IMPERIAL MEMORIES AND NEO-LIBERAL GENEALOGIES IN THE
ALEVI-BEKTAŞHI TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

by

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic research attempts to capture the discursive contradictions and strategic alliances in the recently emerging Alevi-Bektashi transnational networks between Turkey and several Southeast European countries. Tracing the networking endeavours of a major Alevi organization located in Istanbul the research shows how, while lobbying for Alevi rights to faith in Turkey, a major Alevi organization becomes an advocate of Islamic pluralism in its transnational ventures. While the narrative of “love for humanity” underpins both the Alevi and Bektashi stakes on “moderate Islam” in the post-9/11 era, I seek to highlight how this narrative is incorporated by Turkish nationalism on the one hand, and how it travels in the context of Turkish “humanitarian aid” efforts in post-socialist countries on the other. In a post-socialist geography where property relations have been radically transformed in the last two decades, the rhetoric of “owning” Rumeli shrines as Turkish heritage cannot be separated from the prospective claims of their ownership as property. By following these threads, this thesis explores the re-making of Alevi genealogies in transnational processes.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey’s EU candidate status has invigorated the long-standing debate in European public space as to the nature of European identity, and among the European right it has also evoked tropes of a new Ottoman invasion as a historical point of reference. In the Turkish public sphere, however, the memory of the Ottoman Empire, once rejected by Turkish nationalism as a symbol of a backward past, is now articulated in the form of an "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989). This is animated by the imagery of an imperial era defined by wealth and abundance and also commodified in the context of neo-liberal entrepreneurship of the AKP government that currently rules the country (Oncu 2007) and its infrastructural investments in Eurasia (Onis 2009).

This resurgence of Ottoman imperial imagery – that of an empire that rules over a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population – is happening at a time when pluralist forms of Turkish nationalism are envisioned by the Islamist AKP (Progress and Development Party) government. In its EU- and IMF-induced democratization efforts, AKP proposed two major lines of recognition politics under the rubric of “Democratic Openings” aiming to improve the democracy grade of Turkey in the face of transnational actors since 2009. The first was the “Kurdish opening” and involved a willingness by the state to solve the “Kurdish question”. What had loosely been coined as the “Kurdish question” reflected, rather, the anxieties and the ideology of the Turkish state that has denied Kurdish identity. The term subsumed the paradoxes of citizenship for the Kurds of Turkey as well as the state’s denial of responsibility for the internal displacement of Kurds during the conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), most extensively, in the 1990s. Mesut Yegen (2007) argues that the recent shift in nationalist ideology from the Turkification of the Kurdish population to the
recognition of Kurds as “non-Turks” does not promise inclusion. As part of the Turkish state’s “Democratic Openings,” the first TV channel and broadcasting company operating in Kurdish were established, and private Kurdish language courses were legalized in Turkey.; however, this era of manufactured optimism came to an abrupt end with the onset of KCK (Union of Communities in Kurdistan) operations, which resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of activists, lawyers, journalists, and researchers.

The second initiative related to democratizing efforts in Turkey was the “Alevi opening”; after decades of denying recognition of the Alevis, a major ethnic and religious minority, the state permitted some forms of dialogue. Acceptance of cemewis as “places of worship” (ibadethane) rather than “culture houses” was one of the pressing issues in the negotiations. From the 1920s onward, the Turkish state pursued a policy of non-recognition and defined Alevism as a folk culture. In this context, the politics of recognition that the AKP has pursued over the last decade has opened up a space to negotiate the boundaries of Alevi difference, how Alevi identity should be recognized, and how differences should be circumscribed.

Even though “Alevi” is an umbrella term encompassing communities from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds, a shared political and historical memory of modern Alevi identity might be portrayed as follows: having shared historical consciousness of oppression by the Sunni state since the Ottoman centralization in the 16th century; historically being closer to and in intimate exchange with their Christian neighbours from the same village than with Sunni Muslims from outside their home villages; and being cognizant of the secret transmission of knowledge through oral tradition. The origins of the Alevis have long interested researchers, who have characterized Alevism as a syncretic religion combining shamanistic and pre-Islamic practices (Melikoff 1993), a heterodox Islamic order (Ocak 1996) or a branch of Shia Islam.
Alevis are distinctive for the ritual (*cem*) they perform accompanied by music in *cemevis* (Alevi places of worship). Furthermore, the idioms and slogans of leftist activism take inspiration from Alevi poetry narrating the group’s history of oppression and the political memory of venerated historical personalities. In recent years Alevis have mobilized in a number of ways, including in massive street protests intended to memorialize violence against them, namely that which occurred in two major events: the Sivas Massacre and the Maras Massacre. In Maras, from December 19 to 26, 1978, 150 Alevis were killed by right-wing activists, and as many Alevi houses and stores were burnt down. The murders are widely seen as intentional provocation of the state and led the way to the military coup of 1980.\(^1\) On July 2, 1993, in the central Anatolian town of Sivas, during an annual festival organized by a major Alevi organization (*Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association*), 37 people, mostly Alevi and leftist intellectuals, were killed when their hotel was set on fire, allegedly by an Islamist group. Immediately preceding and following the 1980 military coup in Turkey, these events represent a cross-section of state violence against the leftist movement in the broader political picture of Turkey wherein Alevi leftist activists featured prominently (Sinclair-Webb, 2003).

