Rethinking the Justice and Development Party's 'Alevi openings'

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ABSTRACT
The 'Alevi openings' launched in 2007 by the Justice and Development Party have been widely lauded as a historic and unprecedented step in the Turkish Republic. In contrast, this article places the 'openings' in a wider historical context, analyzing them in relation to processes of nation-building. Firstly, it is argued that the 'openings' marked continuity with previous interventions by state actors, including the military, dating back at least to the 1960s. Secondly, it is contended that these interventions should be regarded as a process of re-framing Alevism within a Turkish–Islamic framework, consigning it to 'invisibility,' rather than as democratization.

KEYWORDS Alevis; nationalism; Turkey; nation-building; Turkish Islam

Introduction

Since 2007, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has periodically revived what has been termed the 'Alevi opening' (*Alevi açılımı*). The initiative was presented as part of a wider policy of what the AKP described as a 'Democratic opening' (*Demokratik açılım*), otherwise named the 'National Unity and Brotherhood Project' (*Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi*), which was purportedly concerned with addressing the demands and problems of Turkey's various ethnic and religious communities including Kurds and Roma.[1] The initial stage of the AKP's first Alevi opening involved symbolic moves such as participation of AKP politicians in Alevi fast breaking, and was followed by a series of seven workshops held with Alevi and non-Alevi actors from 2009 to 2010. The Alevi openings were widely described as a 'historic' step in the life of the Republic.[2] For the current president and former prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who stated that 'this is the first time that the official offices of the state have regarded Alevis as interlocutors,' the opening marked a new era in the state's approach to Alevis.[3] Many scholarly analyses have echoed the official line in regarding the openings as heralding an important change and a liberal shift in the state's policy towards the Alevi community.
In contrast, this article suggests a need to re-think the Alevi openings by situating them within a wider historical context and in relation to the processes of Turkish nation-building that ultimately reproduces the hegemonic status of Sunni Muslims within the nation.

Indeed, the approach of the Turkish state to the 'Alevi issue' is an important indicator of the nature of citizenship, the boundaries of national identity, democratization and state-religion relations in the Republic. Alevis,[4] estimated to comprise 15–25 percent of the country's population of Turkey, are the second largest faith community after Sunni Muslims.[5] The matter of Alevi identity and the extent to which it overlaps with the Turkish and Kurdish ethnic projects, and should be defined as within or outside Islam, remains highly contested.[6] Alevi communities have faced not only persecution but also the systematic Islamization and Turkification policies pursued by the late Ottoman state and subsequently under the Republic. In the Republic, alongside official discrimination[7] and political violence,[8] Alevis have suffered from 'invisibility,' reflecting their disadvantaged status under the ostensibly secular state, where citizenship and nationality have been heavily imbued with Sunni Muslim symbols and values.[9]

Against this background, the steps by the AKP, as a (Sunni) Islamist political party, appeared as an unprecedented move and a turning point in relations between the state and Alevis. Scholars pointed to the Alevi opening policies as an example of Turkey's democratization under the AKP, at least until its more visibly authoritarian turn in 2013, and lauded them as a move away from an authoritarian laicism or 'assertive secularism.'[10] Yet, despite these assessments, the Alevi openings have yielded little in terms of addressing the concerns raised by the Alevi movement.[11] The AKP's first Alevi opening effectively ended in 2011 without tangible changes in policy, following a final report evaluating the series of workshops held with a variety of Alevi and non-Alevi actors. Subsequently, it was only in late 2013 that government circles began to talk about reviving the Alevi opening, which was announced by then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in a speech in (pre-dominantly Alevi) Tunceli[12] in November 2014, although, again, little progress followed in the way of concrete measures. Significantly, both the opening launched in 2009

and the attempted revival in 2014 had emerged in the context of social unrest including the Gezi Park protests for which the AKP had blamed Alevis, in part to distort and undermine popular challenges against the government by sectarianizing politics. In addition, the emergence of the crisis in neighboring Syria in 2011 was accompanied by an increasingly sectarian tilt in the AKP's domestic and foreign policy.[13] As such, neither the initial opening nor its subsequent revival marked periods of rapprochement or engagement with problems encountered by Alevi citizens. In fact, the government continued to use sectarian language and accusations targeting Alevis, characterizing *cemevis* as places of terror supported by Syria.[14]

In trying to identify the reasons for the failure of the Alevi openings, scholars focused on a number of factors. These included the shift in the AKP's political priorities, contention within the AKP and Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, PRA)[15] and concerns over upsetting the Sunni Hanafi base,[16] as well as the organization and composition of the workshops that 'turned into a platform where, in essence, Alevi demands were evaluated from a Sunni perspective.'[17] Many scholarly works, alongside the AKP and other state actors, have argued that the fragmented nature of the Alevi movement impeded the formulation of unified demands and contributed to the failure of the workshops.[18] Similarly, Alevis have also been blamed for their alleged attachment to 'authoritarian secularism' and their distrust of the AKP's intentions.[19] More widely, there has been a focus on the particular characteristics of Turkish state-religion relations, arguing that the AKP, like the so-called former 'Kemalist' administrations, have continued a tradition of trying to control religious groups under 'tutelary secularism.'[20] Furthermore, Bardakçı has argued that the AKP has had to walk a 'tightrope between democracy and identity,' arguing that the government failed to address the identity demands of Alevis because of its desire not to upset its Sunni Muslim voter base.[21]

