State Control over Religion and Space as Resistance in Post-1980 Türkiye: The Alevi Case

Word count: 27, 237

MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies

anneme ve babama...

Table of Contents

List of Figures 4

Abbreviations 5

Chapter 1: *Introduction* 6

1.1: *Literature Review* 8

Chapter 2: *Methodology*..... 15

Chapter 3: *Theoretical Framework*..... 26

Chapter 4: *The Turkish Government's Control over Religion and the Rise of Political Islam in the Country After the 1980s Coup.*..... 33

4.1: *Historical Background until the 1980s.*..... 33

4.2: *The 1980 Coup.*..... 40

4.3: *Religious Control Through Public Education* 42

4.4: *Religious Control Through Dormitories and Private Institutions* 48

4.5: *Religious Control Through Space* 57

4.6: *Conclusion* 62

Chapter 5: *Cemevis as Spaces of Resistance* 65

5.1: *Construction of Cemevis* 68

5.2 *Cemevis as Spaces of Hope* 82

5.3: *The Spatial Acquisitions and Growing Public Visibility of Alevis* 89

5.4: *Conclusion* 94

6. Conclusion 97

7. References 101

List of Figures

Figure 1 17

Figure 2 18

Figure 3 34

Figure 4 85

Figure 5 86

Figure 6 86

Figure 7 90

Figure 8 92

Figure 9 92

Table 1 46

Table 2 59

Table 3 74

Table 4 76

Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party
AP	Justice Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
DP	Democrat Party
DEM	People's Equality and Democracy Party
DSP	The Democratic Left Party
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
IHS	Imam Hatip Schools
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MNP	National Order Party
MSP	National Salvation Party
TİP	Turkey's Workers Party
TIS	Turkish-Islamic Synthesis

Introduction

The 1980 military coup dramatically altered Türkiye's social, economic, and political trajectory. The junta regime aimed to address issues of the deeply polarised society by promoting a singular, unified, and state-sanctioned interpretation of religion while disregarding the plurality of the Turkish society. To accomplish this aim, coup leaders began implementing various measures targeting the Alevi and Kurdish communities. This thesis will analyse the Turkish government's growing control over religion in the post-1980 period, with a particular focus on its implications for the Alevi community.

Following the 1980 military coup, the Turkish state intensified efforts to promote a homogenised and de-differentiated national identity through religious assimilation policies and the institutionalisation of Sunni Islam. However, rather than witnessing the disappearance of Alevi religious practices and the complete assimilation of the community, the past four decades have witnessed a significant increase in the number of cemevis (Alevi worship places) across the country and the rise of Alevi revival. Drawing on this contradiction, this research examines how the expansion of cemevis could be interpreted in the context of intensified state control over religion.

When the Republic of Türkiye was established, its founders adopted six defining and constituting principles: Republicanism (Cumhuriyetçilik), Nationalism (Milliyetçilik), Laicism (Laiklik), Statism (Devletçilik), Reformism (İnkilapçılık), and Populism (Halkçılık) (Keyman, 2007, p. 221). Among these principles, laicism played a crucial role in shaping the newly founded country politically and socially. Based on this principle, various measures to control religion across the country were taken, including abolishing the caliphate, outlawing the medreses (religious schools), removing şeriat (religious law), adopting the Latin alphabet,

and outlawing the tarikats[1] (Keyman, 2007, p. 222). Some of these measures have affected the Alevi community profoundly and created a long-standing problem regarding their legal recognition and the right to have places of worship (as explained in the following chapters).

The Laicism principle of the newly founded government has established an environment in which religion has remained a central and enduring force in shaping social and political life, rather than being completely diminished (Keyman, 2007, p. 223). The 1980 coup marked a major point in the religion-state relations trajectory built on this principle since the coup regime began utilising religion in the public scene to increase its political power under the framework of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS) as a government ideology rather than strict secular regulation. TIS sought to integrate Sunni Islam as a central element of Turkish identity to generate a unified and homogenised society while creating assimilationist projects specifically targeting Alevis and Kurds.

Sunni Islam is primarily based on the Hanafi school of thought in Türkiye, and it plays a central role not only in defining religious practice but also in shaping national identity. With the adoption of TIS, the government intensified its involvement in the production and organisation of religious space, spreading its religious ideology through educational institutions, allowing tarikats to thrive in private educational settings and student housing institutions, and also through public discourses affecting everyday life. As a result, religion became the government's key instrument for controlling society.

Within this context, Alevis, who had already been facing marginalisation and assimilation practices since the Ottoman Empire, started re-experiencing systematic state-led

[1] The term tarikat will be used repeatedly in this thesis to refer to Sufi religious orders, groups of believers who follow a religious leader and his principles. In tarikats, members participate in communal religious rituals, religious education, and the dissemination of Islamic teachings. The tarikats discussed in this thesis are Sunni and they have historically been instrumental in shaping the social, cultural, and religious dynamics in Türkiye (Karasapan & Akin, 1988).

assimilationist policies again. However, these projects have not been passively welcomed by the community. Rather, the community sought ways to protect, preserve, and sustain their identity while resisting the state, particularly through the construction of cemevis as socio-spatial places.

This process, started by the adoption of TIS, further contributed to the growing power of political Islam in the subsequent years. Under these circumstances, the Madımak Massacre, which took place in 1993 in Sivas, marked a catalyst and a prompting point for Alevis to rethink their position in the country and ways of resistance. After this violent incident, Alevis decided to assert their visibility in the Turkish urban landscape, demand recognition, and create a collective identity within a socio-spatial order planned to render them invisible rather than remain socially and spatially marginalised. In this regard, cemevis not only function as places of worship for the community, but also as social and cultural sites, where the community acts relatively freely and does not need to conceal their identity.

Therefore, this thesis analyses the intersection of state power, space, religion, and resistance in post-1980 Türkiye. In the first part, it mainly focuses on how the state has used its power over education, student housing, and spatial mechanisms to promote a homogenised Sunni-Muslim citizenship identity. In the second part, it analyses the spread of cemevis as Alevi spatial resistance by using Lefebvre's counter-spaces and Harvey's spaces of hope approaches. In essence, the study aims to elucidate how the space in Türkiye has been used both as a mechanism to control society and as a form of resistance by analysing cemevis not only as solely religious places but also as socio-political spaces. By doing so, this study intends to contribute to debates on state-religion-minority relations, spatial politics and control, spatial resistance, and the agency of marginalised communities under hegemonic power structures.

1.1 Literature Review

a. The Turkish Government's Control over Religion

There is a wide range of studies within academia on the Turkish government's control over religion and the rise of political Islam in Türkiye. However, the existing studies about how the rise of political Islam plays a vital role in assimilation policies towards the non-Sunni communities in the country, specifically Alevis, and how the control over space has been designed to spread Sunni Islam norms in order to marginalise the Alevis from the public landscape have not been linked to each other. For my research, two main studies play a vital role in explaining this side of analyses: Ceren Lord's *Religious Politics in Turkey: From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP (2018)* and Hakan M. Yavuz's *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey (2003).*

Since the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, the government's control over religion has been characterised by a paradoxical form of secularism. By the early Republican period, the nationhood was shaped around being Turk and Muslim to create the nation-state while embracing the secular identity (Yavuz, 2003, p. 47). To cut the ties with the Ottoman Islamic past and embrace a secular identity, the state aimed to exclude any Islamic institutions from public and political life. To achieve this goal, a strictly restricted and surveilled religious institution was crucial, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs was founded with this motivation (Yavuz, 2003, p. 48). During this period, the centre-periphery distinction, which had been prominent in the Ottoman period, continued to exist in the differentiation between the state's and the society's understanding of religion (Mardin, 1973, pp. 181-183).

With the increasing de-Islamisation of government policies, the different peripheral religious groups, including Sufi orders or caliphate supporters, started expressing their

opposition to these policies. This centre-periphery distinction played an important role in the creation of various tarikats in the country (Yavuz, 2003, pp. 53-56). However, up until the 1950s, neither political Islam nor tarikats could properly embed themselves into Turkish politics. Following the Demokrat Parti's (Democrat Party) victory in the 1950 election, religion became more integrated into social life and education (Lord, 2018, p. 184). The transition to a multiparty system enabled Islamist groups to become politically active. These groups were mostly invested in party politics, while left-wing groups prioritised civil and associational organisations. The 1971 military memorandum intervened in these associational activities of left-wing groups and sought to open a way for conservative nationalist–Islamic groups to gain greater political influence (Yavuz, 2003, p. 59).

Türkiye in the 70s witnessed escalating violence, civilian deaths, and growing social polarisation in society. In these circumstances, the military seized power and assumed control of the government. The 1980 military coup marked a significant turning point in Turkish politics, society, and the economy and shaped the country's subsequent trajectory. Lord (2018) and Yavuz (2003) explain the increasing government control over religion after the 1980 coup and its implications for Alevis by touching upon specific issues such as mandatory religious education, the expansion of Imam Hatip Schools and Qur'an courses, the increasing power of Diyanet (Ministry of Religious Affairs) and tarikats, and the mosque construction policy of the government.

b. Alevi Identity, Recognition, and Legal Struggles

Several laws and regulations play a crucial role in the marginalisation of Alevis in daily life in Türkiye since they prevent legal recognition, state support, and access to fundamental rights. This study focuses on the Village Law in 1924, the Law of Closure of Dervish Lodges and Shrines in 1925, the Treaty of Lausanne, the EU Harmonisation Process Package 6 in

2003, the Law on Land Development Planning, the 2014 Regulation on the Preparation of Spatial Plans, the Supreme Court, and the European Court of Human Rights decisions for several issues regarding Alevis' struggle over recognition and equal rights in Türkiye.

Due to these laws and regulations in the country, cemevis occupy a legally ambiguous position. Scholars, such as Kurtarır & Okten (2018), Kurtarır (2022) and Aydın & Gurpinar (2022) interpret this complexity as part of a broader othering pattern and institutional misrecognition. It is important to analyse the legal dynamics in a more nuanced way for interpreting the state's categorisation of religious spaces, definitional boundaries, and administrative frameworks in ways that it uses to control Alevis in the country, and how these legal limitations have affected the community.

c. State Control over Religion through Public and Private Education, Student Housing, and Space

This research will specifically focus on religious control through specific fields to provide a broader perspective on the government's Sunnification policies by examining embedded structural inequalities and social engineering to homogenise society. Scholars argue that the Turkish government has been exercising control mechanisms over private and public education and student housing after the coup. Lord (2018), Yavuz (2003), Başdemir (2011), and Coşkun & Yankaya (2018) study these topics by interpreting how the religious education classes, which became mandatory with the 1982 constitution, and the expansion of the Imam Hatip Schools deepened the structural inequalities for the Alevi community, and how the state norms became more aligned with Sunni Islam due to these measures, starting from the coup government.

Pertaining to the religious control through private education and student housing, Sarıkaya (1998) and Sarpkaya (2008) explain the impact of tarikats to spread traditional

Sunni Islam interpretation and assimilate Alevi children in tarikat-owned dormitories and private education institutions. Terkoğlu (2022) shows that all the exam questions administered by the state had been systematically stolen by tarikats for a very long time, and that a significant number of graduates of these schools had secured positions in important public and political institutions. Çelik et al. (2016) examine these patterns to show how state-led othering practices deepened in Turkish society by providing broader lenses for understanding the impact of these issues' effects on the Alevi community.

Even if there are not that many comprehensive studies about the spatial control of the Turkish government over religion in the country, studies developed by scholars such as Yonucu (2024), Erman (2010), and Orhan (2019) provide a perspective about how the government has instrumentalised the space, especially in Alevi-dominated settlements in order to impose Sunni Islam.

d. Cemevis as Spaces of Resistance

In this part of the research, the way Alevis began using cemevis as spaces of resistance will be explained by using Lefebvre's (1991) counter-spaces and Harvey's (2000) spaces of hope theories. Some scholars, such as Yıldırım (2012), Özdüzen (2019), Hanoğlu (2026), and Kurtarır (2022), offer spatial resistance from different perspectives. While Yıldırım (2012) and Kurtarır (2022) explain the importance of cemevis for Alevis, and how they serve as more than only religious places for the community, Özdüzen (2019) brings new empirical evidence for spatial resistance by showing how public parks were used as spaces of hope during the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013. Hanoğlu (2026) explains the importance of cemevis for the Alevi visibility across diaspora and transnational Alevi networks. Even if these studies do not provide the comprehensive point I wanted to present, they still elucidate a significant perspective on the importance of cemevis for Alevi's struggle for equal rights

and resistance against assimilation policies of the state, as well as on how the urban places could be seen as sites of resistance in Türkiye.

e. Gaps in the Literature and Contribution

While prevalent literature in this field provides a general and comprehensive understanding of the Turkish government's control over religion by discussing issues such as legal recognition of Alevis, assimilation projects targeting them, Alevi identity, and state-religion relations, none of these studies link these state practices to spatial control. Additionally, the existing literature often treats these themes separately rather than examining how controls across different fields interact, reproduce, and reinforce one another. In addition to the religious control part of the study, research on spatial resistance in Türkiye is quite limited.

My research differs from these studies by focusing on how to comprehend the government's control over religion through space, by examining the operation of spatial control through various political and social mechanisms. Furthermore, this research primarily builds its argument on how religious control creates counter-resistance, arguing that cemevis are a spatial form of resistance for the Alevi community by providing Lefebvre's counter-spaces and Harvey's spaces of hope. Lefebvre (1991) argues that alternative spaces can emerge under the dominant spatial orders, and they could be called counter-spaces, built by marginalised groups to provide alternative realities, practices, and forms of social organisation.

Building on Lefebvre, Harvey (2000)'s concept of spaces of hope explains that alternative realities, which enable social relations and political possibilities, can be imagined and built. These spaces allow communities to challenge dominant hegemonies by creating solidarity, belonging, and collective action.

Wright (1997, p. 226) also argues that collective resistance requires holding power to

move within a given topography. He further adds that (1997, p. 256) space enabled communities to form collective identity and to engage in collective action against authorities who often reinforce dominant meanings of it.

By using all these theories as a baseline for my study, I will explain how cemevis play vital roles in Türkiye's urban landscape for the Alevi community by providing alternative spaces where the community culturally and socially flourishes, creates a sense of belonging and solidarity, and asserts their presence in Turkish society.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research approach to examine how the Turkish government has been controlling the religion in the country to Sunnify the Alevis, starting from the 1980 military coup and how the Alevis have been resisting against these assimilationist pressures by using their worship places as spaces of resistance. To do so, the research employs various methods, including discourse analysis combined through analytical triangulation. The thesis dives deep into the religious control of the Turkish state through three main subtitles: religious control through public education, religious control through private education and dormitories, and religious control through space. After explaining how these controls were specifically designed to control the Alevis, it argues that the cemevis started being constructed as socio-spatial places where Alevis would act relatively freely and live in their alternative reality under an absolute hegemony by avoiding control mechanisms and surveillance.

2.1 Research Design

Since this study focuses on the lived experiences of Alevis, state oppression, spatial control, spatial resistance, and issues regarding recognition, a qualitative approach is better suited to capture and analyse the complexity of power relations and community responses since it enables an understanding of lived experiences and resistance processes of marginalised communities. As Creswell & Poth (2016, pp. 79-80) mention, qualitative research is particularly suitable to explore lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and power relations within specific socio-political contexts.

The 1980 military coup was strategically chosen for this research since the coup government saw religion as a glue to bring the fragmented Turkish society together (Erman, 2010, p. 181) and began targeting Alevis and Kurds specifically in this period. The rising

oppression towards the community also pushed them to construct alternative ways of resistance to protect their identity and counter assimilationist pressures. At that point, Alevis started using their unrecognised worship places as spaces of resistance to provide alternative sites for themselves.

The triangulation method, which is a research method that uses diverse sources for data collection to study a topic from different perspectives (Olsen, 2004, p. 3), has been employed for this study. Denzin & Lincoln (2011, p. 141) note that analytical triangulation requires combining multiple qualitative methods to ensure in-depth analysis. With this aim, this research design combines multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with 11 Alevis, field visits and observational research, qualitative document analysis of government texts, legal documents, and newspaper articles. Accordingly, the triangulation method enables this research to bridge the gap between official state discourse and the lived community experience by enhancing the validity and credibility of findings.

2.2 Data Sources and Data Collection

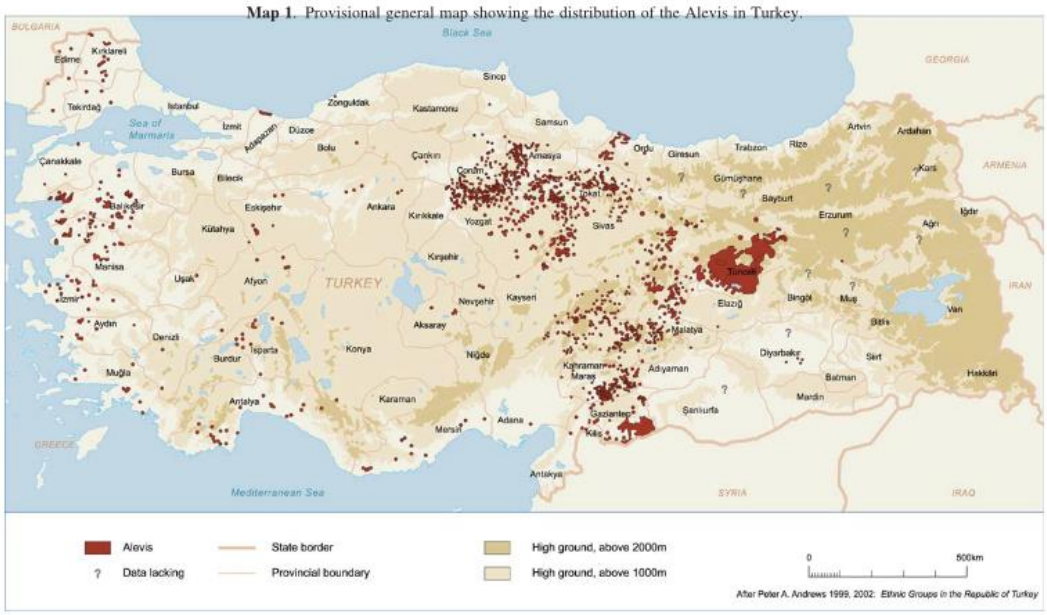
Interviews

Between July and December 2025, I conducted 11 semi-structured interviews in Turkish with people who identify themselves as Alevi and live in Türkiye. These semi-structured interviews sought to capture the lived experiences of Alevis regarding state control over religion and Alevi identity, and their perception and engagement with cemevis in their daily lives. The participants come from diverse geographical backgrounds, including Çorum, Elazığ, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, İstanbul, Sivas, Tekirdağ, and Tokat. These cities were strategically selected. Participants from Çorum, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Gaziantep, Tokat, Sivas, and Elazığ were selected since Central Anatolia hosts the majority of the Alevi population, as shown in Figure 1 below. Some cities, such as Sivas, Kahramanmaraş, and

Malatya, were selected as they hold crucial importance for the Alevi collective memory due to the violent incidents perpetrated against them in these cities. Istanbul and Tekirdağ were selected to capture experiences associated with internal migration and urbanisation. This regional diversity was intended to acquire variations in local experiences and perspectives across Türkiye's diverse socio-political and urban contexts. The snowball sampling technique was used to get in touch with participants.

Figure 1

Map showing the distribution of the Alevis in Türkiye (Shankland, 2010, p. 233)



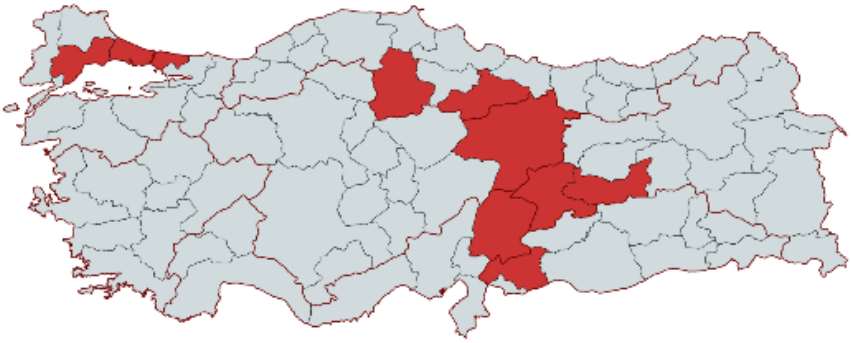
Jianbin (2024, p. 4) notes that semi-structured interviews enable mutual interaction, helping uncover unique stories of participants in their own words. Thus, this method allowed me to navigate my interviews with flexibility while maintaining a consistent thematic focus. Furthermore, this format enabled interviewees to elaborate on their personal experiences and reflections regarding cemevis, being Alevi in Türkiye, othering practices of the state and state-religion relations flexibly. Participants were strategically selected from different age groups to evaluate the generational differences more nuanced and assess the impact of the

coup and subsequent socio-political developments. The mean age of the 11 interviewees is 34, and the eldest participant is 52, while the youngest is 25. Due to ethical and privacy reasons, the names of the participants will remain anonymous. Every participant has been assigned a different name in order to provide a more manageable reading.

