and illegal expulsion of Ottoman citizens with Greek-orthodox faith from the Aegean coast (beginning of 1914)²³ and became a gigantic set of social and ethnic "technology" during World War I. Its main scopes were the expulsion of the Greek, Armenian and partly the Assyrian Christians, the settlement of Muslim refugees from the Balkan and the Caucasus at their place, the general settlement of the nomads, and the scattering of Kurds and Arabs throughout Anatolia.²⁴ The Alevis then were only partly concerned by these ethnopolitics. The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 officially recognised the expulsions that had gone on, for the sake of undisputed Turkish rule in Asia Minor, during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922). The first target until 1923 were the Christians, after the Kurds.

In March 1916 some Dersim Alevi tribes gathered together, occupied and then destroyed the towns Nazimiye, Mazgirt, Pertek and Çarsacak and marched towards Mamuretülaziz. The army however, with a large contingent of troops which included many Shafi'i Kurds succeeded in crushing this Kurdish Alevi revolt. In Harput the missionaries heard officials saying they did not want one single (Alevi) Kurd left in that region, they wanted to deport them like the Armenians. Indeed a caravan appeared later in Harput with about 2,000 men, women and children from the former rebellious tribes who were treated just as badly as the Armenians a year before; with the one exception that the men were not separated. The column however could return the following morning. It was ascertained at the time that the explanation for this was that the tribes of Dersim, in a rare display of unity, had told the

Cf. Davison, Roderic H., *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923. The impact of the West*, Austin, 1990, p. 196.

²³ Celal (Bayar), the chief of the Unionist branch in Smyrna and later prime-minister of the Republic, played there an important role. Cf. Sensekeri, Erkan, *Türk devriminde Celal Bayar, 1918-1960*, Istanbul: Alfa, 2000, pp. 35-37; Bayar, Celal, *Ben de yazdım*, vol. 5, Istanbul, 1965-67, p. 1573. Cf. also Naimark, Norman M., *Fires of hatred: ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 43.

²⁴ Cf. Dündar, Fuat, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanlari Iskan Politikasi (1913-18)*, Istanbul: İletisim, 2001.

governor they would burn Harput to the ground if the deportees were not ordered to return immediately.²⁵ Further research should show how far this deportation was not only a punitive measure but already part of systematic ethnopolitics that continued against the Kurdish Alevi after the revolt of Kotchgiri (1921) and especially in the 1930s (see below).

In order to rectify their paucity of ethnological and sociological knowledge concerning Asia Minor, which they claimed as Turkish national homeland, the Unionists had appointed some gentlemen during World War I to travel into the interior of Anatolia and conduct investigations.²⁶ Esat Uras was given the task of collecting information about the Armenians. Baha Sait Bey was instructed to research Alevism-Bektashism. According to Sait his commission was triggered by a population statistic confiscated in the Anatolia College compiled by Protestant missionaries and listing the Alevi as a former Christian grouping. This startled the Unionist party. The party elite deemed it necessary to set up an opposition to such “separatist ideas”, which Sait was instructed to develop and disseminate.²⁷

The political scope of the investigation was to represent the Alevi as “real old Turks”. The Unionist discovery and enhancement of the Alevi did not serve to foster religious pluralism in Anatolia or the adoption of Alevism as a national religion. It was concerned with assimilating Alevism into a national-religious body of thought. It considered language, religion and morals as basis of the Turko-Muslim national identity.²⁸ Most of the Alevi in the eastern provinces felt threatened by this Young Turkish viewpoint. They were disconcerted in the face of the enhanced status that the Muslim community (*ümmet*) received as an exclusive war community. However, the tribe of the Balaban in the Erzincan region is an example of how Zaza-speaking Alevi could partly be used by the CUP for its purposes, thanks to its

²⁵ Cf. Riggs, Henry H., *Days of Tragedy in Armenia. Personal Experiences in Harput, 1915-1917*, Michigan: Gomidas Institute, 1997, p. 184.

²⁶ Cf. Dündar, Fuat, “İttihat ve Terakki’nin Etnisite Arastirmalari”, in: *Toplumsal Tarih*, July 2001, pp. 43-50.