Moving on from these approaches that have tended to approach the AKP's Alevi opening within the framework of democratization, liberalization or as relating to secularism and religious freedom, this article outlines how this process has instead involved the reproduction of the boundaries of Turkish national identity as Sunni Muslim. In this vein, the discussion below proceeds firstly by outlining the approach to Alevism in the process of early Turkish nation-building. The following sections examine what is described here as the first Alevi opening in the 1960s and subsequently the AKP's initiatives, before concluding with a discussion based on a comparison of both periods. Consequently, the intention of this paper is not to describe in detail the various steps of the AKP's Alevi openings which have already been well documented by others,[22] but to make two arguments. Firstly, based on historical research, it is argued that rather than constituting a break or a 'historic step,' the AKP's Alevi openings in fact marked continuity with previous interventions by state actors such as the military on the Alevi matter dating back at least to the 1960s. Secondly, the discussion below suggests that all of these 'openings' can be characterized as state interventions for the purposes of re-articulation of Alevism within an Islamic framework. In this sense, they involve not a democratic project of negotiating and addressing grievances to establish equal citizenship but a process of nationalist absorption to, again, consign Alevis to 'invisibility.' The openings should therefore be considered as reproducing the parameters of exclusion and inclusion of Turkish nationalism.

Turkish nation-building and Alevi identity

The Turkish state's acceptance of Alevis as interlocutors was lauded as the major achievement of the Alevi openings and a pluralistic turn in national identity. Yet, less attention has been given to how state actors including the AKP government, have defined and delimited the parameters of this engagement in a manner that constitute interventions in shaping Alevi identity and in turn, the boundaries of the Turkish nation. Indeed, the state has a privileged role in the construction of national identity given its powers and resources that place it in a uniquely powerful position to enforce particular boundaries; 'only those in control of the means of violence will be able to force their ethnic scheme of interpretation onto reality.'[23] States, or institutions more generally, structure the field in which specific types of boundary construction occur and 'provide incentives for actors to draw certain types of boundaries…and to emphasize certain levels of ethnic differentiation rather than others.'[24] It is in this sense that the Alevi openings can be characterized as efforts to shape Alevi identity, understood here as a 'contingent political project'[25] rather than as primordial, in the sense of being natural, fixed and immutable over time.

Tracing the nature of the engagement with Alevi identity during early Turkish nation-building requires and understanding of the Ottoman legacy. Perceived as heterodox or heretical and an internal enemy, communities designated as Alevis or *Kızılbaş* had not only faced persecution in the Ottoman Empire[26] but were the target of Islamization/Sunnification during the Hamidian period (1876–1909). Concerned with 'saving the state,' Abdulhamid II's efforts to imagine and construct a Sunni Muslim millet, in the face of multiple challenges to the Empire including rising nationalism, had involved an increased focus on the Sunni Hanafi school of thought as the official religious denomination. Consequently, the Ottoman state had undertaken both the active encouragement of conversion (through missionary activity) and coercion in order to create a 'reliable core population who would be duly imbued with the "correct" ideology.'[27] Propagation of orthodoxy was ensured by the school, mosque and barracks, with the ulama and the (Sunni) Sufi sheikhs who were tasked with fighting heresy.[28] Various measures were taken including the construction of mosques in Alevi villages and the surveillance and indoctrination of Alevis by Sunni Hanafi imams.[29]

With the drift towards Turkism under the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP) particularly in the aftermath of the Balkan wars in 1912–13, nascent Turkish nationalism had increasingly begun to influence state policies towards the Alevi communities. During 1914–15 the CUP commissioned investigations of Alevis that were conducted by Baha Said Bey.[30] These were part of a broader ethnographic research agenda for the purposes of understanding the loyalties and characteristics of non-Sunni and non-Muslim communities, partly motivated by fears of the influence of Christian missionaries and Armenians.[31] This period had thereby marked the beginning of systematic Turkification alongside ongoing Islamization of Alevis. Baha Said's research had aimed to prove that Alevis were of Turkish origin by drawing links between Alevi practices and Central Asian shamanism, re-articulating Alevis as 'real Turks' that had carried and preserved Turkish customs and traditions, race, blood and language since the pre-Islamic and pre-Ottoman era.[32] Through this rearticulation, Alevi identity was instrumentalized in the construction of Turkish national identity in order to posit ethnic continuity with Central Asia.[33] Indeed, as Williams has argued, nation-building involves a transformist hegemony whereby heterogeneity is homogenized through 'appropriations that devalue and deny their link to marginalized others' contributions to the patrimony.'[34] In this vein, while elements of this re-imagined Alevi identity were appropriated for the nationalist project, Alevi identity was not recognized but rather consigned to 'invisibility.' Instead, the subsequent assimilation of the 'marginals' into a constructed majority bloc – in this case defined as Sunni Muslim Turkish – only serves to 'further expand and reinforce the bloc's control over the state.'[35]