Eight of the interviews were recorded, and three were not recorded at the request of the interviewees. All recorded interviews were transcribed. For the unrecorded interviews, detailed written notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews to ensure accuracy and completeness. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and were translated into English by me.

Figure 2

City distribution of interviewees



Fieldwork

Alongside the interviews, I conducted fieldwork at different cemevis in Istanbul, including Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı Okmeydanı Cemevi, Sarıyer İmam Hüseyin Cemevi, and Adalar Cemevi and Tea Garden in Burgazada, between July and December 2025. Field trips allowed me to observe Alevis' religious practices, including Cem rituals and sohbet gatherings. Since I visited some cemevis in July, I was also able to observe rituals happening

in Muharram[2], such as lokma and ashura. Additionally, these visits enabled me to observe how cemevis function beyond their role as places of worship, serving as important social spaces where people socialise, study, and participate in various cultural events.

Ingold (2014, pp. 387-388) argues that participant observation in ethnographic research involves not only watching but also engaging in the activities of communities within their lived environments. He adds that it is not a method by which researchers distance themselves from participants to gather information, but an ontological commitment to learn through shared experience and lived interaction. With this approach, I participated in cem rituals and sohbet gatherings by the encouragement of Alevi religious leaders and the community during my visits.

These three cemevis were strategically chosen for this study. Okmeydanı Cemevi in Şişli represents a political importance for the Alevi community since it has played a crucial role in Alevi politics and the Gezi protests. For example, Berkin Elvan, a 15-year-old youth who was killed by the police during the Gezi uprisings, was living in this neighbourhood, and his funeral was held by the Okmeydanı Cemevi as he was Alevi. In 2014, during a commemoration of Berkin Elvan, another Alevi person was shot and killed by police in the courtyard of the same cemevi. Thus, these events reinforced the symbolic and political meaning of the Okmeydanı Cemevi for Alevis and intensified state surveillance within it and the neighbourhood. As a result, it has become both a site of collective memory and government control. Therefore, conducting fieldwork in this location was crucial to capture how everyday practices, shaped by surveillance, memory, and resistance, function in this politically charged space.

[2] Muharram is a sacred month for Alevis, which is known as the month of mourning.

Sarıyer Imam Hüseyin Cemevi was chosen due to its central location and popularity among Alevis. Lastly, Adalar Cemevi in Burgazada was chosen due to its social spaces' popularity among the community. During my visits, I was able to hold unofficial conversations with dedes (Alevi religious leaders) and people who were the heads of social areas in cemevis (mainly tea gardens). Even if these conversations were unofficial, they provided significant insights into how the community uses cemevis and their social areas, including attendance, age distribution at religious ceremonies, and everyday engagement with these areas. The fieldwork enabled me to gain an insider understanding, and I had the chance to grasp the everyday practices of Alevis.

Government Documents and Legal Texts

This research also draws on the analysis of a collection of various government documents and legal texts. In order to understand the government's assimilation policies and control over the Alevis more nuanced, government texts which show the expansion of Imam Hatip Schools, Qur'an courses, and mosque constructions have been used. Additionally, constitutional provisions, relevant laws and amendments, presidential decrees, official statements, and court decisions, including rulings of domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, have been used to examine the issues regarding the recognition of cemevis and deepened institutional othering practices. The study also employs parliamentary speeches to demonstrate the expansion of cemevis across the country.

The incorporation of these documents aims to analyse how the Turkish government has defined and regulated religious institutions and worship places, and how cemevis are positioned in a grey area due to the country's legal and administrative framework. This study approaches these documents as tools of governance that reflect broader political and ideological priorities of the Turkish state. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) method, an

approach that examines how inequalities are produced, sustained, and legitimised through texts within political and social contexts, was employed to evaluate the state's marginalisation, othering, and control mechanisms. CDA aims to provide a clear critical stance by not only analysing but also revealing and challenging structures of inequality (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). Discourse is one of the strongest tools in a discriminatory environment to spread negative and fabricated perceptions and prejudices to exclude already marginalised communities (Van Dijk, 2012, p. 16). With this approach, the use of language is not only crucial in capturing the legal restrictions imposed on Alevis, but also in how the government deploys it to marginalise the community and exclude them from urban planning in this context.

Government documents and legal texts complement the interview and fieldwork data by providing insights about the lived experiences of Alevis, state discourses, state control over religion, and Alevis' way of resistance.

Newspapers

This research further employs various newspapers to analyse the government's assimilation policies and Alevi resistance. Newspapers have been chosen strategically for this study since they serve as important platforms, where state policies and actions, political debates, and societal responses are communicated, reproduced, and contested in the public sphere. In Türkiye, the perception towards media is paradoxical. It is mainly because of its alignment with military interventions and proximity to state authorities, capital, and bourgeoisie (Alpay, 2010, p. 370). Due to this apprehension, the public trust in it is predominantly low. However, since it still conveys a diverse array of voices, the media is considered the primary platform for the civil society expression. That is why it is still central in shaping public opinion and political decision-making, and deploying the messages of everyone (Alpay, 2010, p. 370).

Even if the media presents complexities Türkiye, it still provides a more nuanced and accurate lens to capture legal, political, and administrative systems in the country and how they affect Alevis. Furthermore, it also provides a more detailed perspective on how the community interprets, challenges, and resists them. In this way, it reveals perspectives and narratives that may not be visible within official state documents.

Newspapers in Türkiye have diverse political stances. Therefore, the following list provides a brief overview of newspapers employed in this study with their political leanings in order to provide a clearer and more nuanced understanding of this study.

Cumhuriyet: It was founded in 1924 and is one of the oldest newspapers in Türkiye. It is well-known for its secular and social-democratic views. Over time, the newspaper has faced significant political pressure, including legal penalties, arrest of its journalists, and attacks on its offices.

Anadolu Ajansı (Anatolian Agency): It was founded in 1920 by the order of Atatürk. It is a state-run news agency, and with the AKP (Justice and Development Party) regime, it became strongly aligned with the conservative state ideology.

Evrensel: It was founded in 1995. From its establishment, it has aligned with socialist and leftist ideology.

Birgün: It was founded in 2004 and is known as a left-wing and socialist newspaper. The paper has been under significant political pressure for a long time and has faced numerous legal and financial penalties. Over the years, several of its journalists have been arrested or detained.

Pirha: It was founded in 2016 by Alevi journalists to convey problems, challenges, and messages of the Alevi community in Türkiye and the diaspora.

Agos: It is a bilingual (Armenian and Turkish) newspaper founded in 1996 by Hrant Dink, an Armenian-Turkish journalist who was assassinated in 2007. Dink aimed to create a bridge between the Armenian community and the broader society through this newspaper (Yanardağoğlu, 2013, p. 91). Even though the newspaper presents itself as neutral, it is known to be opposed to the government and to publish anti-government and progressive views.

Hürriyet: It was founded in 1948 and remained the highest-circulating newspaper in Türkiye until 2018, when it was acquired by the Demirören Holding. This change in ownership made the newspaper much more aligned with the government ideology, representing a right-wing, and economically liberal orientation.

T24: It was founded in 2009 as an online news platform. It considers itself politically neutral, but it is known to publish critics for the government and reflect oppositional perspectives.

TRT Haber: It is a state-run newspaper and channel operated by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)[3]. It is known for its close stance with the government ideology and reflection of the state perspective.

Daily Sabah: It was founded in 2014 by Turkuvaz Media Group. It is considered to be pro-government and reflects perspectives aligned with the AKP regime.

CNNTürk: It was established in 1999 as a partnership between CNN International and Doğan Media Group and was later acquired by Demirören Holding in 2018. It is known for its mainstream stance, which is closer to the government, particularly after the change in ownership.

2.3 Limitations

[3] The National Public Broadcaster

This research has some limitations. Firstly, the exact number of the Alevi population is unknown since the Turkish government has not collected population data based on religious or sectarian background. However, various sources present distinct findings regarding the Alevi population in the country. For example, Kızıl working for Daily Sabah (2021) estimated that twenty million Alevis live in Türkiye, whereas a survey conducted by KONDA[4] in the same year anticipated that Alevis constitute around 4% of the entire population. The survey conducted by CHP in 2014 predicted that the Alevi population is 12.521.000 ("Sabahat Akkiraz'dan Alevi Raporu", 2012). Lastly, Minority Rights Group (2018) anticipates that their population constitutes 10 to 25 per cent of the entire Turkish population, which ranges between 20 and 25 million in the region. Since 11 interviews were conducted for this study due to the time limitations, this creates a constraint on the generalisability of the findings. Even though participants were strategically chosen from various geographic and generational backgrounds to reflect the diversity within the country, the sample size still prevents generalisations about the entire community. Instead, the results present deep insights into specific lived experiences and perspectives.

Additionally, the material regarding the government documents was collected from publicly available sources. Even if it does not create contradictions or a lack of rigour, it is crucial to acknowledge that additional official government data may exist. However, access to these data is restricted.

2.4 Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

Palaganas et al. (2017, p. 426) note that researchers should critically analyse the effects of the research process on them and their participants through reflexivity. They further add that acknowledging reflexivity and positionality is crucial for researchers, particularly in

[4] KONDA Research and Consultancy (KONDA Araştırma ve Danışmanlık in Turkish). It specialises in public opinion polling.

qualitative research, to explore how the research output has been shaped by these factors. Conveying these considerations in this research is particularly important given the sensitive and politically charged nature of the topic. It is crucial to carefully reflect on how my positionality may structure the interactions and interpretations, as interviews and field trips are central elements of this study.

As a non-Alevi person studying at a prestigious university in the West, I unfortunately hold a position that may create power asymmetries and issues of symbolic authority in relation to my interviewees. This dynamic has some potential implications regarding participants' perception of me and how they choose to present their stories accordingly. Although I remained consciously aware of these dynamics and sought to minimise their effects during interviews and fieldwork, such structural imbalances cannot be entirely eliminated in the end. I believe that acknowledging these factors strengthens the transparency and methodological rigour of the study.

Since this study incorporates social and political sensitivity, the ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the entire research process. Participation in interviews was completely voluntary, and participants were provided clear informed consent regarding the purpose of the study, the use of their data, and their withdrawal rights at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and no data that could potentially reveal participants' identities was used through the thesis writing process, and pseudonyms were employed to protect participants' identities. Three interviewees requested not to be audio-recorded, and their preferences were fully respected by taking detailed notes during and immediately after the interviews. All data collected was stored securely in my private account and used only for the thesis writing process.

This research aims to engage responsibly and respectfully with the lived experiences of participants while acknowledging the limitations arising from the researcher's positionality and the constraints on broader generalisation due to the limited number of participants. The research also targets reflexive awareness regarding careful ethical practice and neutrality for participants.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that will guide the understanding of how the Turkish government has been controlling the religion to Sunnify the Alevi community since the 1980 military coup. It will first analyse the state's policies to reshape the space in line with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis in the country. Then, it will explain how Alevis have used their religious space (cemevis) to resist these policies and sustain their collective identities.

To conceptualise these dynamics, this study draws primarily on Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991), with a particular focus on conceived space, to explain how the Turkish government has embedded its ideology by controlling space in the country. The conceived space enables the interpretation of how the state operates space as an instrument of power. In the same book, Lefebvre also uses the term counter-spaces to show how marginalised communities reinterpret and reproduce the space in ways to challenge the dominant spatial order. The theoretical framework will use counter-spaces extensively to explain how Alevis have resisted the Turkish government by creating cemevis as counter-spaces.

Building on Lefebvre, the study also uses David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* (2000) to analyse the evolving nature of spatial resistance. The specific emphasis is given on Harvey's dialectical utopianism to interpret how the spatial resistance is built upon a continuous struggle, negotiation, and adaptation within existing structures of power.

By bringing these theories together, this chapter seeks to build a conceptual foundation for interpreting cemevis not only as places of worship but also as spaces of resistance in which Alevis assert their presence in the Turkish landscape and claim recognition, visibility, and autonomy. In this regard, the situation of cemevis and the Alevi struggle is being framed within a broader discussion of space, power, and resistance,

demonstrating how the space is central to both the state's exercise of power and the emergence of alternative forms of resistance.

3.1 The Production of Space | Conceived Space

Ideology and practice cannot be separated from each other. Lefebvre argues that spatial practice structures everyday life according to a given socio-economic system (Merrifield, 2002, p. 175). Lefebvre presents three spatial dimensions: perceived space, which is a spatial practice embedded in daily routines, conceived space, which is the dominant and abstract space tied to state or capitalism logics, and lived space, which is the space of everyday experience by its users (Merrifield, 2002, pp. 174-175). Under normal circumstances, conceived space should be derived from people's lived experiences, narratives, and the rhythms of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1977, p. 42). However, in practice, the conceived space is privileged over the lived space, leading to the erosion of spatial practice itself, thereby neglecting and inadequately accounting for the unconscious dimensions of lived experience (Ng et al., 2010, p. 414). This means that conceived spaces are always more crucial than lived and perceived ones in today's society (Merrifield, 2002, p. 175).

Lefebvre argues that ideology, power, and knowledge are intertwined in the conceived space (Merrifield, 2002, p. 174). He emphasises that the state has sought to organise and control society through knowledge and technology, flattening social and cultural differences and imposing order since the mid-twentieth century. With this aim, planners created the conceived space by combining technical knowledge with ideology in ways that reinforce existing power structures and modes of production (Ng et al., 2010, p. 414). Planners' projects, which are presented as neutral and objective, function as instruments of thought and action operating as both a means of production and a mechanism of control, domination, and power (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 31).

In Türkiye, the space has begun to be designed to control society in line with dominant state hegemony from the foundation of the Turkish Republic. However, following the 1980 coup, the Turkish government's conception of space has shifted within the framework of the Turkish–Islamic Synthesis. In this way, dominant religious norms began to be systematically embedded in both public and private spheres to spread one unified national order and eliminate those perceived as 'other'. The conceived spaces have been designed by the government to shape the lived spaces in the country. For example, educational structures, public and private educational institutions, student housing, places of worship, and urban planning have served as key mechanisms for the production of conceived space, advancing one particular ideological order in the country. These spatial practices have aimed to marginalise alternative spatial practices and diminish everyday forms of social and cultural expression. This thesis will focus on how the Turkish government's production of space has been designed according to TIS and how this exercise of power on space has functioned as a mechanism for the assimilation of Alevi belief and practice.

3.2 The Production of Space | Counter – Spaces

> When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing-developments, when it demands "amenities" or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a *counter-space* can insert itself into spatial reality: against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power, against the endless expansion of the "private" and of industrial profitability; and against specialized spaces and a narrow localization of function.
>
> (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 381–382)

In addition to his arguments for the conceived space, Lefebvre also argued that the space not only brings oppression but also enables the creation of a different space (1991, p. 349). In

that regard, counter-spaces are places to challenge and question the dominant organisation of the space, according to Lefebvre. These spaces claim visibility for suppressed actions in mainstream places (Cassegard, p. 168). That is why marginalised groups are able to assert their presence in the urban landscape, which has been designed to exclude them, participate in it, and thereby disrupt the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate presence through counter-spaces. Lefebvre was specifically interested in how people create counter-spaces in everyday life, and he presented an example in *The Production of Space* regarding how the community claimed an open area for play and social interaction (Van Ingen, 2002, p. 104). This area is considered counter-space as it resists specialised spatial arrangements. Therefore, counter-spaces are dynamic, counter-hegemonic settings that facilitate the development of alternative spatial practices and stem from the creative agency of marginalised and excluded groups who seek to express alternatives to the dominant spatial order (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 383).

Lefebvre notes that even if counter-spaces challenge the system, they are often still shaped by the same order, and their resistance cannot remain completely outside the existing mechanism (1991, p. 382). He demonstrates another crucial point, which is highly relevant to the Turkish case, by stating that local powers, particularly municipal or regional forces rooted in specific territories, play important roles in enabling greater pluralism empowered by local resistance until they retract (1991, p. 382). In the Turkish case, even though cemevis began to be built by the Alevi community without any notable support from local authorities, they have gradually come to be regarded as sites through which opposition-led municipalities articulate their political and social commitments and express their anti-government stances. Municipalities governed by the Republican People's Party (CHP) have been building or supporting the construction of cemevis in different neighbourhoods and towns across the country. While such involvement from the local powers would increase the visibility, it also

creates another dilemma by situating cemevis within formal political structures, shaped around another political ideology. Thus, this complicates cemevis' status as autonomous sites of resistance.

I choose to call cemevis counter-spaces since they not only provide places of worship but also places where Alevis assert their visibility, collective identity, and solidarity in the urban landscape, thereby claiming recognition within a socio-spatial order that has historically been designed to render them invisible. In this way, cemevis challenge the dominant order and the government-imposed assimilation policies by creating their own alternative, freer spaces that resist homogenisation and exclusion.

3.3 Spaces of Hope

In *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey (2000, pp. 74-77) argues that the power sustains itself through the production and organisation of space by drawing on Lefebvre's theory and integrating a Marxist geographical perspective. He further adds that spatial development is uneven and actively enables capital accumulation while suppressing opposition movements (2000, pp. 79-83). In this way, capitalism always exercises its power over space, which allows it to overcome crises and weaken resistance. Therefore, resistance must also take a spatial form under these circumstances to overcome oppression.

In my understanding, Harvey's spaces of hope are not solely utopian imaginaries but materially grounded sites where alternative realities can be created against dominant powers and capitalist structures. Harvey proposes (2000, pp. 182-189) the term dialectical utopianism, which argues that transformative possibilities emerge through ongoing social struggle rather than a predetermined model of an ideal society by conceptualising alternative futures. This is mainly because capitalism is highly flexible in reorganising and controlling the space, and any counter-alternative must adopt the same strategy and flexibility as Harvey

suggests; such alternatives must retain a degree of dynamism comparable to capitalism itself "if it is to succeed as it materialises" (2000, p. 243). Therefore, dialectical utopianism argues that hope is something that should be actively produced through practice, struggle, oppression, solidarity, and negotiation rather than fixed spatial or ideological form.

Within this framework of Harvey's, spaces of hope could be interpreted as places produced through collective action, where marginalised groups establish their alternative realities. These spaces cannot exist outside of dominant structures but emerge within the system by resisting the prevailing power relations. In this way, these spaces could be perceived as a challenge to hegemonic spatial orders while uncovering possibilities for more even and pluralistic futures.

Cemevis could be interpreted as spaces of hope in this framework since the intensification of cemevi construction has emerged through the ongoing socio-spatial struggle of Alevis rather than as fixed or idealised forms. Additionally, cemevis have been produced through negotiations with the local powers or soft confrontations with the state continuously, rather than violent incidents, which would make Alevi lives harder in an already segregated system. In this regard, cemevis embody a dynamic and contested process, which alternative places that provide an equal and free environment have been produced and enacted. As Harvey suggested in that matter, they provide a similar capacity for adaptation with dominant powers while actively challenging them (2000, p. 243). Therefore, cemevis present spaces of hope by providing new possibilities for Alevis to have more pluralistic, inclusive, and just socio-spatial arrangements for themselves within the dominant state-structured, planned spaces.

3.4 Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this thesis presents that there is an active confrontation over the space between the state and citizens, specifically marginalised communities. With Lefebvre's conceived space, the analysis has shown that the Turkish government has embedded its ideological policies in everyday life and seeks to create a unified, flattened society by dismissing social plurality. However, Lefebvre's concept of counter-spaces highlights that marginalised communities have the agency to reproduce space in ways that disrupt dominant spatial orders and assert their presence within exclusionary socio-spatial structures.

As a continuation of this, Harvey's spaces of hope provides another angle to comprehend spatial resistance. He emphasises that these kinds of resistance emerge through ongoing struggle, negotiation, and adaptation rather than through fixed or predetermined models. This approach enables us to understand the construction of cemevis in a more nuanced way, where they stand as evolving socio-spatial places that provide more pluralistic and inclusive spaces in response to the changing nature of spatial order in the country.

Taking all this together, the theoretical framework enables us to perceive cemevis as spaces of resistance built against all the constraints of the state. Even if they seem like places of worship at first sight, they indicate much more to the Alevis in Türkiye to reconnect, preserve, and sustain their identity, assert visibility in an urban landscape, and challenge the processes of assimilation. In this way, cemevis illustrate the dialectical nature of the space in which domination and resistance are always interlinked.

Chapter 4: The Turkish Government's Control over Religion and the Rise of Political Islam in the Country After the 1980s Coup

4.1 Historical Background until the 1980s

Alevis are the second largest religious community in Türkiye after Sunni Muslims (Teber, 2025, p.1). The exact number of the Alevi population is unknown, but it is estimated that their population constitutes 10 to 25 per cent of the entire Turkish population, which ranges between 20 and 25 million in the region (Minority Rights Group, 2018). There are also Alevis living in the Balkans, including Greece, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria. Due to the migration, Alevi diaspora communities exist in every country that has received migration from Türkiye, including Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, and Denmark.