²⁷ The palace interpreted this action as “Kizilbash propaganda” though and prevented publication of the results in the *Türk Yurdu* (published only in 1926, see Baha, “Alevi”). The *Türk Yurdu* was the organ of the pan-Turkish club “Turkish Hearth” (*Türk Ocagi*) that was closely connected to the Unionist party (in the eyes of devout Muslims it adhered to ungodly beliefs). Cf. Birdogan, Nejat, *İttihat-Terakki’nin Alevilik Bektasilik Arastirmasi (Baha Sait Bey)*, Istanbul: Berfin, 1994, p. 11. Sait’s texts (reprinted in Birdogan) were the first important Turkish attempt to understand the Alevi primarily as “Old Turks”.

²⁸ Ziya Gökalp, the mentor to Turkish nationalism regarded the nation as a “a category, composed of individuals having the same language, the same religion, the same morals and the same aesthetic values” (*Türkçülüğün Esaslari*, Istanbul: Sebil Matbaacilik, 1975, p. 21).

good relationship with the Balaban chieftain Gül Agha. Recently published correspondance between him and local representatives of the CUP make it probable, when compared with eyewitness accounts, that some Balabans also were engaged for massacres organized by the CUP's secret organization Teshkilat-i Mahsusa against the Armenians in 1915.²⁹

Indeed, we can not leave aside the most important and dark experience of the specific phenomenon of modernism - in a Turkey on the threshold between "old" and "new" - that was the extermination of the Armenians in 1915/16. For most of the Eastern Alevis the experience was traumatic; for many years they lived in fear of suffering the same fate, as did other groups, even if, materially, they also profited from the eviction of their neighbours. This is particularly true for the province of Erzincan, where Zaza-speaking Alevis from the Dersim already began immigrating in the 19th century and lived, for the most time peacefully, side by side with the indigenous Christians. The latter had better fields, a developed infrastructure, and more advanced know how in agriculture, trade and commerce. Their eviction during World War I however gave the Alevis an opportunity of improving their position. These facts explain somehow the relative support Mustafa Kemal early had there by Eastern Alevis, seeing that his movement was able to guarantee the status quo. Many Alevis on the other hand had strong reasons to mistrust Kemals Pasha's reorganisation of the Unionist power and were the first "interior enemies" to openly oppose him in the revolt of Kotchgiri-Dersim.³⁰

Jacobinic republicanism and ethnopolitics: the Kemalist's ambivalent modernity

The forementioned Erzincan Alevis were not prepared to pursue agriculture on the same high level as their Christian predecessors. Field surveys show traces of terraced fields, irrigation systems, roads and even mills where there is now only pasture.³¹ When speaking about their skilful predecessors the village people (who hold vivid, but very partial memories) show an apparent inferiority complex.³² Compared with the previous century, there was in fact

²⁹ Özgül, Vatan, "İttihat Terakki ve Balaban Asireti. Bazı Belgeler Isiginda İttihatçilerin Asiret Çalismalari", *Toplumsal Tarih*, December 2001, pp. 38-42. Cf. Dersimi, *Dersim*, p. 68, and Lepsius, Johannes, *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918*, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 86 and 94.

³⁰ In this point Baki Öz and other Kemalist Alevi authors are wrong (cf. Öz, *Kurtulus Savasi'nda Alevi-Bektasiler*, Istanbul: Yenigün Haber Ajansi, 1997, p. 98).

³¹ I rely on my (unpublished) researchs concerning the cantons (*ilçe*) of Pülümür (province of Tunceli) and Çaglayan (province of Erzincan).

³² As early as in the 1930s it was a common place in the provinces to say that since the "destruction" of the Christian communities and the "slaughter" of the Armenians the towns had gone down, as prove

regression in the economic and cultural life of the Eastern Anatolian towns and villages in the decades after World War I. Reality fell far short of the Young Turks' and Kemalists' rhetoric of civilization. After the important educational renaissance of the Eastern Anatolian Christians in the 19th century, the region remained in depression, lacking development and without a basis for general prosperity. With large military expenditure the single-party regime maintained its power in these eastern provinces. Emigration became finally the only way out of an isolated and damaged world in a permanent state of emergency.

Outside the Dersim (renamed Tunceli in 1935) and especially in Western Anatolia a fresh republican idealism however motivated many Alevis during the single-party government (1923-50). The abolition of the Caliphate stirred sympathies for the new regime as did the suppression of Sheyk Said's revolt in 1925, even among many Kurdish Alevis, because this rebellion was interpreted as a fanatical Sunni movement. The Kurdish Alevis who lived in Bingöl, Mush and Varto, notably the Hormek and Lolan tribes, had a long history of conflict with their Sunni Kurdish neighbours. When their traditional enemies took part in Shaikh Said's rebellion (1924/25), they opposed the Kurds and threw their lot in with the Kemalist government.³³ Outside the Dersim the Alevis tolerated without resistance the interdiction of the tekkes in 1926.