Conversely, Turkish national identity has been intertwined with Islam. Islam not only provided a rich symbolic resource in nation-building, but also institutionalized in the Republic under the PRA that housed the Sunni Ottoman ulama, thereby giving the state a Sunni Hanafi coloring.[36] Consequently, scholars have highlighted elements of continuity between the Turkish Republic and late Ottoman Empire in the domain of identity, noting the role of Sunni Hanafi Islam.[37] As Kehl-Bodrogi has argued, the Turkish nation was conceived as an:

> ethnically and culturally homogenous unity. As nation was imagined as Turkish by 'race' (ırk) and (Sunni) Islam by religion […] expressions of deviating collective identities, may they be ethnically or religiously determined [such as Alevism], were regarded as threats to the nation's unity and treated as separatism.[38]

Against this context, under the new Republic declared in 1923, the state continued to absorb and re-articulate Alevi identity within an Islamic framing. The works of Baha Said and the articulation of Alevis as 'real Turks' and as constituting a specific form of 'Turkish Islam' as opposed to 'Arabised Islam'[39] came to form the basis of nationalist historiography as seen in the writings of the prominent politicians and historians of that time.[40] Yet alongside the propagation of Alevism as Turkish Islam, Alevis continued to be rejected as a heretical 'other' perceived as a suspect potential fifth column (of Iran) and a security threat requiring continued surveillance. Indeed, a common thread of the documentation of the one-party period is the identification of the *Kızılbaş* faith as antithetical to Turkish identity owing to its alleged hatred toward Sunni Muslims and what was perceived as a mistaken identification and affinity between the *Kızılbaş* and Kurdishness.[41] Just such logic can be observed in the documentation regarding the violent military campaigns in Dersim between the 1920 and 1930s. Similarly, a secret report prepared for the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) government by Hasan Reşid Tankut in 1949, which warned that despite their affinity with the values of the Republic Alevis harboured socialistic characteristics and hence were open to communist infiltration, suggests that 'correction' or assimilation

was insufficient to overcome the marginalization of Alevis in relation to Turkish national identity.[42] Indeed, this two-pronged approach continued in the multi-party period, whereby on the one hand Alevism was propagated as Turkish Islam but at the same time regarded with suspicion.

'Alevi openings' in the republic

Most studies of the AKP's Alevi opening, as noted above, have regarded it as an important turning point in terms of the relationship between the state and Alevis. Unsurprisingly, Köse, writing from a think tank close to the AKP government, states that 'for the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic and the Ottoman state, state authorities have acknowledged the victimhood and traumatic experiences of Alevis.'[43] Indeed, this has become a near consensus approach within analyses of the Alevi openings. Soner and Toktaş, for instance, concluded that 'it was evident that the government was ready to abandon state-centered and Sunni-based definitions of Alevi identity concerning the status of cemhouses [Alevi places of worship] and the representation of Alevism in the compulsory religious courses.'[44] Likewise, in his study of ethnicity in Turkey, Şener Aktürk too describes the opening as a 'watershed in Turkey's political history regarding state policies on ethnicity.'[45] For Massicard,

> when the AK Party came to power, Alevis widely considered it to be a Sunni, or even an Islamist party, which excluded Alevis and their demands. …more unexpectedly, however, the AK Party government took two historically unprecedented moves concerning the Alevi issue: it became the first government ever to launch a state policy designed to respond to claims of Alevis.[46]

Conversely, while they note an 'ambivalence' in the AKP's aims, Borovalı and Boyraz nevertheless maintained that it was a 'historic step'[47] and that 'in the final analysis the workshops represented a very important opportunity for Alevi organizations to be heard.'[48] An exception is Ayhan Yalçınkaya who has argued that the Alevi openings did not mark a fundamental change in 'Sunni mentality' or state practices aimed at (re)shaping Alevi rituals.[49] Contrary to the general approaches, the history of official state engagement with Alevism during the multi-party era, related below, demonstrates the ways in which the AKP's Alevi openings since 2007 marked continuity with previous state interventions to re-shape Alevi identity rather than a break or unprecedented step of democratization.