The terms used to describe Alevis have been closely monitored by the state, and to this day most Alevi organizations bear the legally required title of “culture and education centre.” Describing the defining characteristics of Alevism often involves the acknowledgement of *dedes* (Alevi community leaders of holy lineage), who traditionally delivered Alevi teachings in secrecy and also acted as healers and judges in cases of personal and community confrontations (Yaman, 2006). Since the 1990s, leaders occupying the cornerstones of Alevi civil organizations and party politics have exclusively consisted of *dedes*, who patrilineally inherit the title. The ways *dedes*

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occupy the key nexuses of Alevi brotherhoods in urban contexts translate their traditional authority into the liberal politics of representation.

A number of scholars have emphasized the transnational context of Alevi identity, which began with post-WWII labour migration from Turkey to several European countries (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003, Neyzi 2004, Sokefeld 2008, Ozyurek 2009). Esra Ozyurek (2009) highlighted the emergence of Alevism in the diaspora as a minority religion, or “Euro-Islam” within the juridico-political frameworks of liberal multiculturalism in the European Union. However, debates on secularism and democratization cannot be separated from the global context of neo-liberal governance. It is echoed in the form of the NGO-ization of Alevism and its concurrent incorporation by the Turkish state (Erdemir 2004).

Since multiculturalism emerged internationally as state policy in the 1970s, most recognizably in former British colonies such as Australia and Canada, it envisioned an alternative model for managing differences in a nation previously defined as homogenous. While the politico-legal framework of multiculturalism differs across states, its critics situated it among the techniques of liberal modes of governmentality. Chakrabarty (1998) historicized the contemporary debates over multiculturalism by drawing its trajectory back to the British colonial policies in India and argued that categorizing, enumerating, and naming its population object through censuses and maps are among the techniques employed by modern states. Homi Bhabha (1998), in contrast, differentiates “minority discourse” from the “discourses of minorities” and draws attention to the tension between the agency of minorities and the representability of this agency. He proposes to shift “the question of identity from the ontological imperative – what is identity? – to face the ethical and political prerogative – what are identities for? – and even to present the pragmatist alternative – what can identities do? (434) – thus acknowledging the
empowering and subversive potential of identities as much as the oppressive universe wherein they flourish.

While the negotiated descriptions of Alevism have been bound up with liberal calculability of differences – minority and majority –, I follow the work of scholars who trace the connections between liberal politics of recognition and neo-liberal enterprises that incorporate these differences into larger systems of power (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Povinelli 2002). Elizabeth Povinelli suggests that multiculturalism is not a subversive alternative to erase the wounds left by historical domination but an adaptable discourse of diversity that legalizes and naturalizes hegemony across nations and within nation states:

These hopes and optimisms and the individual and national telos […] seduce critical thinking away from an analysis of how dominant social relations of power rely on a multicultural imaginary and discourse in order to adjust core state institutions and narratives to new discursive, capital, and state conditions, not to transform them. (1998:583)

Along similar lines, Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) point out the pitfalls of recognition. Incorporated into the global stage of marketable diversity, they argue, “identity-as-difference carve(s) out specific niches of value production” (2009:4). The commodification of ethnic identities is grounded in legal, economic, and political processes that transform rights of recognition into the right to establish a business and the right to sell and trade what one holds and owns as national, minority, or native identity. The state’s role in regulating the processes of becoming incorporated is underpinned by the significance of (national and transnational) legal processes that define the institutions as “entities” or “individuals”.