But there was "no future" in Eastern Alevi villages even far outside the province of Tunceli. Subsistence farming prevailed to a large extent. There were virtually no village schools in Eastern Anatolia until the 1960s, with few exceptions people remained illiterate. In rare cases, village schools were established in the 1920s or 1930s. The Turkish-speaking Mezirme for example (today's Ballıkaya) in the canton of Hekimhan, province Malatya, had been for centuries an important center of Eastern Alevism wherefrom dedes made their annual tours throughout central Anatolia until northern Syria. It had a tekke called Karadirek that was completely independent from the Bektashiye. In 1926 there was established a village school as

early travelers' reports (see Zürcher, Erik-Jan, "Two Young Ottomanists Discover Kemalist Turkey: The Travel Diaries of Robert Anhegger and Andreas Tietze", *Turkology Update Leiden Project Working Papers Archive*, Department of Turkish Studies, Leiden University, <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/tcimo/tulp/Research/diaries.htm>).

³³ Cf. Firat, Mehmet Serif, *Doğu İlleri ve Varto Tarihi*, Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1983 (1952), pp. 161-198.

well as a gendarmerie station. One of the first actions of the appointed teacher and employee of the Republic was the destruction of the tekke.³⁴

We should not forget that the Kemalists were Young Turks, many of them being old members of Union and Progress like Mustafa Kemal himself. Thus there was personal and ideological continuity from 1913 to 1923 and later on.³⁵ Young Turkish Unionism and Kemalism were typical examples of right-wing modernism in the first half of the 20th century. The fundamental ambivalence of the Alevis' attitude vis-à-vis the state continued after 1923, even if the abolition of the caliphate and the abandonment of Islamism for the sake of political mobilization changed somewhat the picture. Early republicanism in fact made a positive impact on many Alevis - but not so much as retrospectively neo-Kemalist Alevis liked to believe.

The jacobinical and *de facto* racist ethnopolitics towards the Dersim however formed the dark side of the Kemalists' progressivist authoritarianism in the history of Alevism. I want to mention two historical situations where that became particularly clear. They are also important proof of the gap between Bektashiye on the one hand, and Kurdish Alevis on the other. This gap had increased during the Balkan wars and World War I.

At the end of 1919 Alisher, the chief promotor of the Kurdish Alevi independence movement of Kotchgiri-Dersim, declared himself an inspector of the Caliph's army - a very surprising step for an Alevi! -, and, in this capacity, called upon the tribes to resist against Mustafa Kemal's national movement. President Wilson's "modern" principle of self-determination was an important element of his Kurdist rhetoric. Around the same time, Mustafa Kemal made a pilgrimage to Hadjibektash in order to win over the the chief of the Western Alevis, Ahmed Djemaleddin Tchelebi Efendi, who had already cooperated with Enver and Talat during World War I. He succeeded and, after the establishment of the Ankara government, made Djemaleddin for a short time the second vice-president of the Parliament in Ankara.³⁶ A year later, in October 1921, the Kotchgiri rebellion and its bloody suppression became a hotly debated topic in the National Assembly. At the end, the National Assembly

³⁴ I rely on my (unpublished) researchs concerning this region, especially on informations got by a retired teacher from there.

³⁵ Cf. the classical work on that aspect by Erik Jan Zürcher: *The Unionist Factor. The Rôle of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement 1905-1926*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984.

³⁶ Cf. Akin, Ridvan, *TBMM Devleti (1920-1923). Birinci Meclis Döneminde Devlet Erkleri ve Idare*, Istanbul: İletisim, 2001, p. 67.

adopted a plan drawn up by a commission for an autonomous administration of Turkish Kurdistan with a Kurdish regional parliament and Kurdish schools.³⁷ But after its triumph in Lausanne 1923 the regime discarded the decision of the National Assembly.

Modern Kurdish claims for self-determination and Eastern Alevis' anti-centralist, anti-Unionist and anti-Sunni stance were closely linked in this first and meaningful clash with the Kemalist movement.³⁸ Following Riza Nur, the agents of the rebellion made propaganda to the Alevis saying: "We are shiites and revolt against the Sunnites. Join us!" Many Turkish-speaking Alevis in fact joined the rebels. With doubtful success the Turkish nationalist and member of the National Assembly Halis Turgut Bey tried to convince the Turkish Alevis of the region that they were Turks and should support the Turkish Nationalists.³⁹ But the term "Turk" in the regional use was very closely related with Sunni, i.e. with state-supporting dominant class.