The first 'Alevi opening'

An important catalyst for the initiation of what will be described here as the first 'Alevi opening' was the dynamics of political competition unleashed with the move to multipartism from 1946. During the one-party regime, Alevis had adopted what Zırh has described as a 'republican cloak of invisibility' in the sense that they had 'voluntarily accepted their invisibility for the sake of the republican ideals that promised equality in anonymity.'[50] The transition to multipartism at the end of the 1940s had coincided with rapid industrialization, urbanization, migration and consequently social differentiation. In this period, the Alevis became visible in public life again.[51] Importantly, increasing competition for access to resources and among political parties accentuated Alevi-Sunni divisions and was partly responsible for numerous bouts of ethnic violence against Alevis.[52] In this context of increased visibility, Alevi political mobilization in the 1960s has been described as the first Alevi revival with the second revival taking place in the 1990s.[53]

It was against this backdrop of increased social contestation and accentuated group boundaries that the first Alevi opening arose following the 27 May 1960 military coup d'etat. In particular, from 1961, President Cemal Gürsel, the head of the junta regime, had begun to engage publicly with Alevi figures who had been invited by him to the presidential palace to raise their concerns and demands.[54] Following these engagements, various Hacı Bektaş associations were founded and the Hacı Bektaş Lodge was re-opened in 1964 as a museum.[55] The shadow of the military actors could also be seen in the establishment in 1966 of what was widely perceived as an Alevi party, The Unity Party (*Türkiye Birlik Partisi*, TBP), which was headed by a retired general and former member of the nationalist Republican Villagers Nation Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi*, CKMP), Hasan Tahsin Berkman. In line with the state, the TBP also emphasized and articulated Alevism as Turkish Islam. In parallel to these public engagements of state actors with Alevi representatives, legislative efforts were also being led by President Gürsel and the military leadership. Above all, this involved the proposal to establish a Department of Denominations (*Mezhepler Müdürlüğü*, DoD) within the body of the PRA. With the push of the military leadership, in

April 1961, the idea of a creation of a 'Department of Denominations […] to meet the needs of denominations that are included within the Muslim establishment [author's emphasis]' was proposed by the nationalist-rightist CKMP members during the constitutional debates within the Assembly of Representatives.[56] While the proposal itself was rejected without further discussion in the Assembly, it continued to resurface as proposals made by former military members or politicians close to the army throughout the first half of the 1960s. In 1961, the military cabinet had even suggested bringing to the PRA a leading Alevi figure, Feyzullah Ulusoy. The Ulusoy family is the hereditary representative of the Hacı Bektaş Veli lodge, who also had a conceptualization of Alevism in line with the military's articulation.[57] Significantly, the TBP had also called for the representation of Alevis within the PRA.[58]

Yet, despite this engagement with Alevi figures, the first Alevi opening should not be seen as an attempt at a more pluralistic re-articulation of Turkish national identity nor a recognition of Alevism. Instead, military actors saw the establishment of a DoD in particular as a means to dissolve manifestations of ethnic difference, Kurdish identity, through its absorption within the (Sunni Muslim) PRA and its re-articulation within an Islamic (Turkish) framework. In another words, Islamization (and Sunnification) had been conceived as a means of Turkification. This is highlighted by Minister of State Hayri Mumcuoğlu words that 'we have to establish an Alevi department within the PRA. Alevis, like the Sunnis will easily separate themselves from Kurdishness once then find a point of authority in the [Presidency] of Religious Affairs.'[59]

Despite these persistent efforts by the military to establish a DoD in the early 1960s, the matter encountered significant opposition both within the PRA and by conservative groups resulting in the withdrawal of the proposal by the CHP government.[60] Conservative groups claimed that such a move would reignite Sunni-Shi'a schisms and destroy national unity. In response to the conservative reaction, an Alevi Declaration was issued in 1963 by a number of Alevi university students who referred to Alevis 'as Turks by race, and Muslim by religion' and gave support to the idea of a DoD.[61] However, the first Alevi opening and the question of any accommodation or representation of Alevism within the PRA had ended by 1966 following a derogatory statement against Alevis by the former PRA President İbrahim Elmalı.