Alevism refers to a heterodox religious community with distinct theological, ritual, and social characteristics. It constitutes Turkish, Kurdish, and Zaza speaking groups. Alevis are believed to be descendants of groups that were religiously affiliated with the Safavids (van Bruinessen, 1996, p. 7). Alevism differs from normative Sunni Islam in various ways. For example, it does not require the five daily prayers (namaz) in mosques, fasting during Ramadan, and undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Instead, Alevis hold ceremonies called "Cem", which is led by dede[5]. There is no gender division in the cem ceremonies, and aşıks' performances with bağlama and Alevi songs are the centre of them. These ceremonies are mostly conducted in Turkish, and semah, which is a sacred dance performance in Alevism, is performed during cem. Furthermore,

[5] Literal translation is the grandfather. Dedelik (grandfatherhood) is the central institution in the Alevi community, which is a hereditary form of spiritual and ritual leadership, and this role is held by members of sacred lineages known as ocaks.

Alevis observe fasting during the month of Muharram, which differs in both form and meaning from the fasting practices observed in Ramadan.

Figure 3

Semah, conducted by Alevis (AleviHaber, 2021)



Alevis had been exposed to several massacres and persecution during the Ottoman time due to the Empire's perception of Alevi's alignment with the Safavids. These violent events caused the portrayal of Alevis as *'rāfiżī'* (heretic) or *'ghulāt'* (Shiʿi extremist) in the state sources and Islamic heresiographies, which triggered the classification of them as others (Teber, 2025, p. 1). During this period, fabricated beliefs regarding Alevis and their religious rituals started being promoted and spread by the Empire. 'Mum söndü' (the candle went out), created back in time and still used against Alevis sometimes, refers to a widespread historical slander which claims Alevis engage in immoral and sexually transgressive acts during their secret cem rituals. These rumours, often focusing on alleged sexual debauchery and even

incest, turned the term “Kızılbaş” (red head) into an insult associated with immorality (Karolewski, 2008, p. 443).

Due to the othering of Alevis in Ottoman times, they were targeted by diverse fatwas coming from religious leaders, starting with the jurist Sarı Gürz Hamza Efendi. He issued a fatwa in 1514, which declared that Alevis were enemies of Islam, and their extermination should be the religious duty of all Muslims, as well as an obligation of the sultan. (Karakaya-Stump, 2020, p. 260). His fatwa further enabled the enslavement of Alevi women and children and restricted everyday interactions between Sunnis and Alevis, such as by considering the food prepared by Alevis impure (Karakaya-Stump, 2020, p. 278). Other high-profile şeyhu’l islams such as Kemalpaşazade and Ebussuʿud also issued similar fetwas (2020, p. 260). This perception towards Alevis has persisted for a prolonged period, and ‘mum söndü’ and “Alevis’ food cannot be eaten” sentiments continued in political and social circles even until recently in Türkiye.

The Republic of Türkiye Period

With the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the founders sought ways to create a nation-state and disassociate the newly founded country from the Ottoman imperial and Islamic past. With this motivation in mind, Fuat Köprülü, one of the first historians of Türkiye, began his studies regarding Alevism and claimed that Alevism is the real national religion of Turks (Livni, 2002, p. 3). This approach was mainly because Köprülü saw Alevism as a form of heterodox folk Islam, rooted in Central Asian traditions, and shaped by pre-Islamic Turkic elements such as Shamanism (Karakaya-Stump, 2013, p. 280). With this paradigm presented by Köprülü and the new government’s determination for secularism, a new era started for Alevis of Türkiye.

However, this new era also affected the Alevi community's recognition and right to have worship places at different levels. For example, the Tekke ve Zaviyelerin Kapatılması Kanunu (Closure of Dervish Lodges and Shrines) in 1925, which included measures banning Sufi orders and closing Sufi shrines, led to the closure of Alevi shrines (van Bruinessen, 2023, p. 124). This was mainly because the newly founded government did not perceive Alevi worship places as institutions that deserve state recognition, but rather unofficial sites comparable to tarikats. Hence, this new law affected Alevi worship places and created a long-lasting legal ambiguity regarding cemevis' status. Alevi places of worship have thus remained outside official recognition frameworks due to this law, and this ambiguity continues to shape the institutional and legal constraints on cemevis in modern-day Türkiye. This issue will be discussed widely in the chapter five of this thesis.

Until the advent of the multiparty system in Türkiye in 1950 and the start of industrialisation attempts of the Democrat Party (DP), Alevis had mostly been living as closed communities across Anatolia due to the state surveillance and massacres they had been severely exposed to during Ottoman times. However, from this period onward, internal migration from rural areas to major urban centres began across the country, and many Alevis migrated to big cities, mainly Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir. During the DP era, religious discourses started appearing slightly in Turkish political life. During the DP period, the party specifically engaged with certain Islamic groups, such as Nurcus and Naqshbandis, to broaden its support in elections. This strategy helped DP to strengthen its position in society while prompting the state to adopt normalisation policies towards Islamic institutions and informal networks (Yavuz, 2003, p. 62). Thus, this period enabled the use of religion in the political arena (Massicard, 2005, p.8).

DP gradually became more authoritarian in the 50s by increasing oppression over oppositions and monopolising political institutions (Landau, 1974, p. 4). With the 1961 coup

d'etat the DP government was overthrown, and the junta leaders claimed that the coup happened in order to restore secular and Kemalist values in the country, and the new constitution was adopted in 1961. The new constitution provided a freer environment for ordinary citizens, unions, and diverse associations (Yavuz, 2003, p. 64). For this reason, new social movements gained momentum, and political parties varied according to different ideologies. For example, Turkey's Workers Party (TİP)[6] was founded in 1971 the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)[7] was founded in 1969 (Massicard, 2005, p. 9).

The rapid migration and deepened social inequalities brought by industrialisation starting from the 50s played a crucial role in increasing the power of left-wing and socialist ideologies in the 60s. In the 1965 elections, TİP entered the parliament with fifteen representatives, and the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK)[8] was founded in 1967 (Ertan, 2019, p. 935). With these developments and rising student activism on university campuses, the left began to gain significant power at the societal and political levels. Alevis, who had been experiencing systemic discrimination, became more aligned with these ideologies (Massicard, 2020, p. 49). This was mainly because the left-wing policies enabled Alevis to become more visible in public and in big cities and actively participate in the solidarity over the distribution of urban resources and shape the urban landscape (Ertan, 2019, p. 933). During this period, socialist movements and TİP organised several political and social activities in the Alevi-dominated cities, villages, and towns, and they gained seats in the parliament through these cities, such as Adıyaman, Malatya, and Yozgat (Ertan, 2019, p. 937).

[6] Türkiye İşçi Partisi
[7] Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi
[8] Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu

Even if there were improvements for Alevis in political life, these remained mostly elusive since their struggle continued over recognition and the right to have worship places. During these times, Alevis faced serious difficulties in protecting their ties to their traditional and religious identities as urbanisation increased the need for worship places, yet adequate cemevis were lacking. My interviewee Zeynep (47 years old, from Sivas) mentioned that:

> "Urbanisation brought serious assimilation for Alevis back in that time. For example, musahiplik[9] was lost, and funeral services until the 1990s were conducted at mosques according to Sunni traditions. Since there was a very limited amount of cemevi, the entire generation that migrated to big cities in the 50s, 60s, 70s struggled a lot to protect their identity." (August 24, Online Interview)

Alevis' alignment with leftist and socialist organisations played a crucial role in the spatial existence of left-wing movements in Alevi neighbourhoods of major cities and in Alevi villages or towns across Anatolia. In return, the presence of these movements further reinforced Alevi alignment with left-wing movements mutually. Due to this relationship, Alevi-dominated places were stigmatised not only for their Alevi identity but also for their association with socialism. This stigmatisation created a surveillance in these places by right-wing movements and the government, and Alevis' experiences of bloody massacres were closely linked to their perceived alignment with leftist movements (Ertan, 2019, p. 939).

Until 1971, the Justice Party (AP)[10] government failed to address social polarisation in the country, and the military issued a memorandum on March 12, 1971. In this memorandum, the military requested the creation of a national unity government from all parties. Furthermore, left-leaning officers were dismissed from the army, and to target left-

[9] Musahiplik refers to a form of spiritual kinship in Alevism, in which two individuals (or couples) establish a lifelong moral and social bond.
[10] Adalet Partisi

wing associations and intellectuals, martial law was declared (Yavuz, 2003, p. 65). The coup leaders also requested the closure of TİP and MNP (National Order Party)[11] from the Constitutional Court. Due to these decisions, mainly two parties held power in the Turkish parliament in the 70s, which were Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist National Salvation Party (MSP)[12] and Alparslan Türkeş's radical nationalist MHP (Gunter, 1989, p. 64).

Since the 1971 military memorandum, Turkish politics had witnessed ten different coalition governments until the 1980 military coup. Political instability significantly weakened the state, which was already dealing with severe economic and political issues due to the oil crisis in 1973 and the US embargo starting in 1975 after the Cyprus Intervention. Under these circumstances, Turkish society began to experience intense social polarisation, led by ethnic, sectarian, and ideological conflict (Yavuz, 2003, p. 68). This polarisation mainly affected the Alevi community, and ultranationalists targeted Alevi neighbourhoods in several cities with bloody massacres.

1978 witnessed three major Alevi massacres in Malatya, Sivas, and Kahramanmaraş, respectively. The massacres in Malatya and Sivas were severe and paved the way for the Kahramanmaraş massacre, while also increasing surveillance across Alemi-dominated settlements. The Maraş massacre was one of the bloodiest massacres in the history of the Turkish Republic, and resulted in the death of 111 Alevis, and more than 1000 were wounded. It continued for seven days and was stopped by martial law in eleven cities. These massacres accelerated the Alevis' migration to big cities, where they could be more anonymous. During these events, the hatred towards the Alevi community was tried to be deepened more by the religious authorities and extremist groups. For example, the Imam of Bağlarbaşı mosque, Mustafa Yıldız, delivered a Friday sermon during the Maraş massacre by

[11] Milli Nizam Partisi
[12] Millî Selamet Partisi

saying that “one who kills an Alevi earns as much religious merit as someone who has gone on pilgrimage (hajj) five times.” (Doğu, 2017). Furthermore, on 22nd December, the third day of the massacre, ultranationalists did not allow two teachers' funeral prayers at the mosque in Kahramanmaraş by stating that funeral prayers are not performed for communists and Alevis (Cumhuriyet, 1978). After these consecutive violent massacres, the Çorum massacre happened in 1980 by the same group, which resulted in the death of 57 Alevis and over 200 injuries.

To sum up, starting from the Ottoman Empire, Alevis have been subjected to othering practices and various forms of state control. Before the 1980 coup d'etat, the violence in the country escalated, and Alevis were overwhelmingly targeted due to their alignment with the left-wing and socialist movements. Although the 1980 military coup promised to end the street violence in the country and restore order, it ended up carrying the violence behind bars, transforming the nature of repression and introducing new strategies of power aimed at assimilating and regulating Alevi identity.

4.2 The 1980 Coup

Neither political Islam nor the government’s control over religion started with the 1980 coup in Türkiye; it has always existed. However, the rise of political Islam and the oppression towards non-Sunni Muslim communities started to become more severe and visible after the 80s. This was the time when the Turkish government fully adopted the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as its official ideology, with a specific focus on Sunnifying the entire society due to the fragmented state of Turkish society in the 1970s.

In the 70s, Turkish society was divided by extreme ideological, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts triggered by economic crises, including the effect of the 1973 oil crisis (Hemmati, 2013, p. 59). This division created widespread violence in the country, including

assassinations, bomb attacks, kidnappings, street clashes, and bloody events such as the Malatya, Maraş, and Çorum massacres, which were organised by the ultranationalist groups towards Alevi neighbourhoods in these cities and resulted in the death of hundreds of Alevis. Between 1975 and 1980, more than five thousand people died in the country, and more than triple were wounded, and the number of killings per day reached twenty by the summer of 1980 (Eligür, 2010, p. 87). In this fragile environment, the military seized power in 1980, and coup leader Kenan Evren became the president of the country.

The junta government perceived the Turkish youth's lack of religious knowledge as a threat to national order and saw this as one of the main factors that made them vulnerable to radical groups and armed conflict[13]. In an attempt to reduce social tension and control society, the coup government saw controlled Islam as a solution, and they fully adopted the Turkish-Islamic (TIS) synthesis. TIS is an ideology which combines Sunni Islamic values with Turkish nationalism and claims that Sunni Islam is an inseparable part of Turkish history and culture. Furthermore, this ideology emphasises that the Turkish nation holds superiority within the Islamic world, emphasising its historical role in spreading Islam, thereby positioning Islamic identity as an integrated part of Turkishness (Kurt, 2010, pp. 123-124)

Thus, the Kemalist secularism, which tried to limit religion to private spheres under state control, was replaced by the TIS, which treats Islam as a nationalist component (Eligür, 2010, p. 95). The government's Sunnification policies in the country have accelerated with this adaptation, and Alevis became a primary target of the state's Sunni-Islamic policies. One of the main reasons that the military government directly focused on the Alevi community was their stance with left-wing parties and the socialist movement in the 1970s (Ertan, 2019,

[13] Growing hostility towards socialist and communist ideologies due to the Cold War period triggered this perception, and the US support for the coup government played a crucial role in eliminating socialist and communist movements in the country.

p. 941). The socialist left became significantly more prominent after the 1961 coup d'etat, and it was not only represented in the parliament but also in universities, factories, villages, and informal settlements (Ertan, 2019, p. 932). This period also prompted an identity crisis for Alevis who migrated to major urban centres after living as closed and small communities in Anatolia for a very long time. Urban sociology argues that political participation increases awareness of migrants about their identity and role within society, and facilitates their integration into urban life (Karpat, 1975, p. 117).

During this time, the left was active in the social life through associations and student activism, while the right was seeking to consolidate its influence within formal political institutions and organised political groups. Due to this difference, the socialist left was able to establish closer connections with Alevis, who have long lived as an oppressed and 'other' community and were ready to embrace the left-wing ideology which emphasised equality, secularism and social justice. This alignment is still an ongoing phenomenon and a common perception towards Alevis in today's Turkish society as well. This is mainly because left-wing political parties mostly achieve higher levels of support in Alevi villages than the national average, and left-wing or socialist movements are particularly stronger in Alevi villages or neighbourhoods (Ertan, 2015, p. 43).

The government's Sunnification policies towards Alevis have not only existed through the political arena but also through education, media, and space control in the country, starting from this period. This chapter examines religious control in Türkiye as a multidimensional and spatially embedded process through which a state-aligned Sunni understanding of Islam is produced, normalised, and reproduced across everyday life. Drawing primarily on Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, alongside theories of governmentality and symbolic power, the chapter argues that religious control operates not only through visible regulation, but through the organisation of education,

student housing, and the built environment in ways that reinforce Sunni practices as natural and unavoidable. The analysis is structured around three interrelated domains: religious control through public education, which institutionalises Sunni norms through compulsory religion classes and Imam Hatip Schools; religious control through dormitories and private institutions, where economic inequalities and employability issues facilitate assimilation and structural exclusion of Alevis with the help of tarikats; and religious control through space, encompassing mosque construction and the regulation of urban space to reproduce and normalise the Sunni norms while marginalising Alevis. Taken together, these domains reveal that religious governance in Türkiye functions as an ongoing process of spatial production that consolidates a Sunni-national order while generating structural inequalities and various forms of marginalisation strategies for the Alevi community.

4.3 Religious Control Through Public Education

Drawing on Marxist theories on education helps conceptualising the post-coup transformation in public education not as a neutral policy shift, but as an ideological production. In Marxist literature, education is understood as a field of contested ideas in which dominant ideologies prevail (Ruuska, 2017, p. 108). This insight suggests that schools function as sites where the ideologies of dominant social and political forces are produced, legitimised, and transmitted to future generations. This section will mainly focus on compulsory religious education and the extension of Imam Hatip Schools across the country as a tool employed by the government to assimilate Alevis and spread Sunni-Muslim norms. After the coup, the education system reflected and reinforced the ruling elite's project of constructing a homogeneous national identity grounded in Sunni Islam rather than reflecting the reality of the country's plurality.

After the coup, the junta government saw religion as a glue that would bring Turkish society together, which was scattered and fragmented in the 1970s (Erman, 2010, p.181). That's why the Turkish-Islamic synthesis became a government ideology for both the junta government and the Özal regimes and played a leading role in subsequent government policies (Kadıoğlu, 2020, p. 816). With the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, the coup government made religious education compulsory with the 1982 constitution for every student starting from the fourth grade to the end of high school. This compulsory religious education has been shaped by the dominant religious understanding, which is Sunni Islam in Türkiye. That's why one of the main challenges this class presents is that it incorporates only a state-supported, institutionalised religious education system belonging to a single sect (Başdemir, 2011, p. 59). The government has used these classes as a tool to spread its political ideology, which aims to create a unified nation through religion.

These classes mainly created a challenge for the non-Sunni Muslim communities in Türkiye since non-Muslims[14] were granted an exemption from the compulsory religious education in 1990 (Erken, 2020, p. 242). However, Alevis, who are the second largest religious community in the country, were subjected to compulsory education, which had not even slightly mentioned Alevism until the European Court of Human Rights Eylem Zengin decision in 2007.

In 2001, Eylem Zengin was a 7th[15] grade student when her father, Hasan Zengin, who is from an Alevi background, applied to the Governorship of Istanbul (Istanbul Valiliği) for her exemption from the compulsory religious education at her school. When the governorship rejected his application, he filed an appeal to the Administrative Court (Idare Mahkemesi),

[14] Only Armenians, Greeks, and Jews are accepted as legal minorities in the Turkish constitution according to the Lausanne Agreement.
[15] In Türkiye, the 7th grade is the third year of a four-year middle school. Students are typically aged between 12 and 13.

and then to the Council of State (Danıştay), respectively. Both rejected the application by emphasising that the constitutional obligation of the course under[16] and stated that there was no legal possibility to accept his requests for his daughter's exemption from the course. As a last resort, he escalated the case all the way to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which then held that the government violated 9th article of the ECHR, which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The court further stated that the Turkish Education System failed to provide pluralistic and impartial conditions and respect parents' beliefs (Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey, 2007).

Following this decision, Alevism was added to the compulsory religious education syllabus. The timing of this decision was important since the Turkish government was actively pursuing European Union membership at the time. However, the information about Alevism has stayed under the 'Sufi Interpretations in Islamic Thought' section and only captured basic information regarding the Alevi belief, while the rest of the curriculum was shaped around the Sunni Islam principles, including prayer memorisation and Quranic education. For example, in the 2019-2024 education curriculum plan, Alevism was only mentioned in the 7th grade books with a special emphasis on how important it is for Alevi-Bektashis to adhere to the Quran and not deviate from its principles (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Din Öğretimi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2023, p.117).

Parents still face diverse challenges when they demand their children's exemption from the compulsory religious classes. For example, an Alevi father living in Didim officially converted to Christianity recently to have his child exempted from compulsory religious education classes (Dikbaş, 2024). It is also crucial to explain that for many Alevis, being

[16] Article 24 of the 1982 Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye says that "Religious and moral education and instruction are conducted under the supervision and control of the State. Religious culture and ethics instruction is among the compulsory courses taught in primary and secondary education institutions." (Din ve ahlâk eğitim ve öğretimi Devletin gözetim ve denetimi altındayapılır. Din kültürü ve ahlâk öğretimi ilk ve ortaöğretim kurumlarında okutulan zorunlu derslerarasında yer alır.)

exempted from these classes presents another difficulty of being the 'other'. My interviewee, Gizem, who is 33 years old, was born and raised in Kartal, Istanbul, which is a cosmopolitan municipality where different sects live together, mentioned that:

> "Even if my parents did not want me and my sister to attend compulsory religious classes at the beginning, they did not want to try for the exemption since it was not very appealing to them to announce our Alevi identity to everyone at the school back in time." (August 7, 2025, Istanbul)

The compulsory religious education could be interpreted by Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses. Althusser (2014, cited in Ruuska, 2023, p. 250) argues that education is the most powerful ideological tool because it shapes individuals from an early age by instilling dominant norms, values, and forms of obedience that appear natural rather than imposed. From this perspective, compulsory religious education classes function as a form of ideological reproduction that spreads a state-sanctioned Sunni interpretation of Islam while excluding and silencing Alevis.

The government's religious ideology spread, and control extended beyond compulsory religious classes in education. In the public education context, Imam Hatip Schools (IHS) have played a crucial role in the rise of political Islam in Türkiye. IHSs were established by the founders of the early Republic to train religious leaders for the state under government control. However, their function shifted significantly after the coup. As a result of the state's political ideologies' annexation of education, IHSs evolved from controlled religious training institutions into key instruments for promoting state-sanctioned religious and political ideology. The junta regime redesigned these schools to create national citizenship consciousness and loyalty to the state by educating the youth with religious awareness and promoting obedience to a single political party (Coşkun & Yankaya, 2018, p.