The second case more specifically fits in with the notion of right-wing "high modernism"⁴⁰. The region of Dersim, renamed Tunceli in 1935, was the heart of Eastern Alevism and a well-known Alevi center for all Alevis from Asia-Minor to Syria. In the progressivist view of the Kemalist elite, the Dersim was an anti-modernist, obscurantist, feudalist and reactionary region, or, to speak with one high official, a "boil" that had to be cut out for the salvation of the country.⁴¹ This "medical operation" took place in the form of the military campaign against the Dersim in 1937/38. The campaign's emblematic "modern" figure was Turkey's first woman pilot Sabiha Gökçen, Atatürk's adopted child, who had the "honor" of bombing the Dersim villages.

It is important to note that despite the civilizationist propaganda around the Dersim campaign by a semi-secular state in the 1930s, in the deeper mentality of the actors old pictures and concepts of the enemy remained and became even sharper through social-darwinist secularization. Circa 1935 a secret report of the (military) Gendarmerie Command,

³⁷ See Olson, Robert, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism 1880-1925*, University of Texas Press, 1991, pp. 39-41 and 166-168.

³⁸ For a deeper analysis see my "Les Kurdes alévis et la question identitaire: le soulèvement du Koçkiri-Dersim (1919-21)", in: M. van Bruinessen (ed.), *Islam des Kurdes*, Paris: INALCO-ERISM, 1998, pp. 279-316 (= *Les Annales de l'autre Islam*, no. 5).

³⁹ Nur, *Hayat*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ Cf. Naimark, *Hatred*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Hamdi Bey, Inspector of the Civil Services, 1926, cited in: Besikçi, Ismail, *Tunceli Kanunu (1935) ve Dersim Jenosidi*, Ankara: Yurt, 1992, pp. 50-51.

formulated in ethno-religious terms the “Dersim problem” as follows: “The worst aspect of Alevism, and one that deserves analysis, is the deep abyss separating them from Turckdom. This abyss is the Kizilbash religion. The Kizilbash do not like the Sunni Muslims, they bear them a grudge, they are their archenemies. They call the Sunnis ‘Rumi’. The Kizilbash believe that divine power is embodied in [human] carriers, and that their imams have been tortured to death at the hands of the Sunnis. Therefore they bear the Sunnis enmity. This has gone so far that for the Kizilbash, Turk and Sunni are the same, as are the names of Kurd and Kizilbash.”⁴² Like the Unionists the Kemalists saw religion above all not as confession but as given element of ethnic identity. Thus for jacobinical actors the solution of the state’s conflict with the Dersim Alevis could only consist in “radically exterminating the problem of Dersim by a general cleansing operation” of the army, as prime-minister Celal Bayar said on 29 June 1938 in the National Assembly.⁴³

For their relationship with Dersim tribes leading men of Zaza-speaking Alevi villages around the Dersim, who strictly had nothing to do with the revolt, were arrested and killed by the military gendarmerie in the late summer 1938. The same was the case with Dersimis who did not participate in the struggle. Many survivors were deported to different places in Western Anatolia. The council of ministers had decided on 6 August 1938 the depopulation of different regions of the Dersim (those of the Kalan, Demenan, Koç and Şam tribes, between Çemişgezek and Erzincan) and the deportation of 5000-7000 Dersim people.⁴⁴ The council declared those zones interdicted zones of the level 3, i.e. the highest level following the Law of Resettlement (*Iskan Kanunu*) of 1934. The zone 2 was that where people had to be deported in order to assimilate them into Turckdom. In the zone 1 the number of Turks should be increased. Forced deportation of Dersimis already had been organized after the campaign in 1937. Robert Anhegger and Andreas Tietze, who then made a travel in Western Anatolia (Eastern Anatolia was hermetically closed to travelers from outside), saw in September 1937 at the train station of Afyon-Karahisar deported Kurds “loaded and unloaded like cattle by the officials”. In the ruins of a mosque in Aydin Anhegger and Tietze saw again Kurds of Tunceli. Without any care and completely impoverished, they “are simply removed there and

⁴² Jandarma Umum Kumandanligi, *Dersim*, [Gizli ve zata mahsustur]. Ankara: T.C. Dahiliye Vekaleti Jandarma Umum Kumandanligi, n.d. [c. 1935], pp. 38-39, cited in van Bruinessen, Martin, “Débat”, p. 20.