Subsequently, Alevi mobilization in the 1960s had been followed in the 1970s, an era of intense polarization between left and right politics, by increasing engagement of Alevis with leftist politics.[62] With this development, the notion of 3Ks, which combined *Komünist* (communist), *Kızılbaş* and *Kürt* (Kurd), was formulated and came to be perceived by the state as a key threat to national security. Not for the first time, Alevi communities became the target of Islamist [8] and fascist violence that resulted in massacres such as in Maraş in 1978. Against this context, the 12 September 1980 military coup that followed was justified by the junta regime as necessary to restore order and involved a thorough restructuring of the state, society and economy. The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, a policy of Islamization, was adopted as a means to stem political polarization and ensure national unity, and triggered a new wave of Islamization efforts against Alevis. Widespread political repression especially of the Left, after the coup, the development of an 'Alevi diaspora' in Europe, and the rise of Islamist and Kurdish nationalist movements were important factors in the 'Alevi revival' at the end of the 1980s.[63] The revival involved increasing political mobilization in which the Alevi movement pursued their demands for equal citizenship.[64] It was in this context that the idea of a DoD resurfaced and some 'state friendly'[65] Alevi associations, such as the Cem Foundation, have raised and advocated the representation of Alevism within the PRA since the 1990s. This has not been, however, necessarily a widely supported policy by Alevi organizations that were established and became active during this period. In contrast, wide sections of the Alevi movement have tended to perceive such proposals as an assimilationist policy of the state and thereby rejected integration within the PRA.[66] In addition, various 'centre-left' parties have continued to raise the idea of a DoD since the 1990s and 2000s. For instance, the matter was also proposed by the Social Democratic People's Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Halk Partisi*) in a statement in 1991 and during debates on a new constitution by the Democratic Left Party (*Demokratik Sol Partisi*) in 1993.[67] Particularly following the 28 February 1997 military intervention, which has been framed as an anti-Islamist move by the military, there were efforts to revive and re-articulate Alevism as Turkish Islam by various state actors collaborating and funding certain state-friendly Alevi organizations. A reflection of these efforts could also be seen for instance by the call of the leader of the ultranationalist National Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) – a party that has been historically implicated in anti-Alevi violence and campaigns – to embrace Alevis, during an election rally in 1999.[68]

However, given the period of unstable coalition governments and fragmentation of political life in the 1990s, a second concerted attempt at an Alevi opening was to wait until 2007.

The second 'Alevi opening'

Unlike the first Alevi opening, which had been chiefly driven by military actors in the 1960s, the second opening was initiated by a (Sunni) Islamist political party. Yet there were some important parallels between both openings. Firstly, both openings had been initiated in the context of rising social contestation. In part reflecting a sectarian approach the AKP government in particular alleged that rising opposition to the party stemmed largely from Alevis. The AKP's opening in 2007 had begun prior to the general elections in July and had followed the anti-AKP demonstrations, which pro-AKP circles maintained had been largely composed of Alevis.[69] Similarly, the subsequent revival of the opening by the AKP had preceded important general elections in 2015, and followed the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations, which again, pro-AKP circles have claimed were largely composed of Alevis.[70]

Secondly, it is possible to identify significant continuity in terms of the two openings and their approach to Alevism, despite the change in the main state actors. Both the organization in terms of the choice of participants as well the content of the debates suggest clearly that the second opening could also be considered a state intervention concerned with re-articulating Alevism rather than a democratic debate or a liberal/pluralistic turn in state policy. Criticisms of the organization of the workshops held between June 2009 and January 2010 have pointed to the exclusion of key segments of the Alevi movement such as the diaspora European organizations, and the fact that they were composed of largely non-Alevi participants, except in the first and seventh meetings.[71] Likewise, aside from organizations such as the Cem Foundation, the Alevi movement has been largely critical of the openings, perceiving them as assimilationist strategies of the state.[72] For this reason, some of the initial participants in the workshops had decided to withdraw from the process.[73]

If we look at the content of the workshops, a key criticism is that rather than engaging with Alevi demands for equal citizenship, the discussions turned into theological arguments attempting to define Alevism, and to how the demands of Alevis can be reconciled with the Sunni public. In this vein, Bardakçı has argued that the AKP was inclined to 'view the demands of the Alevi from a religious standpoint rather than as a human rights issue.'[74] This can be observed in the final report of the workshops, which identifies the fundamental problem of Alevism as being 'how Alevism […] will be transmitted to future generations.'[75] This focus on definition is apparent from the continuous and (implicitly) negative references to the Alevi community's allegedly highly fragmented and heterogeneous approach to Alevism.[76] Yet, the report nevertheless repeatedly declares that despite the 'ambiguity' around the definition of Alevism, 'in reality' it is a manner of 'thinking' and 'living' that is both within and shaped by Islamic tradition,[77] and that:

> the approach that is widely accepted with regards to Alevism is that it above all is part of religious groups that fundamentally have Islam as their root and has particularities that are specific to Anatolia.[78]

On this basis, it is argued that the definition of Alevism can therefore be clarified with the aid of Sunni Islamic theologians who are presented as the purveyors of objective knowledge of religion:[79]

> [Theologians]…make a significant contribution to the updating of society's conception of religion clearly can have an impact in uncovering Alevism's historical, sociological and religious roots.[80]

Such a desire to articulate Alevism within an Islamic framework is also suggested by the comments of Necdet Subaşı, the coordinator of the Alevi workshops, in addressing a meeting with Alevi faith leaders where he claims:

> In the past six workshops we have not seen such a strong emphasis on Islam, I am sorry to say. As someone who witnessed all six workshops until now, this enthusiastic and intensive reference to Islam catches one's attention. But let me also ask openly: 'Where are you in real life?'[81]