At the intersection of finance and charity, vakıfs occupy a unique status in Turkey. Vakıfs, charity foundations that can be established with considerable estates or property for “public good,” had been known as pious endowments (waqf) since their establishment in the Ottoman
realm. Their secularization and incorporation into state bureaucracy dates back to 1924 when the caliphate was abolished and vakıf properties were nationalized by the Republican state (Pioncola and Sertori 2007). One of the most drastic effects of this nationalization process, the state confiscation of non-Muslim vakıfs which are declared after 1936 reflected the ideology of the Kemalist state and its plans for the re-distribution of property and land. Having the protection of state bureaucracy, vakıf property is more immune to drastic effects of urban transformations whereas its privileges are maintained under the supervision of state bureaucracy and law. More recently, a law passed in 2008 gives vakıfs the right to become incorporated and profit for their own ends. Cem Vakfı (the Cem Foundation), a major Alevi organization located in Istanbul, was founded in 1995 by Izzettin Dogan, an Alevi dede and a professor of international law who appears publicly on TV and in meetings with state and civil leaders. The Cem Foundation established the most popular, mainstream Alevi TV channel in Turkey, and in 2011 it started a company involved in spiritual tourism that organizes pilgrimages to Balkan shrines and to Karbala to commemorate Imam Husayn, a major spiritual figure for the Shia Muslims. Founded upon the premise of “public good,” the Cem Foundation emphasizes “service” to the Alevi community and solidifies this discourse by organizing English and photography courses and seven-month courses on dedelik with the mission of educating and modernizing dedes. The Cem Foundation, along with the Alevi-Bektashi Federation (ABF) and the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association, is among the major Alevi organizations that shape the debates in the Turkish public sphere. It is a publicly visible organization within the broader framework of AVF (the Federation of Alevi-Bektashi Foundations) and has representative power as it publicly condemns the massacres against Alevis that took place in the last two decades, most notably in 1978 (The Maras Massacre) and 1994 (The Sivas Massacre). It lobbies for the inclusion of Alevism in
religion course textbooks, brings cases of discrimination against Alevis to the European Court of Human Rights, and argues for dedes gaining equal status to imams, who are appointed and paid by Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (the Directorate of Religious Affairs) since its establishment in 1924.

However, such demands are not supported by all Alevis. For instance, some Alevi groups, particularly those involved in leftist activism, express their concerns over the request for dede salaries as that would affirm the illegitimate authority of the Directorate over religion. Similarly, the demand for the inclusion of Alevism in school textbooks is not shared by all Alevis, some of whom believe that the compulsory religion courses in secondary schools should be abandoned altogether. Recently, renowned Alevi folk music artist Sabahat Akkiraz wrote a press release condemning the Cem Foundation for its manipulation of Alevism and Akkiraz stated that her songs will not be broadcast on Cem TV. Her critique targeted the incorporation of whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi order (semazens) in the Cem Foundation’s Alevi-Bektashi semah ceremonies. These debates show the political sensitivity around aligning Alevi boundaries with Islam and the conversion of the terms of this debate into party politics, which have been artificially polarized between blunt categories of Islamists and secularists over the last decade.

In this research, I trace the transnational networks and discourses of the Cem Foundation in Southeast Europe, as it is the only Alevi organization that ventures into the Balkans. I attempt to capture the discursive contradictions and the strategic alliances in the recently emerging Alevi-Bektashi transnational networks between Turkey and several Southeast European countries. In the first part of the thesis, I provide the political and economic background to the intrusions of Turkish nationalism in Southeast Europe. I contextualize the Turkish “humanitarian aid” within the broader picture of economic restructuring projects, international aid, and religious
charity efforts in post-socialist countries. I also focus on a single international event which allows me to portray the converging narratives of Alevi-Bektashi leaders on “moderate” or “pluralist” Islam. In the second part of the thesis, I look at the shrine narratives of the Cem Foundation in its pilgrimage tour to the Balkans. In its ventures to a post-socialist geography where property relations have been radically transformed in the last two decades, the rhetoric of “owning” Rumeli shrines as Turkish heritage cannot be separated from the prospective claims of the shrines as the property of the Cem Foundation.

Navaro-Yashin (2002) suggests that “civil society” in Turkey has been characterized by statism in the aftermath of the 1980s military intervention, when the already artificial line between state and society was dissolved. In this thesis I consider the “civil” endeavours of Alevi-Bektashi ventures in the Balkans in terms of their ardent statism and creative uses of historical dissidence. However, I will also emphasize the very neo-liberal ways in which distinctions between state-society and public-private have been altered.