⁴³ Akgül, Suat, *Yakin Tarihimizde Dersim Isyanlari ve Gerçekler*, Istanbul: Bogaziçi Yayinlari, 1992, p. 155.

⁴⁴ This ist the official number, cf. Akgül, Dersim, pp. 155-156.

distributed over the country. They are then dumped anywhere, without a roof over their head or employment. They do not know a single word of Turkish”.⁴⁵

Tunceli did not become the “Switzerland of Turkey” through the civilizing effects of the Republic, as the ideologues of the campaign of 1937/38 had promised.⁴⁶ On the contrary, like so many Alevi and Kurdish regions, massive deportation, flight and migration did not stop throughout the whole 20th century. In 2001 Tunceli was still a province in a state of emergency, where a lot of villages and forests had been destroyed for military reasons in the 1990s. With the Alevi Kurdish Tunceli, the Republic’s modernizing concepts indeed had come to a dead end. Promising ways out still are not opened.

From the end to revival: the Alevi’s flight from the villages into a modern diaspora

In the second half of the 20th century the most profound social change took place in the history of Alevi since the 16th century. This period deals with the end of the traditional, rural Alevi organization that had secretly continued functioning during the single-party regime. This end coincides with the establishment of an urban Alevi diaspora, resulting from the massive migration of rural people and especially of Eastern Alevi to the urban centres in Turkey and Europe. This end furthermore was linked to the emergence of a broad leftist protest generation in the 1970s. This end finally led to a spectacular public renaissance of Alevi identity in urban context during the last quarter of our period.

Against a general background of under-development we see two concrete reasons for the Alevi’s precarious situation before the extensive migration. First, in terms of settlement geography, the Alevi villages are at a disadvantage compared with neighbouring Sunni villages. Generally, the Alevi live on the mountainsides, the Sunnis in the more fertile plains. That is largely the case in the provinces of Marash, Adiyaman, Malatya and Erzincan despite the large-scale redistribution of properties during and after World War I. Second, traditionally the Sunnis had good relations with the authorities and were able to profit from public resources to a much greater extent. This remained true in the Republic and resulted in a better infrastructure and better opportunities for commerce.

Thus the only perspective for improving their situation appeared to be migration. Eastern Alevi were over-represented among the candidates when Germany signed an agreement for

⁴⁵ Cited in Zürcher, “Travel Diaries “.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Tan*, 15 June 1937.

migrant workers in 1961. Most families were also engaged in establishing village schools paid for by themselves, with only the teachers being supplied by the government. A number of families later moved to provincial towns in order to send their children to secondary schools.

Many of the first generation of educated Alevis got engaged in politics and were involved in leftist organizations in the 1970s. They understood rural under-development in terms of class struggle and began to take a critical look at Turkish history and the repression in the East. In the provincial towns, Alevis experienced the hostility of their Sunni neighbours who saw them as competitors for local commerce. They still suffered from the stigma as disloyal citizens and heretical Kizilbash. The expression “Kizilbash, Kurd, communist” (*kizilbash, kürt, komünist*) was a dangerous invective. Several times the situation escalated in anti-Alevi raids and pogroms, especially in 1978, in Marash, Elbistan, Malatya, Sivas, Çorum, thus particularly in towns with Eastern Alevis.⁴⁷ These pogroms had patterns similar to the anti-Armenian pogroms in 1895 and 1909, but counted also an important number of female victims. Like in late Ottoman times, the violence was largely legitimized by an Islamist discourse.

The developments of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the virtual end of the Alevis' rural world and their traditional structures. In the first generation of migrants these structures partially were transferred in the urban quarters. But many of the young people borrowed the anti-religious vocabulary of Kemalist and Leninist rhetorics, branding the *dedes* as ignorants and exploiters. However, they did not really break with their Alevi heritage, but interpreted it as a protest movement against unjust rulers and their alleged - but too often truly - fanatical and violent adherents.