On the other hand, Alevis that do not accept the re-framing of Alevism in Islamic terms are approached with suspicion, branded separationist, marginal or extremists.[82] The alleged 'oppositional' character of Alevis is linked to their historical involvement with Marxist-socialist movements, and it is claimed that failure to address the Alevi issue will result in radicalizations of Alevis and thereby pose a

‘security problem of multiple dimensions.’[83] It was not just Alevis on the ideological left that were treated with suspicion however. The report also adopts a critical tone of Alevis that are described as having a ‘deep devotion’ to the founding principles of the Republic including laicism, and thereby allegedly unable to question the destructive impact of Republican reforms on their faith.[84] As Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu note, the emphasis on how to ensure ‘unity and brotherhood’ during the theological discussions in the workshops, suggests that there is a distrust of the commitment of the Alevi community to the unity of the nation and the state.[85] A similar stance can be observed in the discussion of Alevi approaches to compulsory education in the final report, where it is argued that unlike Alevis, Sunnis adopt a more ‘balanced’ and ‘conciliatory’ approach to the state that accepts its policies for ensuring ‘togetherness.’[86] It was within this overall approach that the recommendation to stablish a DoD within the PRA was put forward.[87] Yet, similar to the first Alevi opening in the 1960s, has faced resistance by the PRA and was subsequently scrapped.[88]

Conclusion

Scholarly works that have characterized the AKP’s Alevi openings as a historic break have tended to mirror the government’s own representations of the project. This article has argued that, instead, the AKP’s opening should be seen as marking continuity rather than a break with previous engagements of state actors with Alevis. In this sense, the efforts of the junta regime in the early 1960s is considered as marking the first Alevi opening in terms of state actors’ engagement with Alevis as interlocutors. Crucially, both of openings are distinguished by the common aim of re-articulating Alevism within an Islamic–Turkish framework. Consequently, it is suggested that the openings should be understood within the framework of transformist hegemony of nationalism involving the continuous absorption of antagonistic elements to render them obsolete in the construction of a historic majority bloc.[89] Accordingly, it can be argued that the various state interventions discussed above reflected not so much a recognition but rather the processes of nation-building. Alevism is both instrumentalized and absorbed by reconstructing it within an Islamic and Turkish framing, thereby consigning it to invisibility. At the same time, through this process, the boundaries and parameters of exclusion and inclusion of Turkish nationalism are drawn and reproduced.

For the state actors, Alevis are regarded not only as too close to ideologies like communism, but also appear to require Islamization/Sunnification to become Turkish, as they are perceived to be imbricated with Shiism and Kurdishness. Crucially, therefore, these processes reaffirm and reproduce the Sunni (Hanafi) Muslim character of Turkish national identity. Any recognition of Alevism outside this Turkish–Islamic framework, whether as Kurds or as non-Muslims, is considered as posing a danger to the hegemony of this constructed (Sunni) Muslim Turkish historic bloc. Yet, there are limits to absorption through homogenization. As Williams argues, those that are marginalized from the imagined nation then either continue to insist on their putative root identity and are rejected as true members of the nation, or they adopt the new identity and are:

> ‘constantly required to show proof of their contribution to the nation as they search for a place in its political and economic structure...’ but ‘soon learn that such proofs are often considered by the “non-ethnics” as little more than feathers and flourishes’.[90]

In this sense, Turkification and Islamization is bound to remain insufficient for state actors, with Alevis continuing to be perceived not just a heretical other, but as both marginal and suspect, as evidenced by the continued surveillance of Alevis and depictions of the community as a potential fifth column within the Republic. Consequently, the various state engagements with Alevis and interventions against Alevism have involved a simultaneous process of its rejection as well as an effort to absorb Alevism within a more acceptable framework for the state and thereby make it obsolete.