**Methodology**

In this research, I track transnational networks and their places. Transnational networks have intangible dimensions that appealed to me because of the potential they provide for an ethnographic scrutiny – namely, that transnational institutions do things we cannot see and create spaces we cannot inhabit. Locating these networks within the human dynamics of social relations, scholars explored transnational institutions, transnational media, and migration at the crossroads of ethnicity, gender, and mobility (Ong 1999, Faier 2009, Bloch 2011, Rytter 2011). In my research, tracing the transnational efforts of an NGO opened up queries about events and places and how they are linked – materially and discursively – to discourses of transnational
organizations and the flow of money from one place to another. This research tries to understand
the transnational endeavours of an NGO and the commensurability of its public scripts with the
multicultural discourses of the Turkish state on the one hand, and global discourses of love and
tolerance on the other. In this light, tracking the Foundation’s efforts to claim Turkish national
heritage in its transnational ventures and rights of recognition at home, this research looks for the
connections between these seemingly contrasting discourses and different spaces of capital.

I carried out my research in the summer and the fall of 2010 for five months. My interest
in transnational connections between Bektashis arose when I read Francis Trix’s (1997) book on
the teachings of a Bektashi Baba residing in Detroit, Michigan, during the communist era in
Albania and learnt that in early Republican Turkey in 1925 when the Bektashi order was
outlawed, along with all its religious orders, titles, and symbols, the centre of Bektashism had to
move from Turkey to Albania. I was curious as to how Bektashis perceive this history passed
through the prism of Turkish secular nationalism and Albanian communism only to find out that
today there is no single Bektashi centre or leader recognized by all. Initially, I intended my
research to centre on an annual Bektashi festival in Mount Tomorr, Albania. The Mount Tomorr
pilgrimage would be a good venue of encounter between Bektashis from Turkey and Albania,
but I learned that Turkey’s Alevi leaders had no official participation in this festival. I was
directed to the Cem Foundation by the secretary of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, who knew
about the Cem Foundation’s efforts to network with Balkan Alevis and Bektashis in reclaiming
Alevi shrines in the Balkans against the intrusion of what is varyingly called “foreign Islam,”
“Wahhabism,” “Arab Islam,” and “orthodox Islam” (Ghodsee 2010). So while searching for
these networks I ended up in the Yeni Bosna district of Istanbul in front of the four-storey
concrete building of the Cem Foundation, which was located on a narrow road of concrete apartments mostly built after the 1980s to accommodate Anatolian immigrants.

Through phone calls, emails, and visits, I arranged my first interviews, after which I was invited to meetings and the annual Hacı Bektaş Festival in Kırşehir. Meanwhile, I also followed the publications of Alevi NGOs and media productions of the Cem Foundation. The Alevis I met at these meetings and conferences – which were also attended by academics, researchers, politicians and NGO leaders – were most welcoming to researchers. Part of this welcoming attitude was the conviction/expectation that a sympathetic researcher would discover more about who the Alevis are and provide factual information about the history of Alevis and Alevi rituals as they changed or preserved this culture through time. Even though there are countless and ever-increasing numbers of publications about Alevi identity written by independent researchers and academics alike, there is a continual search for authentication of Alevi differences authorized by the textualized discourse and the “scientific” signature of a researcher. This is not surprising considering the Alevi faith in modern science and education. Based on this expectation, I was intrigued by the historical consciousness of dissidence expressed through the political terms of late capitalism. I met dedes who gave me books to read and invited me to see “the most authentic cem ritual” in a village near Istanbul. I also met younger dedes around my age who were either modest entrepreneurs in the early stages of their business careers or students.

In August 2010 for the annual Hacı Bektaş pilgrimage and festival that took place in Kırşehir – the location of the mausoleum of Hacı Bektaş, the patron saint of Alevis –, I joined a trip organized by the Cem Foundation. I spent time with women who wandered around the hills of Hacıbektaş gazing upon the deserted plateau in Central Turkey called evliyalar diyarı (land of saints), visited tombs of deceased folk poets, attended concerts followed by political speeches
surrounded by the Turkish and CHP (Republican People’s Party) flags hanging from telephone lines, bought souvenir necklaces or pictures of the mourning Imam Ali, ate the meat of sacrificed animals distributed among long lines of people, and took pictures with long white bearded dedes encountered on the way, whose appearance stood in contrast to the dedes in suits and ties I had met in Istanbul.