With the military coup of September 1980, the Alevi youth's protest culture experienced a nearly complete breakdown from which it never recovered. During the 1980s the state drifted openly towards the right⁴⁸ and a more open Sunni stance, with for example obligatory religious (Sunni) education in schools and - as already had done sultan Abdulhamid in the 1890s - a campaign for the construction of mosques even in Alevi villages. In this difficult situation, Alevis rediscovered Alevism as a religion in their urban diaspora, not so much as a

⁴⁷ Cf. Bozarslan, Hamit, “Le phénomène milicien: une composante de la violence politique des années soixante-dix”, *Turcica*, vol. 31, 1999, pp. 185-244, here pp. 235-38; Laçiner, Ömer, “Der Konflikt zwischen Sunniten und Aleviten in der Türkei”, in: Blaschke, Jochen, and Bruinessen, Martin van, *Islam und Politik in der Türkei*, Berlin: Edition Parabolis, 1989, pp. 233-254, here pp. 251-54.

⁴⁸ In its historical substance it always was rightist, cf. above.

religion in the traditional holistic way, but in a new, modern, more individualist mold as an element of civil secular society comparable to religious, political and cultural associations in Europe. Religious material serves for the construction of the individual's personal identity in the modern urban environment. Partially that is true also for the Sunni youth, but contrary to the Islamic revival, the new Alevi movement is far from being tempted into restoring politico-religious hegemony in a global context, but follows closely the Western secular and egalitarian paradigm of modernity from which it has much to win.⁴⁹ The killing of a group of largely Alevi artists and intellectuals by Islamists in Sivas on 2 July 1993 had a catalyzing impact for this Alevi renaissance.⁵⁰

One factor for the new Alevi understanding was that many of the refugees from the junta living in Germany and Switzerland initially received substantial help from Christian confessional relief organizations. To a certain degree they represented a model to be emulated. Experienced organisers had come as refugees to Western Europe. They did not fail to use the possibilities civil society gave them in the European context. At the same time Alevi migrants had to defend themselves against strong right-wing ("fascist") or Islamic diaspora organizations, that, in the logic of the Cold War, still were (partially) subsidized by the Turkish diplomatic service. The important role of the diaspora in Europe for the Alevi revival in and outside Turkey is indisputable.⁵¹

Another strong motivation for the emergence of a new Alevi identity was the Kurdish movement of the 1980s and 1990s. It challenged with success the state's repressive identity politics and thus, on the one hand, encouraged an Alevi coming out. On the other hand, faced by this threat, the state was interested in winning over the alienated Kurdish and Turkish Alevis, and in splitting the Kurdish movement. It notably publicly began supporting the important summer festival in Hacı Bektash. The failure of the Turkish left and the brutal war in the Kurdish region also contributed to the search and revival of a belief based on common

⁴⁹ Cf. Seufert, Güntert, "Between religion and ethnicity: a Kurdish-Alevi tribe in globalizing Istanbul", in: Öncü, Ayşe, and Weyland, Petra, *Space, culture, and power: new identities in globalizing cities*, London: Zed Books, 1997 pp. 157-76, here pp. 173-74.

⁵⁰ Cf. George E. Ellington's paper. In this context it is remarkable that the rich collection of Alevi-Bektashi poems, edited by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, has the following dedication: "[This book] is respectfully dedicated to the holy memory of the martyrs of thought, burnt alive by fanatical men with outworn ideas. Out of the fire their souls turn the semah-dance." (Özmen, İsmail, *Alevi-Bektasi Sıirleri Antolojisi*, 5 vols., Ankara: TTK basimevi, 1998).

⁵¹ Cf. van Bruinessen, "Débat", pp. 23-24.

human values beyond ideologies. The enhancing of religion and ethnicity finally is a general issue after the end of the ideologically formulated global Cold War.

Rethinking Islam and modernity from the Alevi experience

Logically, minorities that feel disadvantaged try to get help from outside. But beyond the general logic of self-interest, there were specific reasons for the Alevis' early orientation towards a West that brought secularized modernity. These reasons are closely connected to the construction of the Ottoman and Turkish society as well as to Alevism itself. Another important background is the genesis of Islam. At the end of my paper I want to reiterate some important points, but above all I think it is worth reflecting the Alevi experience against this multiple background. These aspects too are relevant for the understanding of the problematic relation between Islam and (Western-led) global modernity.

The forementioned report of the Gendarmerie Command in the 1930s exposes an important truth, even if today it sounds politically incorrect: Indeed there is in the Alevism an age-old profound opposition, not to say enmity against the established state-based Sunni religion. Relying on early Shiite and Sufi traditions the Alevis, and again especially Eastern Alevism, categorically took and take the side of the losers, i.e. of the family of Ali, in the struggle of power after Muhammed's death. The claimed descendance of Ali's family is a most important, (de facto) symbolical legitimization of their priest system. The internalization of the Kerbela myth until today results often in a critical, sometimes overcritical, and paralyzing stance towards established rule. With the partial exception of the Safavi Shah Ismail, Anatolian Alevis never believed in the historical Islamic theocracies.