Notes

1. Alevi Çalıştayı; Köse, "Alevi Opening," 5.
2. This was the case for the pro-government media as well scholars. See "Alevi Açılımında Tarihi Adım." Yeni Şafak, November 25, 2014. http://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/alevi-aciliminda-tarihi-adim-2028614; "Hükümetten Tarihi Alevi Açılımı." Star Gazete, November 22, 2014. http://www.star.com.tr/politika/hukumetten-tarihi-alevi-acilimi-haber-970141/; Pınar, "Religion–State Relations"; Borovalı and Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops"; Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism"; Bardakçı, "The Alevi Opening"; Massicard, "Alevi Critique of the AK Party."
3. Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 82.
4. The term 'Alevi' is considered here as an 'umbrella' (but not necessarily synonymous) term for various heterogonous communities, such as Bektashi and Kızılbaş. See Erdemir, "Tradition and Modernity," 938; Zırh, "Following the Dead," 1765.
5. Erdemir, "Tradition and Modernity," 938.
6. See for examples: Şener, Alevilerin Etnik Kimliği; Bayrak, Alevilik ve Kürtler; Ocak, Alevi ve Bektaşi; Shankland, Islam and Society. Sökefeld has also argued that the master narrative of Alevism employs Sunni Islam as a 'negative template' in order to define itself; Sökefeld, Struggling for Recognition, 4.
7. See for example rulings by the European Court of Human Rights; "European Court Condemns Turkey for Discriminating Against Alevis." Reuters, December 2, 2014. http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-alevi-rightsidUSKCN0JG1RL20141202; "Turkey Discriminates against Alevi Faith, ECHR rules." Deutsche Welle, April 26, 2016. http://www.dw.com/en/turkeydiscriminates-against-alevi-faith-echr-rules/a-19214883.
8. The state has been held directly responsible for the Dersim (1937–38) and Gazi (1995) massacres and is implicated in communal violence and massacres of Alevis including in Maraş (1978); Çorum (1980); Sivas (1993).
9. Zırh, "Following the Dead," 1764.
10. Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism"; Borovalı and Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops."
11. For example, key demands made by the prominent elements of the Alevi movement can be seen on the website of a leading umbrella organization, the Alevi Bektashi Federation, ttp://www.alevifederasyonu.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=255&Itemid=264.
12. The choice of Tunceli, formerly named Dersim until 1936, was significant. Tunceli is the only province in Turkey where there is an Alevi majority and it was the subject of a violent ethnic-cleansing campaign by the one-party regime during 1937–38.
13. See for examples: Çağaptay, "Will Syria's Sectarian Divisions Spill Over into Turkey?"; Hinnebusch, "Back to Enmity."
14. See, for example, statements by President Erdoğan, including reference to the "Sunni" victims of the Reyhanlı terror attack in 2013 and the accusations that cemevis are places of terror; Metiner, Mehmet. 2013. "Cemevleri Terör Yuvası." Yeni Şafak, October 10. http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/mehmetmetiner/ cemevleri-teror-yuvasi-39985; "Erdoğan: Reyhanlı'da 53 Sünni Vatandaşımız Şehit Edildi." Radikal, June 14, 2013. http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogan-reyhanlida-53-sunni-vatandasimiz-sehit-edildi-1137612/.
15. Massicard, "Alevi Critique of the AK Party."
16. Bardakçı, "The Alevi Opening," 350; Borovalı and Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops," 146.
17. Borovalı and Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops," 145–6. See also Yalçınkaya, "Alevilik Hendeğinde AKP'nin Devesi."
18. This is a misleading but widespread evaluation of the Alevi movement despite the fact that there are clear common demands. See note 11.
19. Borovalı and Boyraz, "Turkish secularism and Islam," 485–6; Massicard, "Alevi Critique of the AK Party."
20. Özkul, "Alevi Openings."
21. Bardakçı, "The Alevi Opening," 367.
22. See, for example, Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor.
23. Wimmer, "The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries," 994.
24. Ibid., 986.
25. Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups."
26. However, this is not to assume the existence of a primordial Alevi identity. As Bozarslan has noted, in the Ottoman Empire, 'the concepts "Alevi", "Kızılbaş" or even "Bektashi" were used to denote a nebulous entity embracing various religious or political oppositions.' Bozarslan, "Alevism and the Myths of Research," 5.
27. Deringil, The Well-protected Domains, 220; Ateş, Yurttaşlığın Kıyısında Aleviler.
28. Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition."
29. Enver Behnan Şapolyo quoted in Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis", 56.
30. Colonel Baha Sait was a former member of the CUP central committee.
31. Ateş, "Ulusal Kimlik," 269–70; Dressler, Writing Religion, 127.
32. See Ata, Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi; Küçük, The Role of the Bektashis, 907–8; Ateş, "Ulusal Kimlik," 269-70.
33. Ateş, "Ulusal Kimlik," 269–70.
34. Williams, "A Class Act," 434–6.