75). These schools have a curriculum that emphasises Islamic teaching in addition to regular subjects (Ozgür, 2012, p. 2).

Table 1

Statistics of the Imam Hatip schools by years (the Ministry of Education of the Turkish Republic, as cited in Aşlamacı and Kaymakcan 2017, p. 284).

Academic Year	**Junior Division (Middle School)**		**Senior Division (High School)**		**Total Number of Students**
	Schools	Students	Schools	Student	
1923–1924	29	2,268	–	–	–
1931–1950	–	–	–	–	–
1951–1952	7	876	–	–	876
1960–1961	19	3,374	17	1,171	4,545
1970–1971	72	41,767	39	6,708	48,475
1980–1981	374	138,798	333	62,206	201,004
1990–1991	382	209,377	379	100,176	309,553
1996–1997	601	318,775	601	192,727	511,502
1998–1999	–	–	604	191,183	191,183
2002–2003	–	–	536	64,534	64,534
2014–2015	1,597	385,830	1,017	546,443	932,273

The number of IHS and students who are enrolled on these schools has risen significantly after the coup and the AKP era, as it is seen in the Table 1 above. Since these schools operate according to Sunni-Muslim principles and intense Qur'anic education, they have mostly attracted religious Sunni-Muslim parents (Cetin & Jenkins, 2025, p. 70).

The significant spread of IHS created a new challenge for Alevis and the secular principle of the state since the majority of graduates from these schools began playing an important role in politics; local, regional, and national governments (Ozgur, 2012, p. 2). Only 15% of these schools' graduates became religious officials (Ünsür, 2005, cited in Ozgur, 2012, p. 2). As a result, state institutions have become more aligned with the Sunni interpretation of Islam and Sunni norms. Necmettin Erbakan, the founder of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) and served as 23rd prime minister of Türkiye, saw these schools as a place to redefine national identity based on Islamic interpretation, and he made a statement about how IHSs are the 5th reason for their party's increasing power (Yavuz, 2003, p. 126). Additionally, he said the Welfare Party generation raised through IHSs and Quran Courses (Cumhuriyet, 1996). The Welfare Party booklet, published in 1995, emphasised that they opened new IHSs intentionally, and over half a million youth had studied at these schools in the last 15 years. They also added that the number of graduates of IHSs exceeded 1.3 million, and these are the students who have trained as a new and moral generation (Milli Görüş'ün İktidardaki Hizmetleri, 1995, cited in Yavuz, 2003, pp. 126–127). The political effects of IHSs reinforced the structural exclusion of Alevis and the Sunni Islamisation of the state within public policy and governance.

Additionally, these schools were used to assimilate Alevis in certain areas of the country. For example, under the military regime, the first Imam Hatip School was opened in Tunceli, which is a city with an Alevi-majority population, and thousands of Alevi children from Tunceli and neighbouring cities were forced to attend it (Lord, 2018, p. 191). It is known that more than three thousand Alevi children from this region were sent to the Imam Hatip Schools or Qur'an courses in the far cities such as Sakarya, İstanbul, Kocaeli, etc., by being taken away from their families without consent (Kenanoğlu, 2013).

According to Ruuska (2017, p. 136), education becomes a site of disciplined subject formation to mirror the needs and logics of dominant power structures. In the IHS case, these schools not only provided religious education and the spread of Sunni-Islam but also aimed to raise appropriate citizens with political loyalty, obedience, and moral discipline aligned with the state's vision. This process rewards conformity and submission while penalising difference, thereby producing exclusionary effects for Alevis, who were forced either to assimilate into Sunni norms or to accept marginalisation within the system.

Both the religious classes and Imam Hatip schools were designed to impose government ideology and increase the control over religion by the state as a mechanism of social and political control. Through education, the state has institutionalised a majoritarian understanding of religion within public education. These developments created an exclusion of Alevis from the public institutions and forced the assimilation of their religious beliefs by being exposed to dominant interpretations within Sunni Islamic traditions without adequate recognition or representation of their own belief system.

4.4 Religious Control Through Dormitories and Private Institutions

When I was conducting interviews, two of the interviewees expressed their views about the reason why their Alevi parents adopted Sunni religious practices mostly because of the tarikat dormitories they stayed in during their high school or university years. After listening to these stories, I thought it was crucial to include this section to show how private dormitories and private institutions, owned by different tarikats and backed or facilitated by the government, accelerated the Sunnification of the society and assimilation of non-Sunni practices in the country. This section will focus on how the state-backed or state-tolerated tarikat organisations, such as dormitories, private education institutions, and Qur'an courses, enabled

embedding Sunni practices into educational and social life and deepening the structural exclusion and inequalities for Alevis.

When the founders of the Turkish Republic started implementing reforms, many of these ultimately failed to reach the rural areas, and the centre-periphery distinction seen in the Ottoman Empire continued to exist in the modern era. Specifically, the official religion perceived by the centre, which is more secular and distant from the general Islamic understanding, and the popular religion practised by the periphery differentiated from each other significantly (Sarıkaya, 1998, p. 95). This margin played a crucial role in strengthening the power of various tarikats across the country. However, due to the centralised education system, tarikats could not find a leakage to embed themselves into it properly until the 80s.

The 1980 coup was a turning point not only in the Turkish political and social scene but also in the economic arena. The 1980 program involved strong cooperation with the IMF and World Bank, which were the massive financial providers of Türkiye (Öniş, 2004, p. 118). Turgut Özal, who worked in the World Bank and was known to have close ties with it, played the main role in the country's transition to neoliberalism. He became the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the economy as a part of the junta government, and then the prime minister of the country from 1983 to 1989, and then president in 1989 until his unexpected death in 1993.

As the 70s witnessed rising anti-imperialist and anti-American sentiments in the Middle East region, and the unexpected success of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the US sought to restore its hegemonic power in the region by securing Türkiye as a key strategic ally, promising to stabilise the country politically and economically in line with its geopolitical interests (Karataşlı, 2015, p. 391). With Özal's regime's eagerness to adopt neoliberalism quickly and the US support, Türkiye started witnessing several transformative

neoliberal policies, including the privatisation of state-owned institutions, wage suppression, reduced state support for agriculture, depreciation of the Turkish lira, and the adoption of supply-side fiscal measures (Bedirhanoğlu, 2021, p. 362). Furthermore, the rise of neoliberalism under the Turgut Özal regime and the emergence of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis enabled diverse tarikats to increase their visibility and influence within the educational sphere.

With the rise of Imam Hatip schools, the government offered various incentives to encourage people to enrol their children on these schools. This mainly targeted people from rural areas with lower socioeconomic backgrounds since they were unable to cover education fees or living costs in city centres. Sarpkaya (2008, pp. 17-18) emphasises that the state provided the General Directorate of Religious Education with high-capacity dormitory facilities for Imam Hatip Schools, in addition to the scholarship options. However, families whose kids did not attend IHSs, as well as those living in rural areas whose children sought to pursue university education in urban centres, often faced economic hardship since public student housing was inadequate in cities. This is the point at which tarikats emerged and started providing either free or affordable private accommodation for students. According to a study conducted by Nazan Kuloğlu in 1997, the Nur movement operated 24 boarding schools, while the Süleymancı community maintained approximately 1,750 boarding courses[17] (Kuloğlu, as cited in Toktar, 1997, as cited in Sarpkaya, 2008, p. 18). Agai (2002, p. 27) stated that the Gülen movement had more than 150 private dormitories around the country in 1999. Since the Turkish government has never officially announced comprehensive data on the distribution of these dormitories or their registered students, the

[17] "Pansiyon-kurs", in Turkish, is a hybrid private institution combining accommodation, education, and religious-social formation by tarikats. Students, who were enrolled education institutions, such as high schools or universities, were staying in these places. They spread significantly due to the limited state provision of student housing and financial support (Sarpkaya, 2008, p. 18).

actual numbers remain unknown. The annual report of Öğrenci Sendikası (2022) claims that the number of dormitories owned by the different tarikats exceeded 3,331 in 2022.

Intense religious education has been provided at these private dormitories. Students staying in there have been required to attend "group activities" at night (Sarıkaya, 1998, p. 98). These dormitories played a crucial role in the assimilation of Alevi children. One of the important reasons for this was that Alevi communities used to live in rural areas as a closed community due to long-standing patterns of marginalisation and security concerns. As a result of this, families from these regions were predominantly situated within lower or lower-middle income groups. Thus, they were unable to afford housing in big cities for their kids other than the tarikat dormitories. My interviewee Merve, who was born and raised in Istanbul, but whose family is from Kahramanmaraş, and my interviewee Seda, who was born and raised in Tekirdağ but whose parents are also from Kahramanmaraş, both shared similar stories about their parents. Kahramanmaraş holds significance here since Alevis were subjected to a brutal massacre in 1978 there, as it was explained in the historical background section. Merve shared this during the interview:

> "After the Maraş massacre, both my grandparents wanted to send my parents away from Maraş. Education was the only way, but it was expensive. I don't know the details about it or which tarikat it was, but both stayed in the tarikat dormitories. I can see the impact of it because there is nothing related to Alevism in our house now. My parents pray five times a day, they fast, and they taught me to pray and fast when I was little. They are like Sunni now." (August 6, 2025, Online Interview)

My other interviewee Seda also shared this:

> "My uncle was influenced by a tarikat while he was studying at the university. After his involvement with it, he also dragged my other uncles into that. I really thought the

main reason was that they did not know anything about their Alevi beliefs, and it was very easy for tarikats to affect their way of thinking. My parents keep saying, 'We used to be Alevi, not anymore.'" (August 13, 2025, Istanbul)

This process was also illustrated by the documentary filmed by Özgür Fındık, called *Olağan Haller* (2013), which was designed to show how the Alevi children from Tunceli were taken away from their families after the coup and were sent to other cities to stay in these dormitories where they received religious education to embrace Sunni Islam fully and become reasonable citizens. The documentary was filmed by people from Tunceli who were subjected to this forced education in the past.

Many of these tarikats see education as the centre of Islamic activities. Specifically, the Gülen movement invested heavily in constructing schools, training teachers, and raising the future golden generation[18] through education. The training for teachers was one of the key strategies of the Gülen movement since those teachers were recruited by the government later and worked at public schools where they were taught to spread Islam, and 'save' the souls of students (Agai, 2002, p. 38).

Religious tarikats' involvement in education was not limited to dormitories; after-school revision courses (dershane), and private schools also played a crucial role in spreading their ideas. Dershanes are a significant component of Turkish education, as the high school and university entrance exams are vital for many young people in Türkiye. These private institutions provide intensive education to prepare students for highly competitive national

[18] The Golden Generation (Altın Nesil) refers to the movement's aim to raise a morally disciplined, religiously observant, and educated generation that would combine Islamic ethics with scientific knowledge. Inspired by Fethullah Gülen's writings and sermons, the Golden Generation was envisioned as individuals who would be selfless, socially responsible, and committed to serving society (*hizmet*) through education, professional excellence, and ethical conduct.

university and high school entrance exams. Students typically attend dershanes after their regular schooling hours during weekdays or weekends.

With the government's increasing neoliberal policies starting from the 80s, education became a tool for commercial activities, and the number of dershanes rose significantly. The Gülen movement had more than 250 dershanes in 1995 (Sarıkaya, 1998, p. 99). These numbers increased rapidly and spread across the country, including small cities, as well as to Central Asia, Europe, and the Balkans (Yavuz, 2003, p. 190). Similar to dormitories, these institutions have also required students to spend their free time attending prayers or abiding by the principles of these tarikats.

Tarikats also increased their power through private schools by benefiting from the privatisation of education by the government. Yavuz (2003, p. 122) mentions that the Özal era triggered the expansion of religious groups in education by showing that a total of 120 private high schools out of 376 in the 1996-1997 academic year belonged to Islamic foundations and associations, and they enrolled about three hundred thousand students. Tee (2016, p. 19) mentions that the Gülen movement highly benefited from the new economic policies of the country and constructed private 'Gülen schools' in almost all cities in Türkiye. She further emphasises that even if these private schools adhere to the national curriculum, they conduct moral and religious mentoring and education through extracurricular time (2016, p. 60). Right after the coup attempt in 2016[19], the government passed Law 667[20] and 997 private schools owned by the Gülen movement were closed down and converted into public schools (Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Private Education

[19] The Gülen movement organised a coup attempt in 2016, according to the government's allegations. The Gülen movement used to be known for its highly close proximity with the Turkish government, specifically the AKP regime. Even if numerous measures were taken to eliminate its power across the country by the government after the coup attempt, the senior Gülenists in various positions remain intact (Lord, 2018, p. 275)

[20] This is a law passed during the State of Emergency period after the coup attempt in 2016. It introduced extensive measures, including the dismissal of public officials, the closure of institutions, and the seizure of property as part of 'counterterrorism' efforts. It was later enacted into law as Law 6749.

Institutions, 2016). However, the total number of private schools or dershanes owned by the other tarikats remains unknown.

These private educational institutions carry significant influence on deepening structural inequalities. One of the main reasons for that these private schools were known as the most successful in their cities and offered a wide range of scholarships for students from lower-class backgrounds. For example, Tee (2016, p. 63) notes that the Gülen movement allocated a significant number of scholarships for students coming from lower-class backgrounds. This approach presents an important part of the movement's commitment to supporting academically talented students irrespective of their financial means. Additionally, students who attended these institutions had a better chance of earning higher grades on the university entrance exam and were seen as more qualified for governmental or high-impact level jobs. Starting in the 80s, Gülen preached to his followers to join government positions, including the judiciary, the army, and the security, to transform the bureaucracy and state by replacing the state cadre with his golden generation (Çobanoğlu, 2012, as cited in Lord, 2018, p. 222). There have been accusations that the Gülen movement sought to achieve this goal by mainly stealing exam questions and using favouritism through the public personnel selection process.

The Police Academy report conducted in 2017 announced that all exam questions, including KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination), ÖSS (University Entrance Examination), Askeri Liseler (Military High School Entrance Examination), and YDS (Foreign Language Examination), conducted by the ÖSYM[21] were unlawfully obtained and distributed within Gülen-affiliated networks (Terkoğlu, 2022). A witness in the coup attempt trial stated that university entrance exam questions were stolen and distributed to students

[21] Measuring, Selection and Placement Centre, a public institution that organises several large-scale exams in the country.

affiliated with Körfez dershanesi, which is a widely known and well spread dershane, that exists in almost every city in the country and was owned by the Gülen movement, adding that members of the organisation justified this act by framing it as a form of 'jihad' rather than theft ("Sınav sorularını beraber çaldık", 2017). Fikri Işık, former national security minister, mentioned that the questions for the military school entrance examination had been systematically stolen between 2000 and 2014 (Bozan, 2016, as cited in Lord, 2018, p. 222). Terkoğlu (2022) emphasises that about 400,000 people secured public-sector positions through exam question-stealing. These are numbers that can be reached after the coup attempt. However, the comprehensive official numbers remain largely unknown, especially those from other tarikats. Additionally, it is important to note that all these processes have been conducted under state control, thereby the state facilitated the increasing power of the tarikats in the educational and public settings.

Beyond government incentives, the dominant power of tarikats within public institutions, and economic hardships, social dynamics also play an important role in attracting students from various backgrounds to religious education. For example, Qur'an Courses, affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but mostly funded by tarikats or foreign aid[22], exist in almost every neighbourhood or municipality in the country, and are places where students from lower socio-economic backgrounds gather during the summer when schools are closed for vacation. These courses are perceived as social gathering places for kids where they interact with their peers rather than receiving religious education.

Since these are voluntary attendance institutions, they actively seek to attract students through various strategies, including social activities such as playground facilities, contests where pupils can earn money, and sports events designed to foster socialisation and sustain

[22] Foreign aid mostly refers to transnational funding streams, which include charitable donations and religious foundations linked to Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which have historically supported the global expansion of Islamic education and religious institutions.

students' engagement. My interviewee, Ali, 25 years old, who was born and raised in Fatih, Istanbul, but originally from Malatya, specifically mentioned this case by saying:

> "Especially during the summer months, when we were not going to school, we were staying out with my friends all day to play games in our neighbourhood. When the night prayer times came, some of my friends' fathers or grandfathers took them to the mosque, and I would go with them since I did not want to feel left out. It was the same with Qur'an courses. Almost every summer, I attended them with my friends, and they were actually quite fun." (August 13, 2025, Istanbul)

Othering practices implemented by the state play a crucial role in deepening this idea among the Alevi community. Othering is built and deepened by the institutions, norms, and practices. Furthermore, it holds the power to reinforce positions regarding domination and subordination in society (Çelik et al., 2017, p. 218). The identified other mostly interpreted as other than self and socially inferior because of their real or imaginary traits (Çelik et al., 2017, p. 218). In most cases, the other is categorised as biased, negatively perceived, excluded, and discriminated against. This categorisation plays a crucial role in individuals' classification of others, considering similarities or differences with themselves (Akbaş, 2010, p. 3). In this case, since Alevi religious practices differ from majoritarian Sunni practices, they are put into a category of the other by the majority in the country. Additionally, the imaginary Alevi practices (e.g. mum söndü), amplified by the state and the media, have been internalised by the dominant majority, thereby reinforcing the construction of Alevis as socially inferior 'others'. In the case where Sunni religious practices are normalised and made accessible by the state, not following them would risk marking Alevi individuals, especially children, as visibly different. This was one of the main reasons mentioned in the previous section, which is how the exemptions from the compulsory religious education would foster the othering feeling among the Alevi children.

To sum up, the interrelation among the rise of tarikats, the increasing power of political Islam, the implementation of neoliberal policies by the government, and the Turkish-Islamic synthesis empowered the use of private education and dormitories as a tool for the spreading of Sunni Islam within the society. Since tarikat-owned institutions offered a wide range of advantages, including affordable housing, scholarships for education, a reputation, and a high chance to get into the best universities in the country, and access to influential public and private sector positions, they attracted many students. Thus, students from an Alevi background were forced to either stay outside of this system or get assimilated into it by leaving their religious beliefs.

These educational institutions reinforced another glass ceiling that prevented Alevis from securing high-ranking positions or simply existing in the system. Additionally, social dynamics played an important role in spreading the Sunni practices since participation in religious activities such as going to mosques and attending Qur'an courses was embedded in everyday social interactions and peer relationships. For many Alevi children, engagement in these activities was not driven by religious conviction but by the desire to belong, to avoid social exclusion, and to remain 'similar' to their peers within common spaces where Sunni practices were normalised by the state.

4.5 Religious Control Through Space

Every society produces its own space to secure cohesion and enforce ideological and political control (Zieleniec, 2018, p. 6). Lefebvre argues that the space is political and ideological, and the owners of the space allow some actions or structures while limiting or banning others (Lefebvre, 1977, as cited in Zieleniec, 2018, p. 6). The states also hold the strength to reproduce their power through controlling city planning and projects. In this way, cities have been designed and built to reflect ideas and ideologies concerned with control and order,

which governments seek to implement. The urban is not only a material reality, but it involves the consumption of signs and is represented through the spatial forms encountered in daily life, which attempt to structure and regulate what is deemed acceptable and appropriate use (Zieleniec, 2018, p. 8).

The space control of the Turkish government was designed to implement a majoritarian understanding of the nation and religious notions. With this aim, the space has been used to impose one-sided Sunni Islamic interpretation and Turkish ideology. Space control has been implemented through various means, including all the practices mentioned in the previous sections and more, such as the spread of Imam Hatip Schools and Qur'an courses, control of public banners, building family consultation centres, which spread family values of Islam, etc. This section will focus on how the space has been controlled by the Turkish government to create a unified and flattened society aligned with Sunni Islamic thought.

After the establishment of the Turkish government, the Köy Kanunu (The Village Law) came into force in 1924, and it is still in effect. According to this law, the state only legally recognises the villages with a mosque (Village Law, Law No. 442, 1924). Village status in Türkiye provides various advantages for residents, including property tax exemption (50% discount), lower water tariffs, exemption from building permit fees, and more flexible zoning permits (within village residential areas). This law created another structural inequality for the Alevi community since their residential areas were not legally recognised, as they do not have mosques in their villages.

Even if this law contributed to the urge to construct a mosque for the government, there had been no significant mosque construction efforts under the Atatürk and İnönü regimes until the 1950s (Uzer, 2024, p. 428). After the electoral win of the Democrat Party, a

right-wing and conservative party, in 1950, mosque construction began to increase under Adnan Menderes's religious discourses. With the instability in the country due to the 1960s coup, the 1961 constitutional change, the 1971 military memorandum, and the ongoing violence in the 1970s, this aim was diverted. However, with the 1980s coup and the rising emphasis on Turkish-Islamic synthesis, mosque construction gained crucial importance from this point onward. Özcan (1990, p. 7) emphasised that the mosque construction in the country between 1981 and 1988 increased 32%, while the overall population increased only 20% during this time.