Traditions, which in today's orthodox Shiism have been discarded, are still quite vivid among Alevis. For them all, the Koran is a sacred text, but I did not meet a single Alevi who in longer talks not would have said, in accordance with early Shiite tradition, that some parts of the Koran were falsified by the Caliphs of the 7th century.⁵² In the Alevis' (imaginative) memory, there is a general attitude against the establishment of Islam as politico-religious power system in that time. In accordance with the Suras given in Mecca, Alevis underline the continuity and coherence of Islam with the precedent prophets, thus theologically relativizing

⁵² Cf. Brunner, Rainer, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission für die Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2001.

it as foundation of a new religion. Some dedes see Ali as preexistent to Mohammed, as “the spirit existing in all prophecy” and “essentially the same as Jesus”.⁵³

The place of Ali in the largely popular Alevi theology indeed sheds much light on the fundamental opposition to Muslim Orthodoxy through the centuries. One of the most widespread tales is that about the assembly of the forty (*Kirklar meclisi*), a legendary assembly with Ali, its family members and the twelve Imams, that is seen as the first and exemplary djem. Still today, during each djem, the reference to the *Kirklar meclisi* is made many times.⁵⁴ The tale is that Muhammed knocked at the door of the *Kirklar meclisi* giving his name, but was refused to enter. A second time he tried to be admitted by saying that he was the Prophet, but without success. Finally he called himself a poor child (*yoktan varolmus bir yoksul oglu*), guest of God (*Tanri misafiri*), and was admitted. The point is not at all the humiliation of Muhammed - who always is respected as prophet - but to show, that only humble humans can attend at the djem that represents the place of Truth (*Hak meydana*). Logically the *shahada* (confession of faith) like the other “pillars of Islam” does not play a central role (most Alevis refuse the fasting of Ramadan and the interdiction of alcohol).

When unipolar Byzantine power crumbled away, Medieval Asia Minor became the place where heterodox visions of early Islam could freely be cultivated, notably among the Turkmen immigrants. Spiritual leaders like Hadji Bektash (13th c.), influenced from Khorasan, an important center of Persian Sufism, were welcomed by Turkmen Beys. They succeeded in giving the immigrants and rural autochthonous Christians a new orientation that fitted well the historical situation. The nominally Islamic, but undogmatic, integrative message made it easy to adhere to for rural Christians, who had suffered under Byzantine rule. Originating in a religiously and politically multi-polar Asia Minor during the late Middle Age, the Sufi-influenced heterodox “Alevism” (significantly the term did not yet exist) deeply suspected dogmatically formulated orthodox religion for its link to empires. Many Alevi poems and also those, famous, of Yunus Emre (whom the Alevis claim as one of their spiritual fathers) express this need of near and direct relations with God and men. Sometimes extremely free with regard to politics and dogmatics, they sing of the undivisible love to human beings, humanity and God. True worship, freed from its function of legitimizing

⁵³ Cited in Trowbridge, “The Alevis”, p. 341.

⁵⁴ Cf. for example Yaman, Mehmet, *Alevilikte Cem*, Istanbul: Ufuk Matbaacilik, 1998. Partly online on <http://www.alevi-bektasi.de/Tuerkce/Alevilik/Cem.html>. For a detailed version of the tale see e.g. Kaya, Hasan, *Bir baska Gözle Alevilik - Kizilbaslik*, Istanbul: Amaç, 2000, pp. 71 and 144-148 (he cites the *buyruk* of Imam Cafer Sadik).

power, is what Alevis still claim today. The establishment, for political reasons, of an Ottoman Muslim Orthodoxy in the early 16th century was a catastrophe for large heterodox circles. It resulted in the marginalization of the “Alevis” whose worldview before had been wide-spread in Asia Minor. It led too to the splitting of Eastern and Western Alevis (see above).

It is not surprising that many Alevis saw with satisfaction the decline of Sunni power in the 19th century. They felt themselves confirmed in their hopes. With astonishing ease and somewhat naively many Kizilbash tribes and villages turned from the mid-19th century to the American missionaries, considering them as long expected teachers. Western modernity, as represented by these men and women, which first penetrated from the outside the rural countryside, fascinated them not so much in technical terms - like the Ottoman restorers and reformers - but for the free, self-confident habitus it showed, and, surely, for the welfare it represented. The strong link of Ottoman and Young Turkish reformers with the endeavour to reestablish the undisputed rule of the Empire and its *millet-i hakime*, inside by centralization and to the outside by arming, made Alevis deeply suspect, even if they gladly welcomed their liberal proclamations. But these proclamations generally never were implemented in the regions where Alevis lived.