35. Ibid.
36. See Lord, "Between Islam and the Nation."
37. See, for example, Çetinsaya "Rethinking Nationalism and Islam"; Çağaptay, Islam, Secularism and Nationalism; Kirişci, "Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship."
38. Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis," 64.
39. Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition"; Massicard, Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya, 45.
40. Ateş, Yurttaşlığın Kıyısında Aleviler, 263.
41. See for instance Tankut, Zazalar Üzerine Sosyolojik Tetkikler; Çalışlar, Dersim Raporu. See also the works of Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, a prominent member of the one-party CHP elites who described Alevis as being under Safavid influence against the Ottoman Empire. Uluğ, Tunceli Medeniyete Açılıyor, 89–92.
42. Tankut, Zazalar Üzerine," 36–8, 107–10; Zırh, Becoming Visible, 134.
43. Köse, "Alevi Opening."
44. Soner and Toktaş, "Alevis and Alevism".
45. Aktürk, Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood.
46. Massicard, "Alevi Critique of the AK Party."
47. Borovalı and Boyraz, "The Alevi Workshops," 145.
48. Borovalı and Boyraz, "Turkish Secularism and Islam," 482.
49. See: Yalçınkaya, "Alevilik Hendeğinde AKP'nin Devesi"; Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu.
Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor.
50. Zırh, Becoming Visible, 138, 140–1.
51. Ibid., 140–1.; See also Zırh, "Kirmančiya Belekê," 166–9.
52. Massicard, Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya, 54. Despite minimal research on the matter, it has been argued that some of the underlying reasons for the bouts of violence against Alevis in Ortaca (1966), Kırıkhan (1971), Maraş and Malatya (1978), Çorum (1980), Sivas (1993) and Gazi (1995) were the unease of the Sunni Muslim bourgeoisie and locals who felt threatened by the economic ascendency and involvement as well as by increased visibility of Alevis particularly in cities that experienced significant internal migration. See Doğan, Eğreti Kamusallık.
53. Zırh, "Bir Kesişim Kümesi," 360–1; Massicard, Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya.
54. Ata, "Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi," 47. Gürsel was appointed by the military following the 27 May 1960 coup and served as president until 1966.
55. Ata, "Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi," 47–8.
56. "T. C. Temsilciler Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi," 231–2.
57. Ulusoy rejected the post stating that he was not suitable. "Çelebi Feyzullah Ulusoy'la Sohbet." Haberiniz, March 7, 2012.
58. Ata, "Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi".
59. Koçak, 27 Mayıs, 555–8.
60. See, for example, Gözaydın, Diyanet, 72; Kara, Cumhuriyet Türkiyesi'nde, 99.
61. Some of these students subsequently played a role in the establishment of the TBP. For details, see Ata, Alevilerin İlk Siyasal Denemesi, 47–50, and "Eski Türkiye Birlik Partisi Başkanı Mustafa Timisi: İsmet Paşa Aleviliği Diyanet'te Temsil Ettirecekti." Radikal, November 12, 2008.
62. Vorhoff, "'Let's Reclaim Our History and Culture!'," 230–1.
63. Sökefeld, Alevism Online, 88–9; Zırh, "Bir Kesişim Kümesi," 360–1.
64. Zırh, Becoming Visible, 6.
65. Shankland, Islam and Society in Turkey, 162.
66. The final report of the Alevi workshops states that many Alevis have given upon their request to be represented within the PRA. See Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 131.
67. Schüler, Particilik Hemşerilik Alevilik, 171.
68. "Alevilerde MHP'ye olan ilgi giderek artıyor." Haber Türk, June 5, 2007.
69. Aktürk, Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood; Bumin, "(Muhtıra Sonrası) Ikinci Gün Izlenimlerim." Yeni Şafak, June 30, 2007. http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/kursatbumin/muhtira-sonrasi-ikinci-gun-izlenimlerim-4945.
70. "Emniyete Göre, Gezi Parkı Şüphelilerinin Yüzde 78'i Alevi!" T24, November 25, 2013. http://t24.com.tr/haber/gezide-kac-eylem-gerceklesti-kac-kisi-gozaltina-alindi,244706; The majority of citizens murdered during the Gezi Park protests in 2013 were of Alevi origin; see the analysis of Karakaya-Stump, "Alevizing Gezi."
71. For a summary of criticisms made by Alevi organizations see Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor; Borovalı and Boyraz, "Turkish Secularism and Islam."
72. "Kitaptaki Alevilik için Aleviler Çok Tepkili." Radikal, September 10, 2011.
73. See Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor.
74. Bardakçı, "The Alevi Opening," 367.
75. Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 67.
76. For examples see: Ibid., 67, 87, 88.
77. Ibid., 41.
78. Ibid., 40.
79. Ibid., 88; Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor, 48.

80. Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 21.
81. Alevi İnanç Rehberleri Çalışma Yemeği, 33–4.
82. For examples see: Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 20–1, 27, 32, 40, 43, 69, 141–2.
83. Ibid., 15, 51–2.
84. Ibid., 102, 141, 168–9; Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor, 92–3. This can also be seen in a newspaper interview with Dr Necdet Subaşı, coordinator and moderator of the workshops, who subsequently joined the PRA; "Necdet Subaşı ile söyleşi." Zaman Gazetesi, February 21, 2010.
85. Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 21; Yalçınkaya and Ecevitoğlu, Aleviler Artık Burada Oturmuyor, 65.
86. Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor, 141–2.
87. "Mezhepler Genel Müdürlüğü kuruluyor." Hürriyet, August 12, 2010.
88. "Cemevleri 'Diyanet' Gibi Olacak." Milliyet, November 8, 2010.
89. Williams, "A Class Act."
90. Ibid., 435.

Acknowledgements
I would like to express my gratitude to Hege Markussen and Besim Can Zırh who have read earlier versions of this paper and organized the 'Alevi Identity Revisited' seminar at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul in 2014, out of which this article developed. I am also thankful to the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful and insightful feedback and comments on this paper.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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