Table 2

Mosque numbers in Türkiye by years (Özcan, 1990, p.6)

Year	Provincial Centres	District Centres	Provincial & District Centres (Total)	Towns & Villages	Total Number of Mosques
1971	2,791	4,443	7,234	35,510	42,744
1973	2,903	6,111	9,014	36,138	45,152
1981	3,644	6,835	10,479	37,166	47,645
1984	4,015	7,304	11,319	43,348	54,667
1985	4,245	7,525	11,770	45,290	57,060
1986	-	-	12,468	47,685	60,153
1987	4,474	8,447	12,921	48,611	61,532
1988	3,465	10,442	13,907	49,040	62,947

In the 80s, almost 1500 new mosques were constructed every year, and there was a mosque for every 857 people by 1988 (Ozgür, 2012, p. 48). Özcan (1990, p. 7) also mentions that mosque construction specifically increased in towns and villages after 1981. It is possible

to correlate this data to the government's 'Her köye bir cami' (A mosque to every village) policy. This strategy specifically targeted Alevi villages as a tool to spread Sunnism and eliminate Alevi beliefs. Kurul (2022) mentions that the governors assigned after the coup to Alevi-dominated cities, such as Tunceli, tried to implement this policy heavily as a part of the assimilation project. The villagers who resisted these constructions faced severe infrastructural difficulties. In a report on the aftermath of the 12 September 1980 coup, Karataş (2012) documented how local officials conditioned basic services such as schools or roads on the construction of mosques in Alevi villages, and they forced communities to request the building of religious structures. In doing so, the government could justify itself by stating that the mosques have not been built without request; they were the demand of people who live there (Saraç, 2025).

The mosque building was not limited to Alevi villages, Alevi-dominated neighbourhoods in Istanbul and Ankara also experienced the spatial control through the expansion of majoritarian religious places. Tahire Erman's (2010) study, focusing on the Alevi neighbourhood in Mamak, Ankara, shows that even the neighbourhoods which were called 'saved' by Alevis experienced rapid mosque construction right after the military coup. This issue has remained a subject of ongoing debate since the 1980 coup, and there have been extensive mosque construction efforts under the AKP government as well. Saraç's (2025) work shows that mosques are still being built in Alevi villages, even the ones which are 20 minutes away from each other. He further emphasises that even Alevi villages with populations as small as thirty residents have been targeted for mosque construction.

The government's religious space control was also supported by some tarikats. As an example, Gülen's hizmet network, with the support of the government, introduced the joint Mosque-Cemevi complex in Mamak, Ankara, in 2013. This project was announced as a Sunni-Alevi fraternity in which a mosque and a cemevi could co-exist within the same site

(Orhan, 2019, p. 199). The project sparked various protests and discussions within the Alevi community and was cancelled after the coup attempt in 2016. Parlak (2025) highlights that it was a clear example of spatial and political engineering, as it reproduced the structural inequality between Alevism and Sunnism. Even if the concept of spatial coexistence might seem appealing as a symbol, Alevis rejected this project because of concerns over unequal status, lack of representation, and the continued rejection for formal recognition. They believe it is another effort from the government to instrumentalise Alevism through narratives of 'fraternity' that lack substantive political recognition. Within this framework, the Mosque-Cemevi initiative has commonly been interpreted as a spatial expression of symbolic power, while being described as an architecture of 'tolerance' by the government and the Gülen movement (Parlak, 2025).

Space control also means the control over what people see, perceive, and consume in their daily lives. The state produces space not only materially but also symbolically. The symbols play a crucial role in the political construction of collective or national identity (Azaryahu & Kook, 2002, p. 196). Modern societies seek to use the connection between material and social backgrounds to create a shared memorial in order to make their histories align with political ideologies (Cobangil, 2020, p. 294). In the early Turkish government case, the founders sought to create a collective identity shared with the Central Asian Turkic past to cut ties with the Imperial Islamic past and create a nation-state. After the coup, the government's policy shifted to religion since they saw religion as a solution for the scattered and fragmented society. That's why connecting back to the Ottoman Islamic past was inevitable for them. While connecting to this past, the military government and now the AKP government have strategically selected figures from the Ottoman past to embed them into daily life in the country.

To integrate TIS into everyday life and remind Alevis of the structural system, the government has used figures like Selim I extensively. Selim I is known for his brutal and cruel massacres and persecution towards the Alevis (Yonucu, 2024, pp. 58-59). For this reason, he is accepted as a deeply contentious and unwelcome figure within the community. The military government, right after the coup, began renaming many neighbourhoods or public institutions after 'Yavuz Sultan Selim'. For example, right after the coup, the local police station and the primary school in the Alevi neighbourhood were renamed Yavuz Sultan Selim Karakolu and Yavuz Sultan Selim İlkokulu, respectively (Erman, 2010, p. 182).

Additionally, when the Gezi protests began in 2013, which millions of people attended across the country, the government mainly blamed Alevis for acting according to external forces' wishes, and Erdoğan, who was the prime minister back in time, announced the name of the third bridge of Istanbul will be called Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, 24 hours after the Gezi protest began (Yonucu, 2024, p. 61). During the Gezi protest, the Alevi neighbourhoods were specifically targeted by the police by controlling the entrances and exits, and the concentration of police violence was high in these neighbourhoods, seven young people who were killed by the police during the protests were all from an Alevi background (Yonucu, 2024, p. 62).

Taken together, the Turkish government has used the space to strengthen its control over religion across the country. Through legal frameworks, urban planning, inclusion of selected religious spaces, and symbolic interventions, the state has shaped both the material and representational dimensions of space in ways that normalise and reinforce Sunni Islam while marginalising Alevi presence and rights. Lefebvre's production of space provides that spatial strategies operate across both material and representational dimensions of space. Therefore, spatial interventions are designed to continuously reproduce and deepen existing

hierarchies, and it works to normalise Sunni Islam as the legitimate religious order while subordinating alternative belief systems in the Turkish case.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that religion has been controlled by the Turkish government through diverse policies in Türkiye to spread Sunni Islam, and it also emphasised the importance of understanding religious control as a spatially produced and socially embedded process. Furthermore, the Turkish government's control over religion could also be interpreted through different lenses, specifically through mainstream media, in addition to the subtopics discussed in this chapter.

The selective representation through the media is a powerful form of religious control. Drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality, the state's control over religion can be perceived not only through legal regulation or institutional authority, but also through the production of norms that guide how individuals understand, practice, and internalise religion in everyday life under neoliberalism. In Türkiye, the media has been instrumentalised in disseminating and normalising a Sunni-centric understanding of Islam. Especially, with the adoption of neoliberal policies, many tarikats were able to find their places in the media industry through private channels and newspapers. TGRT, the first tarikat-owned channel, started broadcasting in 1993. It was owned by the Naqshbandi tarikat, of which the prime minister Özal's brother was a member. Later on, different tarikats founded various media organisations such as Samanyolu TV, Zaman gazetesi, Meltem TV, Akra FM, IHA, etc. (Avcı, 2009, pp. 220-221). All these media institutions facilitated the communication and solidarity among the tarikats and spread their propaganda (Avcı, 2009, p. 218). These media institutions have been quite powerful and well-spread throughout society. For example,

Zaman Newspaper, owned by the Gülen movement, had approximately one million circulations, which was 20 per cent of all newspapers sold (Evans & Kaynak, 2015, p. 142).

Furthermore, the absence of Alevi representation in these media platforms further positioned Alevism outside the realm of legitimate religious expression. Bourdieu's symbolic power refers to how certain social structures are privileged through the delegitimisation of others. In this sense, the media functions as a site where society comes to perceive Sunni Islam as a normative and authoritative force through repeated exposure to Sunni-centric religious narratives, while Alevi practices remain marginalised, misunderstood, or invisible. As a result, the normalisation of Sunni Islam in the media and public discourse contributes to keeping Alevis as others in Turkish society. Even though religious control through media is crucial in understanding the marginalisation of Alevis and the spread of state-controlled religion, a systematic analysis of media dynamics lies beyond this thesis's main scope and represents a potential direction for future research.

Through the interconnected mechanisms of public education, dormitories, private education institutions, and the planning of physical and symbolic space, the state has actively produced a Sunni-centred religious order that permeates everyday life. Drawing on Lefebvre's theory of the conceived space, the analysis has shown how religious governance operates by normalising Sunni practices within schools, housing arrangements, and the built environment, thereby rendering them natural, legitimate, and unavoidable while constantly marginalising Alevi beliefs, which do not fit into its ideology.

The control over religion in Türkiye has generated enduring structural inequalities for Alevis. By conditioning access to education, housing, public services, and social belonging on conformity to Sunni norms, state-aligned religious control has marginalised Alevi beliefs. The exclusion of Alevis from dominant religious representations and spaces, combined with

their limited recognition within legal and institutional frameworks, has reinforced their position as ‘others’ within the political and social order. Ultimately, the chapter revealed that religious control in Türkiye functions not only as a static or centralised policy, but also as an ongoing and contested process in which power is exercised and negotiated across multiple domains of everyday life.

Chapter 5: Cemevis as Spaces of Resistance

Since the space under authoritarian regimes is perceived as a threat because of the potential resistance it might create, these regimes aim to control and shape it to reinforce their power over it by using various techniques (Lewis, 2015, p. 141). The Turkish government's control over space was not only limited to spreading Sunni Islam in common spaces but also to rejecting the existence of non-Sunni religious worship places. Cemevis have not been recognised as places of worship since the Tekke ve Zaviyelerin Kapatılması Kanunu (Law 677)[23] in 1925. This law enabled the removal of autonomous religious institutions from the legal and administrative framework. As a result of this law, the cemevis were excluded from legal recognition as places of worship, and even if they were not explicitly banned, the law and subsequent administrative practice failed to acknowledge Alevi belief and rituals as an autonomous religious movement deserving institutional recognition, support, and protection. While the recognition of cemevis as places of worship continues to be debated, the current government still uses this law as a reason not to recognise them legally. The legal recognition provides various forms of support for the religious places, including the annual fund from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, exemptions from various taxes, and mandatory inclusion of these sites in urban development plans (Aydın & Gürpınar, 2022, p. 8).

The legal status of cemevis in Türkiye presents a complexity due to various reasons. The legal definition of minority in Türkiye only refers to Greeks, Armenians, and Jews according to the Treaty of Lausanne (Section III, Articles 37-44). This recognition excludes other non-Muslim groups, such as Syriacs, Baha'is, and Yezidis, as well as heterodox Muslim communities like the Alevis (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 253). Due to this distinction, only mosques, churches and synagogues are accepted as places of worship in the country. The

[23] Law on the Closure of Dervish Lodges and Shrines

Ministry of Religious Affairs has been consistently rejecting the recognition of cemevis as legal places of worship.

Regarding this recognition issue, certain changes were included with the EU Harmonisation Process Package 6 in 2003. For example, Kurtarır (2022, p. 254) notes that interpretation of worship places in Imar Kanunu (Law on Land Development Planning) was replaced by the place of worship (dini tesis) from the mosque. However, the 2014 Mekansal Planlar Yapım Yönetmeliği (Regulation on the Preparation of Spatial Plans) narrowed the meaning of place of worship once again by defining it at three scales: small mosque, mid-scale neighbourhood mosque, and külliye (social complex). The 2017 revision of the Planlı Alanlar İmar Yönetmeliği (Planned Areas Zoning Regulation), which formally defined a place of worship, referred only to mosques and masjids in its construction provisions (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 254). Thus, planning law continued to spatially institutionalise Sunni Islam.

In 2014, the Yargıtay (Supreme Court) decided that cemevis should be recognised as a legal worship place, and Alevis have a right to determine which spaces they consider to be their places of worship (Yargıtay Hukuk Genel Kurulu, 2014, E. 2014/1038, K. 2014/990). This decision was parallel to the ECHR's decision about how the state's refusal to exempt cemevis from electricity payments constituted discrimination under Article 14 in conjunction with Article 9, and the Turkish government keeps violating these articles (Cem Vakfı v. Turkey, 2014). However, neither the Supreme Court's decision nor the ECHR's was able to change the status of cemevis.

With Presidential Decree No. 112, published in the Official Newspaper on 9 November 2022 (No. 32049), the Alevi-Bektashi Culture and Cemevi Directorate (Alevi-Bektaşi Kültür ve Cemevi Başkanlığı) was established within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This created another disappointment among Alevis since the government once

again rejected Alevism as a religious movement and cemevis as places of worship and increased its surveillance mechanism over Alevis and cemevis under the legal framework. Alevis still struggle with this decision and continue fighting for the recognition of cemevis as their places of worship. Many Alevi associations announced that this decision of the government is only about institutionalising the cemevis according to the government's understanding and creating an Alevism based on their standards. They further stated that they will not comply with this structural surveillance, which aims to create a state-defined Alevi identity[24] ("Devletin Alevisi Olmayacağız", 2022). Even if cemevis are part of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism now, the funding they receive from the state is limited to maintenance and repair expenses of certain cemevis rather than to construction costs (Presidential Decree No. 112, 2022), whereas places of worship within the Ministry of Religious Affairs are eligible for funds in these matters.

Since cemevis have not been recognised as places of worship at the national level, their legality has been highly tied to the municipal approach. As a result, they have long existed in a legal grey area. Ali Balkız, who is a former president of the Alevi-Bektaşi Federation, stated this situation by saying that all cemevis in Türkiye are effectively 'illegal' and comparable to illegal settlements as they do not have any place in the law (Ciddioğlu, 2021).

Due to the same issue, they are not eligible for construction funding and are not even considered for inclusion in urban planning. Also, since they lack funding, their construction is largely dependent on communal fundraising or financial support from the well-off people. The situation regarding Alevis and cemevis was even more ambivalent during the 1980s and

[24] The term 'Devletin Alevisi' (Alevis of the state) in Turkish is used broadly in the Alevi resistance. It mainly emphasises the fact that the Turkish government tries to produce a controlled and depoliticised version of Alevism that is incorporated into its broader framework of Sunni Islam to maintain state power over the community.

1990s, when state-led assimilation policies by the junta government were more extensive, and Alevi-dominated areas were subject to increased surveillance, policing, and political pressure.

Despite these circumstances, the number of cemevis significantly increased starting from the 1990s. Wright (1997, p. 52) explains this kind of dilemma by noting that there is an active relationship between authorities and individuals over space and its meaning. In his case, he uses the term resistant heterotopias to explain how homeless people in the US created a form of resistance by using the space against the state-imposed identities. It is a term which explains when homeless people began organising or asserting a collective presence, spaces that exist alongside mainstream life could become resistant heterotopias. He (1997, p. 227) further emphasises that by intervening in the urban landscape and creating distinct and alternative forms of organisation and decision-making, the homeless community directly challenge the authoritative strategies. Since Alevis began making the invisible visible and constructed the 'despised', cemevis could also be interpreted as resistant heterotopias. This chapter will focus on how the Alevis have resisted the assimilation policies of the Turkish government, intensified from the 1980s onward, by using their places of worship as spaces of resistance, and on how they have found ways to construct these worship places even under severe conditions.

5.1 Construction of Cemevis

With the increasing oppression on Alevis starting from the coup government, and deepened structural inequalities, the community searched for ways to negotiate with the state and protect their identities against the assimilation policies. As the previous chapter mentioned, the state used various fields to control its power over Alevis and Sunnify them. Alevis have resisted all the ways the government has tried to implement through diverse methods. For example, for the assimilation policy through the public education system, the Alevis still

demand exemption from the compulsory religious education courses. Alevi organisations pursue staging demonstrations in multiple provinces to claim the abolition of compulsory religious classes (Stockholm Centre for Freedom, 2022).

Additionally, as seen in the Eylem Zengin case, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Alevi families still pursue legal procedures to challenge discriminatory educational practices. Some of them even converted to other legally accepted religions on paper to exempt their children from these classes. Additionally, there has also been societal resistance to the state's spatial control over the Alevi community. For example, Erman (2010, p. 182) notes that after the renaming of the local public school in the Alevi neighbourhood in Ankara to Yavuz Selim, residents still continued to call it "Democracy School" and refused to use the new name. Scott's (2016, pp. 33-36) everyday resistance concept is helpful to interpret this community-level resistance. Scott's concept emphasises that everyday resistance is designed to go unnoticed, to avoid formal records and open confrontation, yet undermines official claims. In this case, residents enact a symbolic disguise by persisting in calling this school a Democracy School and standing against the state's spatial imprint in their private lives.

A similar form of everyday resistance can be observed in practices of collective self-protection. Yonucu (2014, p. 11) mentions that the leftist, Kurdish, and Alevi youth in the Kurdish and Alevi neighbourhoods, where the state surveillance and violence exist extensively in everyday life, always move around in large groups to protect themselves from being forcibly pulled into police scorpion vehicles. This is also about collective presence, which functions as a resistance strategy against everyday forms of coercion. During the Gezi Park and Saraçhane protests in the country, similar forms of actions emerged in response to police violence, reflecting patterns of solidarity and collective resistance. Even if everyday resistance is crucial and helpful for communities to preserve their identity in the short term, it

was not enough for Alevis to sustain their existence and collective identity in the long run by solely relying on it.

There has been an ongoing struggle against the cemevis' recognition as legal places of worship, as mentioned previously. However, all these topics are highly tied to the politics where Alevism has been systematically ignored and excluded from. There has been a gradual increase in Alevi visibility in politics since the 1990s, particularly within opposition parties such as the CHP[25], TİP[26], DSP[27], and DEM[28], where politicians from an Alevi background have become relatively more active in these political parties and have raised awareness of the challenges faced by Alevis. Additionally, there were attempts to found Alevi political parties, but these parties were unable to survive in Turkish politics for a long time due to various reasons[29]. Despite all these attempts, dominant political and bureaucratic positions within the state remain largely occupied by Sunni Muslim norms, which are the institutionalised Sunni interpretations of Islam.

For this reason, Alevis have started using their worship places as counter-spaces to protect their identities while increasing their public visibility. In the previous chapter, the conceived space created by the Turkish government was discussed. However, as Lefebvre (1991, p. 381) argued, in opposition to the homogenisation of space, counter spaces have been created to question and resist the dominant power. Furthermore, Wright (1997, p. 253) mentions that placemaking is crucial for marginalised communities under authorities to build places of resistance. He adds that solidarity and sticking together are significant for survival under violent circumstances. By institutionalising Alevi rituals, collective memory, and

[25] Republican People's Party
[26] The Worker's Party of Türkiye
[27] The Democratic Left Party
[28] People's Equality and Democracy Party (A pro-Kurdish political party, formerly HDP)
[29] Türkiye Birlik Partisi (Turkey's Unity Party) was closed down right after the 1980 military coup. Barış Partisi (Peace Party) decided to dissolve itself in 1996 due to a lack of electoral support.

community life within a visible and organised spatial form, cemevis challenge the state-produced religious landscape and increase their visibility within the public sphere, which has only been organised by the dominant religious norms and provide a place for solidarity for Alevis.

The rise of Alevi visibility and cemevis in Türkiye is highly tied to the Madımak Massacre that happened in 1993 in Sivas. In July 1993, many artists, musicians, poets and writers came together in Sivas to commemorate Pir Sultan Abdal, a 16th-century Alevi poet and rebel (Yıldız & Verkuyten, 2011, p. 246). Aziz Nesin, who translated Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses into Turkish and was heavily targeted by the extremists, was among the people who were attending the commemoration. After the Friday prayer on the 2nd of July, a crowd consisting of Islamist extremists surrounded the hotel where these people were staying. They chanted pro-Sharia chants as well as slogans targeted at Aziz Nesin, consisting of statements of severe violence, including "Aziz is the devil!" and "Sivas will be Aziz's grave!", and slogans toward the state and the regime, such as "Down with secularism!", "Muslim Türkiye!", and "Long live Sharia!". Despite the escalating tension, the security forces remained ineffective, and the mayor and governors did not try enough to stop the violence and protect people in the hotel. Before the attackers set fire to the Madımak Hotel, Aziz Nesin called Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü[30] in Ankara to tell him to save the people at the hotel, Erdal İnönü assured him that the necessary measures had been taken and nothing would happen ("Hatırlatmalar", 2024). At the end of this, the hotel was set on fire by the protestors, and 33 people lost their lives.

[30] Erdal İnönü, son of İsmet İnönü, was serving as a Deputy Prime Minister of the coalition government led by Tansu Çiller during the Madımak Massacre. The coalition was formed between Doğru Yol Partisi (DYP - True Path Party) and Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (SDP - Social Democratic Populist Party).

After the massacre, 124 people were sued, and most of those were released with light sentences. 33 people were sentenced to death, but their punishment was switched to lifelong imprisonment, and they were released in 1997. In 2012, the court dismissed the case against five fugitives due to the statute of limitations, and the ongoing case against the remaining three defendants was also concluded due to the same reason in 2025 (Gökırmaklı, 2025). Consequently, almost no one has been punished for this violent massacre in the country. Additionally, the lawyer of the perpetrators, Şevket Kazan, served as a Minister of Justice for the 1996-1997 period (Yonucu, 2024, p. 60). Şevket Kazan was also known to spread the insults toward Alevis by using the mum söndü sentiment, which is a derogatory term used against the Alevis to spread slanderous claims. Additionally, the prime minister of the time, Tansu Çiller, made an explanation right after the massacre by saying that "Thank god, none of our people outside the hotel was harmed" ("Sivas Katliamı", 2015).