The restorers and reformers early saw the dangers of what American missionaries - too smugly - called the Islam’s “internal breach” and “deadly wound” (the deep division from the beginning within Islam).⁵⁵ They made important efforts to overcome it. Under this angle we could and should (not exclusively of course) interpret the Kemalists’ abolition of the caliphate and their repression of Sunni Islam in the public sphere as last radical attempt to cure the old breach. We know that for many reasons they did not or only partly succeed. Their coercive *laiklik* was not a real laicism because it integrated Sunni Islam to the state and, despite the construction of prehistoric ethnic origins, left it de facto untouched as central historical element of national, *millî*, identity. The official “Turko-Islamic synthesis” of the 1970s/1980s confirms this fact. Moreover the exclusive Turkish nationalism, which served as ideological *ersatz* for religion, alienated the Kurdish Alevis more than ever. The positive, constructive dynamics of the Republic did not get a look-in in the eastern provinces where the state of emergency continued to reign. However, principally, the Alevis welcomed the Kemalism’s turn to Western modernity as necessary for social equality.

At the end of the World War, “a common prayer of the Turks was: May God send us a Master” (*Sahip*), as Clarence Ussher wrote in June 1919 after a stay in Istanbul.⁵⁶ A few Alevi in fact later began to see Mustafa Kemal as their saviour or secular *mahdi*. But this phenomenon was largely exaggerated through invented traditions in neo-Kemalist Alevi circles since the 1960s.⁵⁷ The strong eschatological, quasi millenarian dimension of Alevi belief could not be fulfilled by the Republic as it existed in reality. Against this background we have also to see the turn of the young Alevi generation to leftish, strongly ideological worldviews in the 1960s and 1970s.

Though only very partly successful, the Turkish Republic’s experience with modernity is very interesting and meaningful. The Young Turks were probably confronted with deeper and more complex problems than any right-wing movement in those times: the crisis of Islam, the Eastern Question and nationalism. These problems did not only call for a new political order for the Near East, but concerned the fundamental challenge to Islamo-Christian (and Islamo-Jewish) cohabitation in a Western-led global modern world. The crisis of Islam was linked as well to the thorny problem of its modernization (in the given terms of modernity) as to the old wound of its early division, still extremely vivid in Anatolia through the Alevi question. The Young Turks finally “solved” their Islamo-Christian problem by expulsing or killing their Christians. They tried to get rid of the Sunni-Alevi question by means of secularization from the top, of Turkish ethno-nationalism and social technology. They indeed took a highly problematic short cut. But what makes scholars humble - though not less critical - is the fact, that to a large extent Turkey’s problems are now too the West’s and the world’s. Hundred years ago that was not the case. Today the world is deeply concerned by the challenge of religious and ethnic cohabitation and by the crisis of Islam.

Alevi-Sunni reconciliation (or successful cohabitation) seems closely to be linked with Islam’s creative adaption of Western-styled civil society. Turkey partly succeeded this way. Its unsettled problem with Islam in civil society however shows that a much deeper reform than what “high modernist” Kemalists made, is still not achieved: the constructive reform of Islam. This reform would mean the overcoming (and not domestication or

⁵⁵ White, George E., “The Shia Turks”, *Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, vol. 40, pp. 225-239, London, 1908, here pp. 225-226.

⁵⁶ ABCFM, Houghton Library, Boston, Ussher Personal Papers, document cited in Kieser, *Friede*, p. 368.

⁵⁷ Cf. Vorhoff, Karin, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1995, pp. 71 and 157-158.

instrumentalization) of Islamism's right-wing and antihumanist currents which largely can be understood as radicalized backward-looking, anti-modern reactions. It would not be fair to put the blame on "Islam" or "Islamism" alone. Open wrongs of the global order, which injure the elementary sense of justice, and the instrumentalization of the Middle East's right-wing forces by the West for the sake of hegemony strongly hampered the evolution towards functioning civil societies in that region of the world. That is true not only after World War II, but already in the times of Germany's backing of Abdulhamid II and of the Unionist Young Turks, when many Ottomans, not least the Alevis, strongly looked toward culturally and politically liberal Western modernity.