This massacre marked a significant turning point for the Alevi community and reinforced the chance within it. That is why the period right after the massacre has been commonly described as 'Alevi Revival' (Van Bruinessen, 1996, p. 7). The main reason for that was that Alevis, who were forced to hide their identities due to the embedded and systematic marginalisation that they have been exposed to since the Ottoman Empire, realised that hiding their identity does not bring anything positive but more segregation and othering in society. For example, in the 32. Gün Documentary (32. Gün, 2023, 15:09), Kazım Genç (President of Pir Sultan Abdal Organisation) mentions that:

> "When the Sivas Massacre happened, Alevis realised that even if they hid their identities, they were still subjected to violence and death. This led to the idea that Alevis have to express their identity more openly. From that point onward, a turning point occurred in the organisation and mobilisation of Alevi groups."

My interviewee Zeynep, who is 47 years old and works in the Alevi-Bektaşi Association also specifically mentioned the significance of Madımak Massacre by stating that:

> "After the Sivas Massacre, our collective memory has formed. We hid ourselves in Malatya, but we were killed; we hid ourselves in Maraş, but we were killed; we hid ourselves in Çorum, but we were killed, and we have been killed in many more of them across the country. We realised that the more we are buried, the more we are killed. That is why we started being visible." (August 24, 2025, Online Interview)

The othering has not only been effective in the political arena but also embedded in social practices. One of the main reasons Alevis have been segregated from Turkish society extensively was the imaginary and fabricated Alevi practices created and spread by the state, starting from the Ottoman Period. These narratives led to their social exclusion and reinforced their status as a stigmatised community within broader society. The organisation among Alevis aimed to increase visibility while dispelling these spurious accusations. The increase in visibility occurred through various means, and Alevi political activism has existed. However, using space as a form of resistance to increase visibility is one of the main ways Alevis have used, and this helped them reintroduce themselves to the wider community in a significant way. Thus, constructing cemevis in urban areas created visible and permanent spaces of worship that directly contradicted long-standing stereotypes of the community. These spaces allowed Turkish society to encounter Alevism and Alevi practices in everyday life. In this way, the use of space became a central strategy through which Alevis reintroduced themselves to the broader public and contested their historical othering.

Since the 90s, the number of cemevis has increased significantly across the country. The table below shows the yearly increases starting in 1989, since no data were collected

annually before then. Alevis have constructed these places under severe state control and surveillance, and a lack of resources. The Alevi neighbourhoods in big cities were labelled as spaces of danger and terror due to their affiliation with left-wing organisations and the Kurdish movement in the 70s, 80s and 90s, and they have encountered intense police violence and surveillance due to these perceptions (Yonucu, 2014, p.7). Additionally, these places, constructed under tough conditions and with community fundraising, have faced hardships after completion due to interventions by the state or municipalities. It was mainly because taking up urban spaces that were not designed for them and making their unrecognised worship places public were disruptive and irritating for the dominant ruler. For example, the newly elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attempted to demolish Karacaahmet Cemevi, which he claimed was illegal and a freak place (Karakaya-Stump, 2018, as cited in Çetin & Jenkins, 2025, p. 62). Many cemevis have still encountered problems regarding access to water and heating services due to the complexity of their legal status (Ciddioğlu, 2021). Under these circumstances, as Orhan (2019, p. 196) mentioned, even the construction of these worship places could be interpreted as resistance against the state and majoritarian Sunni-Islamic understanding.

Table 3

Cemevi numbers in Türkiye by years (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 2012)

Year	Overall Number
≤1989	**106**
1990	120
1991	121
1992	125
1993	130

1994	137
1995	154
1996	170
1997	186
1998	191
1999	199
2000	210
2001	215
2002	226
2003	232
2004	239
2005	257
2006	274
2007	284
2008	301
2009	322
2010	343
2011	371
2012	391

After 2012, the government's announcements of cemevi numbers revealed significant inconsistencies. For example, right after the data shown on Table 3 above from the Turkish Parliament, in 2013, the Ministry of the Interior announced that there are 937 cemevis in Türkiye (Karabağlı, 2013), by stating that Tokat has the highest number of cemevis with 172. However, Bekir Bozdağ, Deputy Prime Minister between 2011 and 2013, claimed that the total number of cemevis in Türkiye is 598, and Çorum has the highest number of cemevis

with 90 in 2013 (Yılmaz, 2013). Since they have never announced the name of these cemevis, I attempted to identify the exact number in certain cities to assess these claims. However, the data I was able to access does not agree with these numbers. For example, in Tokat, the most comprehensive data, prepared by Ali Arif Özzeybek, who served as a founding president of the Alevi-Bektaşi Culture and Cemevi Presidency, indicates that there are 127 cemevis in the city even in 2023 (Şahin, 2023). Moreover, these numbers, prepared by him, also include not only formally established cemevis but also some places in Alevi neighbourhoods or villages, that have been used as a place to conduct cem ceremonies, such as spacious rooms of some houses or a stable, as cemevis. Furthermore, some cemevis included in the new list are quite old but had not been recorded in the previous lists. The inclusion of these older cemevis shows the state's attempt to prove that they provided a basis for their establishment, despite the fact that many were established independently of state involvement, and the data is not accurate. That is why it is difficult to obtain transparent and reliable information on the current number of cemevis in the country.

Table 4 below also shows the first twenty cemevis in Istanbul and their establishment date. It is crucial to note that more than half of these cemevis were constructed in 1993, right after the Madımak Massacre. The number of their increase after this date not only reflects their institutional growth but also a collective response to trauma and exclusion, as cemevis increasingly serve as sites of visibility, solidarity, and resistance.

Table 4

Establishment Dates of the First 20 Cemevis in Istanbul (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 259).

Name of the Cemevi	Establishment Date

Promotion of Karaca Ahmet Sultan Culture, Solidarity and Repair of Tomb Association / Karaca Ahmet Sultan Convent / Üsküdar (Karacaahmet Sultan Dergahı ve Cemevi ve Karaca Ahmet Türbesi)	1969
Foundation of Şahkulu Sultan Convent / Kadıköy (Şahkulu Sultan Dergahı)	1985
Seyit Seyfi Association and Cemevi / Pendik (Seyit Seyfi Cemevi)	1986
Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associates and Cemevi Gazi Osman Paşa Branch (Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği Gaziosmanpaşa Şubesi Kültür Merkezi Ve Cemevi)	1988
Foundation of Republican Education and Culture / Adalar Cemevi	1988
Kağıthane Hacı Bektaşı Veli Education and Culture Association / Nurtepe Cemevi (Kağıthane Hacı Bektaş Veli Eğitim ve Kültür Derneği ve Cemevi)	1989
Hacı Bektaşı Veli Culture and Promotion Association / Bağcılar Cemevi (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı)	1989
Hacı Bektaşı Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation İstanbul Branch / Okmeydanı Cemevi (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı İstanbul Şubesi)	1990
İkitelli Cem and Culture House / Küçükçekmece	1990

Kartal Cemevi Culture Education and Social Solidarity Foundation (Kartal Cemevi) Kültür Eğitim ve Sosyal Dayanışma Vakfı)	1993
Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associates and Cemevi Pendik Branch (Pendik Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği ve Cem Evi)	1993
Ahi Mahmut Veli Çekmeköy Cemevi	1993
Sarıgazi Survival Promotion Solidarity of Cemevi Culture and Repair of the Tomb Association (Sarıgazi Cemevi Kültürünü Yaşatma, Tanıtma, Dayanışma ve Türbe OnarımDerneği)	1993
Kazım Karabekir Cemevi / Ümraniye	1993
Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associates and Cemevi Ataşehir Branch	1993
Gazi Education and Culture Foundation / Gazi Cemevi / Sultangazi (Gazi Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı Cemevi)	1993
Culture of Hacı Bektaşı Veli Survival and Promotion Association / Arnavutköy Cemevi (Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Kültürünü Yaşatma veTanıtma Derneği)	1993
Cem Foundation Haramidere Cemevi	1993
Erikli Baba Cultural Association and Cemevi / Zeytinburnu (Erikli Baba Kültür Derneği ve Cemevi)	1993
Anatolia Science Culture and Cem Foundation / Ümraniye Ihlamurkuyu Cemevi (Anadolu Bilim Kültür ve Cem Vakfı)	1993

Yıldırım (2012, p. 167) mentions that space cannot be only interpreted as a physical unit, but a socially constructed place where the collective experience, tradition, and symbolic meaning are embedded. He further emphasises that it plays a significant role in shaping and sustaining individual and collective identities. Thus, space becomes meaningful through social interaction and collective interpretation, functioning as a site where belonging is produced and reproduced. Parallel to this understanding, cemevis' roles started shifting starting from the 90s. Instead of using these worship spaces only for the religious practices, the Alevi community started seeing this space as a way of being together, reproducing their cultural elements, and spreading Alevi thought among their community while introducing themselves to the wider community, especially in big cities. Since religion plays an important role in forming collective identity, religious spaces provide communities with a sense of existence, belonging, and collective consciousness. Therefore, spaces of worship are not only sites of ritual practice but also arenas where identities are expressed, reinforced, and made visible (Yıldırım, 2012, p. 168).

Alevi worship places did not generally exist as separate spatial areas within Alevi settlements until the 1950s. Alevis used to conduct their religious ceremonies in any appropriate place, such as the rooms of the largest houses in the village, a sheep shed, a stable, or in any open space, such as a forest (Godzińska, 2023, p. 45). However, with internal migration beginning in the 1950s during Türkiye's industrialisation attempts, Alevis living in rural areas began migrating to major urban centres (Rençber, 2012, p. 84). This movement created a need for religious spaces in the cities as it became increasingly difficult for the community to find spacious places to conduct cem ceremonies, particularly in lower-income neighbourhoods where many Alevis had settled. At the same time, living alongside different social and religious groups reinforced the pressure to conceal their identity, which

had long been stigmatised and criminalised. For this reason, coming together at homes for cem ceremonies became increasingly difficult.

Even if some cemevis had built after the 1950s to 1980s, the number of them was not enough to make these spaces accessible for the majority of the community. Four of my interviewees, whose parents migrated to Istanbul in the 70s, specifically mentioned how hard it was for them and their parents to go to cemevis at the time since all cemevis were quite far from places where they lived. For example, my interviewees Ayça and Selen, who are 52 and 53 years old respectively, were born and lived in Sivas and Çorum until the 1980s when their parents migrated to Istanbul, mentioned that:

> "We were quite young when we started working after we moved to Istanbul, and there was no possibility for us to go to cemevi after work, which used to finish around 8. Additionally, Cemevi was not even close to just stopping by." (Joint Interview, August 8, 2025, Istanbul)

Additionally, my interviewee Ali, 25 years old, who was born and raised in Fatih, Istanbul, but originally from Malatya mentioned:

> "My father often says that when he first moved to Istanbul from Malatya, it was very hard for him to go to a cemevi after work because all cemevis were far from home and he was working for very long hours." (August 13, 2025, Istanbul)

Under these circumstances, the Alevi community began building cemevis in diverse neighbourhoods of major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, as well as the city centres of smaller cities. As Yıldırım (2012, p. 169) notes, cemevis have begun to be built not only for religious needs but also for identity formation and reconnecting with the roots of Alevism. Cemevis are socially constructed institutions which have been shaped, developed, and sustained through various social, political, and historical processes. Consequently, for Alevis,

cemevis function as spaces that foster belonging and establish cultural awareness while increasing their visibility and reinforcing their presence in Turkish society.

My interviewee Zeynep again mentioned how the construction of cemevis increased their visibility by saying that:

> "City Alevism made Alevism more visible in a way that we began to be known after being unknown for a very long time. Even if my generation and I struggled to find our identity when we first migrated to big cities, younger generation do not and will not face the same uncertainty because cemevis are their homes." (August 24, 2025, Online Interview)

This quote shows how cemevis play vital roles in identity formation and create a sense of belongingness among the community. That's why it is not feasible to perceive cemevis solely as places of worship; they are also socially constructed institutions. Yıldırım (2012, p. 170) explains that among Alevis in Tunceli, having a cemevi is accepted as equivalent to having a culture and identity, which indicates a sense of belonging established through place. In his research, it also shows that even the younger generation, who do not practice Alevism or attend cemevis, still embrace the existence and prevalence of cemevis because these places contribute to identity formation and provide a place where they can move freely. In addition, cemevis play a crucial role in helping Alevi communities connect their religious rituals and learn more about Alevism. Some of my interviewees from the younger generation also expressed similar thoughts and feelings regarding cemevis and their function for the reconnection with Alevism. For example, my interviewee Aslı, who is 27 years old, was born and lived in Elazığ until the age 18, emphasised that:

> "Cemevi in Elazığ, which is only one by the way, has an importance since my grandparents and mom connected to their religious background through it. In addition,

when I was a child, I attended different 'ziyarets'[31] they organised, such as Abdül Cabbar Türbesi or Sedeftepe. Even if I don't practice Alevism right now, these events were important for me in terms of embracing my identity and reconnecting with it." (August 11, 2025, Istanbul)

My other interviewee, Gizem, who is 33 years old, was born and raised in Istanbul but originally from Sivas, also mentioned that she attended a ziyaret in Nevşehir organised by a Cemevi in Istanbul as a child. Even if she does not practice Alevism right now, it was quite an important event in her life since she did not need to conceal her Alevi identity for the first time in her childhood. Hence, both these events provided a sense of openness and collective belonging that contrasted sharply with the silence and caution that had shaped their childhood.

The same pattern has been visible among the diaspora Alevi communities living in Europe. Hanoğlu (2026, p. 1) mentions that cemevis became a significant place for Alevis living in Western countries to claim identity and legitimacy. She also adds that remittances from the diaspora Alevis are significant for developing the local economy in Alevi villages with high emigration rates and for the construction of cemevis in Türkiye (Hanoğlu, 2026, p. 8). Cemevis hold significance for the diaspora Alevis to contribute to the Alevi cause in the country. For example, in 2007, with the collaboration among Turkish, German, and British Alevi foundations, Yörükselim Erenler Cemevi was constructed in Kahramanmaraş, in a neighbourhood where the Maraş Massacre took place (Hanoğlu, 2025, p. 102). Hanoğlu further emphasises that the community specifically avoids collaborating with government

[31] Ziyaret in Alevism refers to spiritual visits made to shrines, the graves of saints, sacred trees, or other sacred elements of nature. Within the belief system, candles are lit, prayers are recited, cloth pieces are tied to trees or structures, and animal sacrifice is often performed at these sites. The purpose is to establish a connection with the sacred energy believed to reside in that place, in accordance with the Alevi understanding of Hakikat(Ultimate Truth).

authorities for the developmental projects due to a lack of trust in government institutions stemming from systemic discrimination and othering practices (2025, p. 101).

5.2 Cemevis as Spaces of Hope

To increase collective belonging and identity, cemevis did not only aim to provide spaces for religious practices or religious trips. They started offering various cultural, social and educational activities to increase people's participation and reinforce community building. These activities include musical education courses, specifically bağlama courses[32], and semah courses, which are one of the main components of cem rituals. In addition to these, various cemevis across the country offer preparation courses for university and high school entrance exams, as well as for English. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that the state-backed tarikats have used education as a tool to spread their ideology, especially among Alevi children coming from lower-class backgrounds. The remaining private educational institutions were too costly for many Alevi people to afford. However, cemevis aim to provide accessible or free educational support in their spaces for these groups. In this way, cemevis function as spaces of hope, as they incorporate a form of resistance through education, culture, art, and socialising. Thus, rather than passively accepting what is being forced on them by the state, Alevis have sought alternatives to sustain their realities without violent confrontation with the state, which might be too costly and disruptive for them.

In addition to the education, these spaces offer a place for social gatherings. Some of them have been specifically built to provide additional areas for socialising and coming together. In my interviews, people specifically mention using some cemevis as gathering places. The ones living in Istanbul specifically mentioned the importance of the Burgazada (Prince Island) Cemevi Tea Garden, which was built in 1987 and has a small worship place.

[32] Bağlama is a musical instrument which has great importance in Alevi folk and musical culture.

However, it has a spacious, cosy garden where people visit and enjoy drinks at affordable prices. Gediz, who is 27 years old, was born and raised in Istanbul but is originally from Sivas, mentioned that:

> "Even if I did not attend Cem ceremonies that often, I have used Burgazada Cemevi's Tea Garden a lot. During summer, if we decided to go to the Prince Islands, we had to go to Burgazada, mainly because of that Tea Garden." (August 20, 2025, Istanbul)

On December 11, 2025, I visited Burgazada Cemevi and Tea Garden and had an informal conversation with the head of the establishment. He explained that during the summer months, the tea garden becomes particularly crowded with anyone from the island or tourists. He specifically mentioned that people would not even be able to find seats during that period. They also offer various Turkish board games and okey[33] to attract more people, and the space functions as a lively gathering place. He added that they do not specifically seek attendance from the Alevi community; rather, it is open to everyone, regardless of background. He further emphasised that they try to create a welcoming space where people socialise and spend time together at affordable prices. Since the cemevi and the garden were aimed to be made visible, there were signs of them everywhere around the island, making them much easier to find for everyone.

On July 3, 2025, I visited Okmeydanı Cemevi in Şişli, Istanbul. During an informal conversation with dede (religious leader) of the cemevi, he specifically emphasised that the cemevi should also be considered as my home and encouraged me to use it for socialising, sharing tea, and spending time in its library. He specifically highlighted that cemevi is an inclusive place, where everyone is welcome. This also indicates how the community tries to make themselves lves more visible and understood by the wider society.

[33] Very popular tile-based game in Türkiye. Typically played with four players.

These are examples of the function of cemevis' in the major urban centres. However, they also have similar roles in smaller cities, municipalities, or villages. In such settings, it is hard to find places to socialise, and cemevis play vital roles in providing communal spaces. My interviewee Gediz again mentioned the importance of cemevi in his grandparents' village in Sivas by saying that:

> "Cemevi has been built pretty recently, like 3-4 years ago, in our village. Since there is no kahvehane[34] in the village, people use it as a gathering place where they socialise as well." (August 20, 2025, Istanbul)

My other interviewee, Haydar, who is 46 years old and was born and lives in Tokat, described similar functions of cemevis in Tokat:

> "Especially in summer, cemevis are so lively here. People who live in cities or abroad come back and bring their families and kids to the village. Hence, cemevis transform into a social place during that time." (December 19, 2025, Online Interview)

He also added that even though the Alevi population in Tokat and his village (his village's population is 3,200) is not that big, cemevis still organise various social, cultural, and educational events, including trips to ziyaret areas, English courses, and sewing courses for women. This comment also invites a broader interpretation of cemevis, revealing another cultural side of them. These courses are not only specific to the interviewee's village; cemevis in various locations also offer diverse courses beyond education and religious content, including sewing, crafts, diction, painting, marbling art, theatre, etc. These courses are crucial for women, specifically in lower-class neighbourhoods, in fostering social participation and economic empowerment. Additionally, courses, such as bağlama, guitar, theatre, etc., have also been attracting people from various age groups. Additionally, the

[34] A coffee house where people gather to spend their leisure time and drink tea and coffee.

majority of cemevis have a library that provides accessible books and educational resources for the community, and a place to study and work.

Figure 4

Bağlama course at Nurtepe Cemevi in Istanbul (Nurtepe Cemevi)



Figure 5

Sewing course at Elbistan Cemevi in Kahramanmaraş (Elbistan Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfi)



Figure 6

Taşdelen Cemevi Library (Taşdelen Cemevi)



By looking at these functions of cemevis, David Harvey's spaces of hope play a vital role in perceiving and interpreting them as more than solely religious constructions. Harvey (2000, as cited in Ozduzen, 2019, p. 36) explains these spaces as alternative realities against dominant structures, particularly those shaped by capitalism. He also adds that communities are not totally desperate, they can generate collective practices that contest hegemonic orders and articulate different futures. By using Harvey's theoretical perspective, Ozdüzen (2019, pp. 36-37) brings empirical evidence of the protestors' creation of spaces of hope by using the public parks in Istanbul during the Gezi Protests in Türkiye in 2013. She emphasises that during the Gezi uprisings, people formed a solidarity against the political, social and economic injustices in the country through protecting Gezi Park in Istanbul. She explains how this solidarity, created through and in a symbolic space, functions as spaces of hope and identity-forming place, and how people use this space and similar ones not only during important events such as Gezi but also in their daily lives.

Even if her work does not mention cemevis or Alevi resistance directly, it offers a valuable conceptual lens for interpreting cemevi case and Türkiye's experiences with spatial resistance. Cemevis, which are often perceived as threatening and dangerous for the Turkish state, constitute spaces of hope. These spaces have been built and are functioning to provide a relatively freer movement area where the community gathers, reproduces cultural memory and sustains collective identity. These spaces offer educational and cultural practices, communal interaction, social gathering, and a sense of belonging to the community.

Kurtarır (2022, p. 253) mentions that cemevis in Istanbul are more than just religious places, but they are places that foster a sense of belonging among Alevis. He further adds that places enable communities to protect their identity and sustain their rituals and cultural traditions by their multi-functional character (2022, p. 268). My interviewee Zeynep mentioned the significant role of cemevis to reintroduce old Alevi rituals, which were about to be forgotten or not seen before the expansion of cemevis by saying that:

> "I don't think we talk enough about how cemevis helped revive Alevi practices that were at risk of disappearing, for example funeral rituals. In the 1990s, because there were not enough cemevis, my grandparents' funerals had to be conducted in mosques, according to Sunni practices. But when my father passed away, his funeral was organised through the cemevi, and it was conducted according to Alevi traditions. In that sense, cemevis brought Alevi funeral rituals back into our lives. It is quite important since people, who have lived as Alevi their entire life, do not have to be buried according to Sunni practices anymore." (August 24, 2025, Online Interview)

Kurtarır (2022, p. 260) mentions that some cemevis, such as Okmeydanı, Sarıgazi, Garip Dede, Kartal, Bağcılar, Yenibosna and Gazi, conduct at least 40 funeral services each month, not only for Istanbul residents but also for Alevis living abroad. This shows another acquisition for the community through cemevis. In this sense, the role of cemevis is more

than sustaining the existing traditions; it also revives religious rituals that have sunk into obscurity. Before the expansion of cemevis, Alevis were forced to use mosques in their neighbourhoods for their funerals. However, this practice frequently resulted in what can be described as a form of double exclusion, even though municipalities are required to provide burial services according to the Municipality Law (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 260). However, as Kurtarır further notes that these services are provided according to Sunni Islamic tradition, determined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Additionally, as Kurtarır & Ökten (2018, p. 166) mention, when Alevis tried to conduct their funerals in the mosques, imams sometimes refused to officiate the ceremonies, or members of the community were subjected to hostility and hate speech due to their unattendance of the mosques during regular times. They (2018, p. 166) specifically noted that some imams say that "You do not come here while you are alive. So, why do you bring your death?" This attitude explains how the government's power exercise over religion has normalised Sunni Islamic practices at the level of religious authority. In this way, the religious legitimacy has become contingent upon conformity to majoritarian norms. This caused implicit pressures on Alevi communities to assimilate into what is constructed as the 'normal' and 'legitimate' form of religious observance.

However, the community's spatial existence has altered this understanding. Rather than continuing to conduct their funerals according to a majoritarian understanding, the community can now hold these ceremonies in accordance with their own traditions. In this way, cemevis provide spatial freedom to sustain and revive rituals that had previously been marginalised or suppressed and challenge the monopolisation of religious practices.

5.3 The Spatial Acquisitions and Growing Public Visibility of the Alevi Community

Alevis' struggle with the state has been continuing over the recognition and acceptance of their fundamental rights. However, through this process, there have been important acquisitions for the community through their resistance and increasing visibility. On January 30, 2014, the main opposition party (CHP) announced that cemevis will be recognised as places of worship officially in 230 municipalities across the country, governed by the CHP (Radikal, 2015, as cited in Kurtarır, 2022, p. 261). Several municipalities in Istanbul, including Beylikdüzü, Sarıyer, Çatalca, Pendik, Maltepe, have either built or supported the construction of cemevis in their districts after this decision (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 260).

Following this decision, the previous mayor of Beylikdüzü Municipality, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the current mayor of Istanbul, who was arrested last March on the government's allegations and is still detained, organised a cemevi construction competition in 2015. The Fatma Ana Cemevi was chosen and completed in 2020 among the 82 projects. İmamoğlu ("Fatma Ana Cemevi", 2020) specifically stated that the provision of worship places for the Alevi community is the responsibility of municipalities, and he further emphasises that if municipalities could spare money for mosque construction, they should also allocate a budget for the cemevis.

Fatma Ana Cemevi in Beylikdüzü holds importance not only because of municipal recognition but also its role in increasing Alevi visibility in Istanbul's urban landscape. Architects of the project described Kavaklıdere river basin, the area where the cemevi was built, as a public corridor due to its communal role. They aimed to employ this public corridor by increasing the social unity, enhancing Alevi visibility and fostering social cohesion within the neighbourhood (Archdaily, 2024). Overall, Fatma Ana Cemevi's size, visibility, and central location are politically significant since it shows that the cemevi is fully integrated in urban life now, rather than being a hidden or marginal religious space.

Figure 7

Fatma Ana Cemevi and Culture Centre (Beylikdüzü Belediyesi)



A similar example happened in Balçova, Izmir, in 2021. The Balçova Cemevi, constructed by the Balçova Municipality, distinguishes itself from other cemevis since it was designed to be clearly recognisable as a cemevi by using various traditional Alevi sacred architectural techniques and beliefs. Taking the Büyük Ocak Cemevi in Malatya as a muse, built in the 13th century, the Balçova Cemevi was designed to bring tradition into modern life (Merdim, 2023). For example, the use of four truncated pyramidal roof structures reflects the key Alevi symbolic concept of the dört kapı (four doors) while also enabling top-lighting from above and connecting the interior space to the sky, which is an important experiential and spiritual dimension in Alevi ritual practice (Baumit Türkiye, n.d.). Another important element of the cemevis, which used to be present as an interior characteristic in village cemevis but was not visibly expressed on the exteriors, tütekli tavan (pyramidal roof system) was used in the main halls of the building (Merdim, 2023). The cemevi further includes an

interior courtyard shaped with reference to the circular form of the Alevi semah ritual (Ekoyapı, 2023).

The architects of the building specifically mentioned that the cemevi was strategically built in red to reclaim the term “Kızılbaş,” which means “red head” and has historically been used as a derogatory label for Alevis, and thereby turns it into a strong and visible statement of identity (Merdim, 2023). Overall, the Balçova Cemevi is a significant development for the Alevi community since it challenges the historical marginalisation and spatial invisibility of Alevi worship spaces. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in reviving the old Alevi worship spaces’ features in modern times by asserting a publicly recognisable Alevi presence within the urban landscape.

Figure 8

Balçova Cemevi (Merdim, 2023)



Figure 9

Balçova Cemevi (Merdim, 2023)



In addition to the construction of cemevis, Alevi resistance has led to an increase in some additional municipal support for the Alevi rituals. In Istanbul, when Ekrem Imamoğlu was elected for the first time as the Mayor of Istanbul in 2019, the Istanbul Municipality started providing funeral services to all religious groups from the Municipality budget, and employed people from various religious backgrounds for the organisation of these services (Kurtarır, 2022, p. 260).

Furthermore, in the previous chapter, it was noted that the symbols encountered in everyday life play crucial roles in shaping collective identity, and that the state exercises spatial control to produce a single, national, collective uniformity (Azaryahu & Kook, 2002, p. 196). Due to the spread of cemevis in urban areas in Türkiye, symbols such as bus stop names began to be associated with or changed by municipalities accordingly cemevi names. My interviewee Zeynep mentions this development by saying that:

> "In the past, when you were on a minibus, no one would dare to say, 'I want to get off at the cemevi.' Now, the minibus driver asks if anyone wants to get off at the cemevi. This is a very significant societal change. The names of the bus stops have changed according to cemevis, for example, Karaca Ahmet Cemevi bus stop. There are bus

stops near cemevis now or metro stations closeby." (August 24, 2025, Online Interview)

This acquisition has not happened suddenly; it was the result of a long-term resistance in which Alevis have negotiated with the state and asserted their identity within the urban landscape in Türkiye through the establishment and use of cemevis. This also shows how the cemevis and the Alevi identity have progressed from a stigmatised and unrecognised societal position to a more visible and socially acknowledged status.

These developments at the municipal level stand as crucial examples of supporting places of worship and securing religious freedom that Alevis have the right to have by also increasing Alevi visibility in society. However, without a secure legal status, these spaces can become subject to political negotiation and conditional support. For example, the previous president of the Alevi-Bektaşi Federation expressed his concerns about this issue, saying that cemevis have become places where some municipalities negotiate with the Alevi community about certain conditions. For example, some of them conditioned the opening of Qur'an courses in the cemevi or requested to control the funeral services if they contributed to the construction of the cemevi (Ciddioğlu, 2021). Additionally, some cemevis are still at risk of destruction due to their 'illegal' status. Kurtarır (2022, p. 261) mentions that cemevi founders in Sultanbeyli and Sancaktepe in Istanbul were sued over licensing issues, and the cases are still ongoing. These dynamics again illustrate that the lack of full recognition of cemevis as places of worship at the state level affects their autonomy and forces Alevis to continue fighting for their rights in everyday life.

Consequently, Alevi resistance through cemevis has provided increasing visibility and secured some acquisitions in Türkiye, contributing to recognition and support from the municipalities run by opposition parties. This process has thereby facilitated the integration

of cemevis into the urban landscape. However, the municipality support still remains ambivalent, as some municipalities use cemevis as sites of negotiation to either increase their control over these spaces and the community or gain electoral support. Additionally, the state's persistent refusal to recognise cemevis as legal places of worship, together with its effort to maintain control over the Alevi community, continues to create serious structural difficulties. Furthermore, the government's decision to bring all cemevis under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism increased surveillance and state control in cemevis, which have been designed to provide free alternative spaces for the community under the state hegemony as counter-spaces. Therefore, even if some decisions seem like acquisitions, Alevi's struggle and resistance continue to protect themselves from the state's ongoing Sunnification and surveillance attempts.

5.4 Conclusion

Which spaces could be called spaces of resistance, counter-spaces, or spaces of hope is still open for discussion. However, in my understanding, even if Lefebvre's spatial triad does not explicitly refer to resistance, it can be extended to do so. As Cassegard (2019, p. 166) mentions, spatial appropriation is more than opposing one form of space to another, but it is the act of struggle itself that becomes embedded in lived experience and shapes representational space. He explains this point by using Lefebvre's rhythm analysis by defining that rhythms are multiple, and not only states and the capital have the strength to deliver their rhythms in space, but also nature and ordinary people. These people also hold the power to spread their rhythms by challenging existing boundaries, claiming spaces for their own purposes, and reshaping them through everyday use (Lefebvre, 1996, as cited in Cassegard, 2019, pp. 166-167). I understand cemevis as Alevis' rhythms to assert themselves

in public life and challenge the state without violent confrontations or destructive consequences.

The Alevi community in Türkiye has been resisting the assimilation policies of the state for a long time. However, the 1980 coup d'etat affected their way of doing it since the state seized its power over religion severely. Alevis formed several sorts of resistance forms against these policies. However, to sustain their religious rituals and increase their visibility in society, cemevis played vital roles as spaces of resistance. These places have been constructed with limited resources by the community's determination. Their numbers increased rapidly, and these worship places have provided relatively freer spaces for the community who have been facing state violence, othering, and marginalisation for a very long time.

Cemevis also aim to provide several services to attract the community through cultural and social elements, including skills courses, social gathering areas, and educational services. The community's reconnection with Alevism and its roots was also achieved through the expansion of cemevis. The increase in Alevi visibility led to an increase in some municipal level acquisitions. However, some acquisitions still might either appear as conditional or aim to control the Alevi community since there is no legal recognition of Alevism or cemevis under the state framework. Additionally, even if municipal resistance exists, the state has been significantly increasing its control over local powers across the country, reflecting the growing authoritarianism in Türkiye. Starting from 2014, the Turkish government has arrested opposition mayors in several districts and cities around the country. From March 2024 onwards, 22 opposition mayors, who were elected in the 2024 local elections, were arrested and are still either detained or removed from their positions (Bölükbaş, 2026). In addition to mayors, many people working for the opposition

municipalities have been either detained or expelled from their positions. These investigations include employees and mayors who have been working to support the construction of cemevis and increasing Alevi visibility. Despite the state's control mechanisms, cemevis still function as places where the Alevi community feel relatively freer, acts without the necessity to hide their identity, and asserts their presence in the urban landscape and broader society in Türkiye.

Conclusion

With this research, I believe I answered the question of how the space could be both a site of oppression and a place for resistance for marginalised communities under absolute hegemony by focusing on Alevis in Türkiye and showing the crucial role of the 1980 military coup. Since the military in Türkiye has long been assumed to be the guardian of Kemalist and secularist values (Senemoğlu & Kazkondu, 2025, p. 2980), its role in the spread of political Islam has often been underestimated. Furthermore, neither the Turkish government's religious control over space nor the spatial resistance of the Alevis has been examined in detail in the existing literature.

Since the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, the religion has always been designed to be kept under state control. The founders wanted to keep it in the private sphere to achieve 'modernisation' and 'westernisation' goals. The 1980 military coup altered the government's control over religion to varying degrees. The TIS became the government ideology, and the junta government aimed to silence the left-wing politics, economic and civil organisations. Furthermore, the coup regime increasingly relied on Islam to regulate the relationship between the state and society; all of these provided a ground for the emergence of Islamic identity in different forms (Keyman, 2007, p. 232). Since the pre-1980 period witnessed extreme societal division around ethnicity, sect, and ideology, and this division caused violent street clashes, several massacres, and an unstable country, the government saw religion, which is shaped around Sunni-Islam understanding, as a tool to both control and unify the society.

Alevis, who have been exposed to oppression and marginalisation and lived as closed communities across Anatolia since Ottoman times, started aligning with the socialist and left-wing movements when they started migrating to big cities. The reason the socialist

movements became relatively more successful in the Alevi-populated areas was mainly because of their successful engagement with local communities and efforts to support and represent Alevis' needs. For example, Erman (2010, pp. 175 - 178) notes that students from the socialist movement, mainly from ODTÜ (Middle East Technical University), participated at various stages in the construction of an Alevi neighbourhood in Ankara. The students played an important role not only in planning the construction of the neighbourhood but also in facilitating access to essential infrastructure such as electricity and water in the 70s. Alevis' alignment with the socialist movements made them one of the biggest targets of the right-wing and ultranationalist movements, specifically grey wolves (Bozkurtlar), and they experienced bloody massacres, which resulted in the death of hundreds of Alevis in different cities. These massacres happened as a result of the government's unwillingness to prevent violence towards Alevis as well.

With the adoption of TIS, the government started exercising its power over Alevis crucially through multiple channels, including public education, the increasing power of tarikats over private education and student housing facilities, and the extension of spatial control in everyday life. By drawing on Lefebvre's concept of conceived space, the study has shown that the Turkish government has produced a dominant spatial order to spread and privilege Sunni-Islam and systematically marginalise minorities, specifically Alevis. In this regard, the space has been instrumentalised to materialise and reproduce ideological control by the Turkish state by influencing both the physical environment and the social dynamics within it.

However, the research mainly aimed to show the agency of Alevis and the ways they resist spatial control and assimilation policies. By doing so, the study used Lefebvre's counter-spaces, which emphasise that the space is not solely the site of dominant order but also of resistance. In this regard, the study approached cemevis as counter-spaces, which have

been constructed by Alevis to challenge dominant hegemony by asserting their identity in Türkiye's urban landscape. The study showed why cemevis could be interpreted as counter-spaces by explaining their construction processes and how they allowed Alevis to shape and reconfigure urban spaces, thereby challenging the spatial order organised by the state. Thus, these spaces disrupt the idea of homogenising the space and flattening the society by demonstrating alternative ways of resistance through spatial practices grounded in collective memory, identity, and solidarity.

Building on this, the study uses Harvey's spaces of hope to further illustrate the changing and growing dynamic of resistance within the cemevis. As Harvey points out by using the term dialectical utopianism (2000, pp. 182, 243), spaces of hope exist through continuous negotiation, adaptation and conflict rather than static and isolated resistance. These spaces need to adopt these approaches to deal with the dynamic and evolving nature of capitalism and hegemonic power. In this framework, cemevis operate within the dominant power structures while systemically challenging them. Thereby, cemevis function both as counter-spaces as they resist dominant spatial arrangements and as spaces of hope since they materialise an inclusive and pluralistic alternative future through constant negotiation and resistance strategies against the government.

With these theories, I wanted to emphasise my findings regarding the reality that domination and resistance are not separate or mutually exclusive but deeply intertwined. Additionally, by adopting Harvey's dialectical utopianism, I wanted to demonstrate that, to sustain cemevis' existence within a highly regulated and exclusionary socio-spatial order, the community has developed adaptive strategies to address the practices of authoritarian government. Cassegard (2019, p. 167) explains this relationship between norms and spatial practices by stating that activists and marginalised groups need to navigate the tension between pursuing their ideals, sustaining these practices, and avoiding being perceived as

excessively transgressive by the state. As Jacobsson and Lindblom (cited Cassegard, 2019, p. 167) argue that this often requires a careful and sensitive balancing for them under dominant powers to continue pursuing their ideals. Similarly, Alevis' engagement with local and national powers can be seen as a strategic negotiation, and a balance that the community needs to maintain to sustain their spatial resistance without heavy confrontation with the state. These kinds of adaptations do not signal compromise but rather reflect a form of spatial agency in which alternative identities and practices are sustained, and challenge and transform the dominant order.

Consequently, this thesis contributes to the literature by showing that cemevis could be seen as spaces of resistance by offering a broader analytical lens for understanding state-religion relations, specifically focusing on identity-based society building and marginalisation. It also highlights the significance of seeing everyday spatial practices, produced and sustained by the marginalised communities without institutional support, as sites of resistance to political and spatial order through which these communities assert their existence and claim recognition and autonomy.

Ultimately, cemevis in Türkiye illustrates that even under highly regulated hegemonic powers, alternative spaces could be produced and sustained by the marginalised communities. These spaces present an active form of resistance by providing alternative realities and coexistence within contested socio-political landscapes. In this sense, cemevis present spatial resistance beyond the boundaries drawn by the state.

References

Agai, B. (2002). Fethullah Gulen and his Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education. Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies, 11(1), 27-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/10669920120122234

Akbaş, G. (2010). Social identity and intergroup relations: The case of Alevis and Sunnis in Amasya (Master's thesis, Middle East Technical University (Turkey)).

Alevi Haber. (2021, December 29). Semah nedir? https://www.alevihaber.com/semah-nedir-29197h.htm

Alevis in Türkiye. (2018). Minorityrights.org. https://minorityrights.org/communities/alevis/

Alpay, Ş. (2010). Two faces of the press in Turkey: the role of the media in Turkey's modernisation and democracy. In Turkey's engagement with modernity: Conflict and change in the twentieth century (pp. 370-387). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

ArchDaily. (2024, August 31). Fatma Ana Cemevi and Culture Center / 9016. https://www.archdaily.com/1018428/fatma-ana-cemevi-and-culture-center-9016

Aşlamacı, İ., & Kaymakcan, R. (2017). A model for Islamic education from Turkey: the Imam-Hatip schools. British Journal of religious education, 39(3), 279-292. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2015.1128390

Avcı, Ö. (2009). Türkiye'de İslam'ın modern görünümleri ve medya araçları: Samanyolu TV örneği. Kimlikler Lütfen: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde kültürel kimlik arayışı ve temsili, 213-230.

Aydin, O., & Gurpinar, B. (2022). The Right to Have Places of Worship: The Cemevi Case in Turkey. Religions (Basel, Switzerland), 13(8), 758. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080758

Azaryahu, M., & Kook, R. (2002). Mapping the nation: street names and Arab-Palestinian identity: three case studies. Nations and Nationalism, 8(2), 195–213. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8219.00046

Başdemir, H. Y. (2011). Din dersleri ve Aleviliğin aktarılması. Liberal Düşünce Dergisi, (63), 59-72.

Baumit Türkiye. (n.d.). Balçova Cemevi. https://baumit.com.tr/references/balcova-cemevi

Bedirhanoğlu, P. (2021). Cronyism through Financialization: Turkey's Neoliberal Transformation from Özal to Erdoğan. Social Research: An International Quarterly, 88(2), 359-379. https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2021.0018

Beylikdüzü Belediyesi. (n.d.). Beylikdüzü Fatma Ana Cemevi ve Kültür Merkezi. https://www.beylikduzu.istanbul/tesis/beylikduzu-fatma-ana-cemevi-ve-kultur-merkezi

Bölükbaş, C. A. (2026, April 1). CHP'li belediyelere yönelik operasyonların çetelesi: Kaç belediye başkanı tutuklandı, suçlamalar neler, ne kadar ceza isteniyor? T24.

Cassegård, C. (2019). Counter-spaces, no-man's lands and mainstream public space: Representational spaces in homeless activism in Japan. In The Routledge Handbook of Henri Lefebvre, The City and Urban Society (pp. 164-172). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266589-17

Cem Vakfı v. Turkey, Application No. 32093/10, European Court of Human Rights (2014, February 12).

Cetin, U. and Jenkins, C. 2025. The Sunnification and Turkification of Alevi Kurds in Turkey: The Use of Education as a Colonising Practice. In: Anand, D. and Kaul, N. (eds.) Contemporary Colonialities: Kurds and Kashmiris. Pp. 59–80. London:

University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book70.d. License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Ciddioğlu, M. (2021, October 9). "Türkiye'de bugün ne kadar cemevi varsa yasadışı ve gecekondu statüsündedir"-VİDEO. PİRHA. https://pirha.org/turkiyede-bugun-ne-kadar-cemevi-varsa-yasadisi-ve-gecekondu-statusundedir-video-290809.html/

Cizre, Ü. (2004). Problems of democratic governance of civil–military relations. European Journal of Political Research, 43(1), 107–125. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00147.x

Cobangil, O. (2020). The transition of urban toponymy of Izmir: Impacts of modernism and nationalism on the street names. Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 6(4), 293-314.

Coşkun, M., & Yankaya, D. (2018). National education as a battlefield. A restructuring of Imam-Hatip Schools after the July 15th. Confluences En Méditerranée, No 107(4), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.3917/e.come.107.0073

Court of Cassation [Yargıtay] General Assembly of Civil Chambers. (2014, December 3). Decision No. 2014/990 (E. 2014/1038).

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. Sage publications.

Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesi No. 112. (2022, November 9). Resmî Gazete (No. 32049).

Cumhuriyet. (1978, December 23). Cumhuriyet gazetesi arşivi. https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/1978-12-23/0

Cumhuriyet Katalog. Cumhuriyet. (1996, October 15). https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/katalog/192/1996/10/15/5?utm_source

Çelik, A. B., Bilali, R., & Iqbal, Y. (2017). Patterns of 'othering'in Turkey: A study of ethnic, ideological, and sectarian polarisation. South European society and politics, 22(2), 217-238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1250382

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). The Sage handbook of qualitative research. Sage. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794108098034

Devletin Alevi'si olmayacağız. (2022, November 13). Evrensel. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/471758/alevi-orgutleri-devletin-alevisi-olmayacagiz

Dikbaş, E. (2024, June 5). Çocuğunun, zorunlu din dersinden muaf olması için Hristiyan oldu. Evrensel.net; Evrensel. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/520185/cocugunun-zorunlu-din-dersinden-muaf-olmasi-icin-hristiyan-oldu?utm_source

Doğu, P. (2017, December 20). Alevi olmak. T24. https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/pinar-dogu/alevi-olmak,18765?_t=1778103432428

EkoYapı Dergisi. (2023, December 1). Gün ışığıyla gelenekten geleceğe yolculuk: Balçova Cemevi. https://www.ekoyapidergisi.org/gun-isigiyla-gelenekten-gelecege-yolculuk-balcova-cemevi/

Elbistan Halk Eğitimi Merkezi. (2025). Elbistan Halk Eğitim Merkezi tarafından Elbistan Cemevi'nde açılan dikiş nakış kursu [Facebook post]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/100066681457336/posts/elbistan-halk-eğitim-merkezi-tarafından-elbistan-cemevin-de-açılan-dikiş-nakış-k/1001270875438952

Eligür, B. (2010). The mobilization of political Islam in Turkey. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511711923

Erken, B. (2020). Hukuki temelde Türkiye'de zorunlu din dersi. Selçuk Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi, 28(1), 237-263. https://doi.org/10.15337/suhfd.659796

Erman, T. (2010). Kent çeperindeki bir ‘devrimci’mahalle: 1970’lerden 2000’lere mahallenin değişen anlamı ve mahalle üzerinde yaşanan çatışmalar, çekişmeler. İdealkent, 1(2), 170-195.

Ertan, M. "Örtük Politikleşmeden Kimlik Siyasetine: Aleviliğin Politikleşmesi ve Sosyalist Sol," Birikim, no: 309-310, Ocak-Şubat 2015, s. 43-56.

Ertan, M. (2019). The latent politicization of Alevism: the affiliation between Alevis and leftist politics (1960–1980). Middle Eastern Studies, 55(6), 932-944. https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2019.1591276

Evans, M., & Kaynak, M. S. (2015). Media framing in religious–secular conflict in Turkey and Israel. International Political Science Review, 36(2), 139-152. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512113512147

Fatma Ana Cemevi 2021’de bitecek, tüm yönetimi kadınlardan oluşacak. (2020, November 11). Birgun.net; Birgün Gazetesi. https://www.birgun.net/haber/imamoglu-fatma-ana-cemevi-2021-de-bitecek-tum-yonetimi-kadinlardan-olusacak-322517

Fındık, Ö. (2013). Olağan haller [Documentary]. Türkiye.

Foucault, M. (1990). The history of sexuality: Volume 1 (R. Hurley, Trans.). Vintage. (Original work published 1978)

Godzińska, M. (2023). Invented Traditions of the Turkish Alevis–the Gathering House (Cem Evi), Prayer Ceremony (Cem), and Religious Marriage Ceremony. Przegląd Orientalistyczny, 286(1-2), 43-57. DOI 10.33896/POrient.2023.1–2.4

Gökırmaklı, İ. (2025, July 3). Yapanın yanına kâr kaldığı düzene direnenler: “32 yıl önce atılan şeriat sloganları ve yakma güdüsü aynı”. Agos.

https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/haber/yapanin-yanina-kr-kaldigi-duzene-direnenler-32-yil-once-atilan-seriat-sloganlari-ve-yakma-gudusu-ayni-34087

Gunter, M. M. (1989). Political Instability in Turkey during the 1970s. Journal of Conflict Studies, 9(1).

Hanoğlu, H. (2025). Transnational Alevism: Shaping Identity, Community and Recognition Across Borders. In The Republic of Turkey and its Unresolved Issues: 100 Years and Beyond (pp. 89-106). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-1583-4_6

Hanoğlu, H. (2026). Alevi Spatial Politics: Placemaking and the Negotiation of Visibility Across Diaspora and Homeland. Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.70034

Harvey, David. Spaces of Hope. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Harvey, D. (2000). Spaces of hope. University of California Press.

Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey, Application No. 1448/04, European Court of Human Rights (2007). Access to the judgment

Hatırlatmalar | Devlet eliyle örgütlenmiş bir katliam: Madımak. (2024, June 30). Birgun.net; Birgün Gazetesi. https://www.birgun.net/makale/hatirlatmalar-devlet-eliyle-orgutlenmis-bir-katliam-madimak-541177

Hemmati, K. (2013). Turkey post 1980 coup d'etat: the rise, the fall, and the emergence of political Islam. Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, 12(1), 58-73. https://doi.org/10.18357/illumine121201313325.

Ingold, T. (2014). That's enough about ethnography!. Hau: Journal of ethnographic theory, 4(1), 383-395. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021.

Jianbin, X. (2024). Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews in Social Service Research: A Practical Guide. National University of Singapore Social Service Research Centre.

Kadıoğlu, A. S. (2020). Türk-İslam Sentezi'nin oluşum ve gelişim süreci. OPUS International Journal of Society Researches, 16(27), 813-834. https://doi.org//10.26466/opus.699138

Kağıthane Nurtepe Cemevi. (n.d.). Bağlama kursu. https://kagithanecemevi.org.tr/Course/ReedCourse

Karabağlı, H. (2013, March 15). Türkiye'de 82 bin 693 camiye karşılık 937 cemevi var. T24. https://t24.com.tr/haber/turkiyede-82-bin-693-camiye-karsilik-937-cem-evi-var,225770

Karakaya-Stump, A. (2013). The Vefā'iyye, the Bektashiyye and Genealogies of' Heterodox'Islam in Anatolia: Rethinking the Köprülü Paradigm. Turcica, 44, 279-300.

Karakaya-Stump, A. (2019). The AKP, sectarianism, and the Alevis' struggle for equal rights in Turkey. In Alevism as an Ethno-Religious Identity (pp. 53-67). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1244935.

Karakaya-Stump, A. (2020). Kizilbash-Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community. Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474432702.

Karasapan Ö. (1988, July 16). Turkey's Tarikats - MERIP. Middle East Research and Information Project. https://www.merip.org/1988/07/turkeys-tarikats/

Karataş, Ş. (2012, May 6). Darbe ve yeniden sürgün. Evrensel. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/28464/darbe-ve-yeniden-surgun

Karataşlı, Ş. S. (2015). The origins of Turkey's "heterodox" transition to neoliberalism: The Özal decade and beyond. Journal of World-Systems Research, 21(2), 387-416. https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2015.8.

Karolewski, J. (2008). What is heterodox about Alevism? The development of anti-Alevi discrimination and resentment. Die Welt des Islams, 48(3), 434-456. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006008X364767.

Karpat, K. H. (1975). The Politics of Transition: Political Attitudes and Party Affiliation in Turkish Gecekondu. and Bendor, G.(eds)(1975) Political Participation in Turkey: Historical Background and Present Problems, Istanbul.

Kenanoglu, Ali. (11 April 2013). 'Olağan Haller'. Evrensel. www.evrensel.net/yazi/53975/olagan-haller

Keyman, E. F. (2007). Modernity, Secularism and Islam: The Case of Turkey. Theory, Culture & Society, 24(2), 215–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075008

Kızıl, N. (2021, December 31). Govt signals action for Turkey's Alevi community amid obstacles. Daily Sabah.

KONDA. (2021). KONDA İnteraktif.

Kurt, U. (2010). The Doctrine of "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" as Official Ideology of the September 12 and the "Intellectuals' Hearth–Aydınlar Ocağı" as the Ideological Apparatus of the State. European Journal of Economic and Political Studies, 111.

Kurtarir, E. (2018). Planlama kurumunun görmedikleri; Kimlik ve ibadet mekânı olarak Cemevleri. METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture. https://doi.org/10.4305/metu.jfa.2018.1.7

Kurtarir, E. (2022). The Socio-spatial Meaning of Cemevis in Istanbul's Public Space. In D. Ozkul (Ed.), The Alevis in Modern Turkey and the Diaspora (pp. 252–271). Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474492058-016

Kurtarir, E., & Okten, A. N. (2018). Invisibles For Planning Authority, Cemevis as the Places of Identity and Worship/Planlama Kurumunun Gormedikleri; Kimlik Ve Ibadet Mekani Olarak Cemevleri. Metu Journal of the Faculty of Architecture, 35(1), 157-183.

Kurul, O. (2022, September 5). "12 Eylül'den sonra her köye bir cami"ydi, şimdi Dersim'in çeşitli yerlerine asimilasyon merkezleri. Evrensel. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/462197/12-eylulden-sonra-her-koye-bir-camiydi-simdi-dersimin-cesitli-yerlerine-asimilasyon-merkezleri

Landau, Jacob M.. 1974. Radical politics in modern Turkey. Leiden: Brill.

Lefebvre, H., & Enders, M. J. (1976). Reflections on the Politics of Space. Antipode, 8(2), 30–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1976.tb00636.x

Lefebvre, Henri. The Survival of Capitalism. Translated by F Bryant. London: Allison and Busby, 1976.

Lefebvre, H. (1977). The survival of capitalism: reproduction of the relations of production. Allison & Busby.

Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Lewis, D. (2015). "Illiberal Spaces:" Uzbekistan's extraterritorial security practices and the spatial politics of contemporary authoritarianism. Nationalities Papers, 43(1), 140-159. https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.980796

Livni, E. (2002, May). Alevi identity in Turkish historiography. In 17th Middle East History and Theory Conference (Vol. 10).

Lord, C. (2018). Religious Politics in Turkey: From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP (Vol. 54). Cambridge University Press.

Mardin, Serif. "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" Daedalus (Cambridge, Mass.) (Boston) 102, no. 1 (January 1973): 169–190.

Massicard, E. (2005). Alevism in the 1960s: Social Change and Mobilisation. In Alevis and Alevism, Transformed Identities (pp. 1-26). Isis.

Massicard, E. (2020). Alevis in the 1960s. From Mobility to Mobilization. In Turkey in Turmoil : Social Change and Political Radicalization during the 1960s (pp. 49–62). De Gruyter Oldenbourg. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110654509-004

Mekansal Planlar Yapım Yönetmeliği (2014). [online]. 14 June. [Viewed 12 March 2026]. Available from: http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/06/20140614-2.htm.

Merdim, E. (2023, March 1). Balçova Cemevi. Arkitera. https://www.arkitera.com/proje/balcova-cemevi

Merrifield, A. (2002). Henri Lefebvre: A socialist in space. In N. Thrift & M. Crang (Eds.), Thinking Space (1st ed., pp. 167–182). Routledge.

Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Din Öğretimi Genel Müdürlüğü. (2023). Din kültürü ve ahlak bilgisi 7. sınıf ders kitabı. Access Link

Ng, M. K., Tang, W. S., Lee, J., & Leung, D. (2010). Spatial practice, conceived space and lived space: Hong Kong's "Piers saga" through the Lefebvrian lens. Planning Perspectives, 25(4), 411–431. https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2010.505060

Olsen, W. (2004). Triangulation in social research: qualitative and quantitative methods can really be mixed. Developments in sociology, 20, Causeway Press.

Orhan, G. (2019). Religious Freedom Governance or Institutionalization of a Heterodox Religion? Turkey's Urban Policies with Respect to Alevi Population. Peace Human Rights Governance, 3(Peace Human Rights Governance 3/2), 193-214.

Ozduzen, O. (2019). Spaces of hope in authoritarian Turkey: Istanbul's interconnected geographies of post-Occupy activism. Political Geography, 70, 34–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.01.003

Ozgur, I. (2012). Islamic schools in modern Turkey: Faith, politics, and education (No. 39). Cambridge University Press.

Öğrenci Sendikası. (2022). Gençliğin barınma sorunu raporu. Access to Report

Önis, Z. (2004). Turgut Özal and his Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective. Middle Eastern Studies, 40(4), 113–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200410001700338

Özcan, Y. Z. (1990). Ülkemizdeki cami sayıları üzerine sayısal bir inceleme. Journal of Islamic Research, 4(1), 5-20.

Palaganas, E., Sanchez, M., Molintas, Ma. V., & Caricativo, R. (2017). Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning. Qualitative Report, 22(2), 426–438. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2552

Parlak, D. (2025, July 2). Cami - Cemevi projesi (CCP). Alevi Ansiklopedisi. https://www.aleviansiklopedisi.com/?pdf_download=5818&lang=TR

Rençber, F. (2012). Alevi geleneğinde "cem evinin" tarihsel kökeni. Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi, 12(1), 73-86.

Ruuska, T. (2017). Reproduction of Capitalism in the 21st Century Higher Education and Ecological Crisis. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Ruuska, T. (2023). The reproduction of capitalism in education: Althusser and the educational ideological state apparatus. In The Palgrave international handbook of Marxism and education (pp. 243-259). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37252-0_13.

Sabahat Akkiraz'dan Alevi raporu. (2012, December 14). SoL Haber. https://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/sabahat-akkirazdan-alevi-raporu-haberi-64266

Saraç, N. (2025, February 13). 30 kişilik Alevi köyüne cami. BirGün. https://www.birgun.net/makale/30-kisilik-alevi-koyune-cami-599384

Sarıkaya, M. S. (1998). Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye'sinde Dini Tarikat ve Cemaatlerin Toplumdaki Yeri. Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, (3), 93-102.

Sarpkaya, R. (2008). Köy Enstitülerinden Sonra İmam Hatip Liseleri. Toplum ve Demokrasi Dergisi, 2(3), 1-28.

Scott, J. C. (2016). Everyday forms of resistance. In Everyday forms of peasant resistance (pp. 33-62). Routledge.

Senemoğlu, O., & Kazkondu, Ş. B. (2025). From The Ottoman Empire to The Republic of Turkey: The Military and the Center–Periphery Tension: Institutional Mediation, Political Continuity and Transformation. İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi, 14(5), 2980-3007.

Shankland, D. (2010). Maps and the Alevis: On the ethnography of heterodox Islamic groups. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 37(3), 227-239.

Sınav sorularını beraber çaldık. (2017, January 12). Trthaber.com; TRT Haber. https://www.trthaber.com/haber/turkiye/sinav-sorularini-beraber-caldik-293572.html

Sivas Katliamı'nın ardından kim ne dedi? (2015, July 2) CNN Türk. https://www.cnnturk.c/yasam/sivas-katliaminin-ardindan-kim-ne-dedi-479946

Stockholm Center for Freedom. (2022, March 1). Alevi organizations call on Turkish authorities to abolish compulsory religious classes and recognize cemevis as houses of worship. https://stockholmcf.org/alevi-organizations-call-on-turkish-authorities-to-abolish-compulsory-religious-classes-and-recognize-cemevis-as-houses-of-worship/

Şahin Ş. December, 2023). Tokat cemevleri: Tokat'ta kaç cemevi var? Acısu Köyü Cemevi'nin önemi nedir? Hürsöz Gazetesi. https://www.hursozgazetesi.com/tokat-cemevleri-tokatta-kac-cemevi-var-acisu-koyu-cemevinin-onemi-nedir

Taşdelen Cemevi (December, 2025). Hacı Bektaş-i Veli Kütüphanemizin Açılışı. [Instagram post]. https://www.instagram.com/p/DSPWAzdDfYa/

Teber, Y. (2025). The Kizilbash/Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community: by Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Tee, C. (2016). The Gülen movement in Turkey: The politics of Islam and modernity. Bloomsbury Publishing.

T.C. Başbakanlık. (July, 2012). Türkiye'deki cemevleri: Soru ve cevap. https://static.bianet.org/files/doc_files/000/000/646/original/Türkiyedeki_Cemevleri_soru_ve_cevap.PDF

T.C. Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Ortaöğretim Genel Müdürlüğü. (2016). 667 sayılı kanun hükmünde kararname sonucu kapatılan özel okul listesi. View the Document

T.C. Resmî Gazete. (2022, November 9). Cumhurbaşkanlığı Kararnamesi No. 112 (Sayı: 32008). https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/11/20221109-11.pdf

Terkoğlu, B. (2022, August 4). Barış Terkoğlu yazdı: Soruları çalanlar devleti çalıyor. Cumhuriyet.com.tr; Cumhuriyet. https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/baris-terkoglu-yazdi-sorulari-calanlar-devleti-caliyor-1965292

Treaty of Lausanne, July 24, 1923, 28 L.N.T.S. 11, arts. 37-44.

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. (1924). Köy Kanunu (The Village Law). (Kanun No. 442). https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.442.pdf

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. (1925). Tekke ve zaviyelerle türbelerin seddine ve türbedarlıklar ile birtakım ünvanların men ve ilgasına dair kanun (Kanun No. 677). https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.3.677.pdf

Uzer, U. (2024). Mosque Construction as Nation-Building: The Case of Turkey. The Journal of the Middle East and Africa, 15(4), 427- 444. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2024.2408820.

Van Bruinessen, M. (1996). Kurds, Turks and the Alevi revival in Turkey. Middle East Report, (200), 7-10.

Van Bruinessen, M. (2023). The Alevis: religious, ethnic or political minority?. Minorities and Diasporas in Turkey, 115-135.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2012). The Role of the Press in the Reproduction of Racism. In Migrations: interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 15-29). Vienna: Springer Vienna.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. The handbook of discourse analysis, 466-485.

Van Ingen, C. (2002). Unmapping social space: The Toronto Frontrunners, Lefebvre and geographies of resistance.

Wright, T. (1997). Out of place: Homeless mobilizations, subcities, and contested landscapes. State University of New York Press.

Yanardağoğlu, E. (2013). Elusive Citizenship: Media, Minorities and Freedom of Communication in Turkey in the Last Decade. İletişim, (19).

Yargıtay Hukuk Genel Kurulu. (2014, December 3). E. 2014/1038, K. 2014/990.

Yavuz, M. H. (2003). Islamic political identity in Turkey. Oxford University Press.

Yıldırım, E. (2012). Cemevleri ve cemevlerinin dini ve toplumsal fonksiyonları. Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 12(2), 157-176.

Yildiz, A. A., & Verkuyten, M. (2011). Inclusive victimhood: Social identity and the politicization of collective trauma among Turkey's Alevis in Western Europe. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 17(3), 243-269.

Yılmaz, T. (2012, July 27). Cemevi sayısı 598. Hürriyet. https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/cemevi-sayisi-598-21077587

Yonucu, D. (2014). Türkiye'de Bir Yönetim Biçimi Olarak Mekansal Ayrıştırma: Tehlikeli Mahalleler, Olağanüstü Hal ve Militarist Sınır Çizimi'[Spatial segregation as a technology of governance in Turkey: dangerous neighbourhoods, state of emergency and the drawing of militarized boundaries]. Yeni Istanbul Çalışmaları [New Istanbul Studies] Metis, Istanbul.

Yonucu, D. (2024). Sectarianism as racism: the collective punishment of Alevi communities in Turkey. Race & Class, 65(3), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968231205144

Zieleniec, A. (2018). Lefebvre's Politics of Space: Planning the Urban as Oeuvre. Urban Planning, 3(3), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v3i3.1343

32. Gün. (2023, July 29). Türkiye'nin Alevileri | 1980–2000 (2. bölüm). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX8mVteLmgo