I was visiting this area about a month before the national referendum for constitutional change, initiated by the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, which centred the event on the yes/no referendum question. The town of Hacıbektaş was full of Republican People Party (CHP) flags with the figure of six arrows representing the principles of the founding party of the Turkish Republic: populism, nationalism, statism, republicanism, laicism and revolution. It was a time of immense polarization in the country between those who wanted to protect their country against potential religious bigotry and those for whom reforming the existing constitution (established by the military government in 1982) meant democratization. People that I travelled with did not seem too concerned about the constitutional change; they acknowledged that they did not know what this change would really mean, yet many of these men, women and children wore headbands with the symbol of CHP– a testament to the power of the party on this Alevi-Bektashi space created by ‘civil’ organizations. These hot-button issues related to laicism and Islamism occupying the public sphere still persist and offer some background to the narratives I offer in this research.

I interviewed two key “transnational translators,” as I will term those who travel back and forth between Turkey, Macedonia, and Albania. Fluent in both Albanian and Turkish, they had been important mediators between Albanian Bektashis and Turkish Alevis. Hisen was affiliated with Bektashi circles and helped the Cem Foundation translate Albanian to Turkish in a number
of events. Huseyin Başar Baba is a Macedonian Turk who has been charged with international communication in the headquarters of Bektashism in Tirana. He occasionally appears on Turkish TV programs wearing traditional Bektashi garb, but in his daily life he dons a tie and jacket with the badge of Atatürk affixed to his lapel. Huseyin Basar Baba exemplifies the Bektashi image of a poised, charismatic leader who possesses an oratory power embroidered with Bektashi jokes. Başar Baba distributes his CDs consisting of his speeches recorded in TV programs and in Alevi-Bektashi meetings. Unfortunately, time restrictions prevented me from extending my fieldwork to other networks of shrines in the Balkans. I had to narrow my focus down to the Cem Foundation’s Balkan narratives in the context of its pilgrimage tour. Cem TV broadcasts footage from the tours, including interviews with participants/pilgrims, locals, and religious leaders. While participant observation on the tour would have provided rich ethnographic data, given the constraints around taking part in the pilgrimage, my data in this section focus on the Cem Foundation’s representation of the tour – namely on interviews with the tour organizer and the portrayals of the tour as narrated in the program series broadcast on Cem TV in 2010 and 2011.

**From the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic**

How to remember the Ottoman Empire has been central to the debate over the origins of the Turkish people in different versions of Turkish nationalist historiography. The Ottoman Empire began as the principality of Osman (Otman) in 14th century western Anatolia (the central plateau of present-day Turkey). It defeated the Byzantine Empire (which until 1453 controlled Constantinople, today’s Istanbul) along with other numerous principalities of Anatolia and expanded its territories dramatically over several centuries. Once extended from the Balkans and the gates of Vienna to the Middle East and North Africa, the territories of the Ottoman Empire had shrunk considerably until its fall in the early 20th century.
The Ottomans created a multi-ethnic, multi-religious empire whose imperial rivalries with the neighbouring Habsburg, Russian, and Safavid Empires created shifting loyalties to the central state. In the provinces closer to the capital Konstantiniyye (Istanbul), including the provinces in Rumeli (the Ottoman territories in Europe), rural life was organized around the patronage of agricultural lands, and in urban centres guilds of artisans and tradesmen were major nexuses of socio-economic relations (Grandits et al. 2011). The Janissaries were elite Ottoman corps consisting of devsirmes (converted Christian boys) who were taught to follow Bektashism, an order which had been integral to this urban nexus in the Balkans and Anatolia. Zeynep Yurekli (2005) situates the emergence of Bektashi networks in the 16th century in Anatolia. She highlights the multiplicity of socio-economic groups who follow the cult of Hacı Bektaş and who have conflicting loyalties towards the central power. To illuminate contrasting affiliations with the cult of Hacı Bektaş, Yurekli traces the battle over architectural symbolism, which reflects changing political alliances and antagonisms, in the architectural complex of the Hacı Bektaş convent and the shrine. As Yurekli writes, “The architectural patrons were those who chose reconciliation [with the central state], their audience included those who preferred protest and rebellion. The buildings accommodated them and responded to their expectations as well” (2005:181). In Anatolia, Bektashis had been more precarious with their ability to attract heterodox groups into its networks. In contrast to the subversive potential of Bektashis in Anatolia, Bektashism in the Balkans had been associated with proselytizing dervishes who took part in the Ottomanization of Rumeli (Krstic 2005).

However, the descriptions of Ottoman expansionism as Turkification is anachronistic since the Ottoman elite did not identify themselves as Turks, and the people in “the lands of Rum” (Anatolia or Asia Minor) called themselves “Rumi” (Erdem 2005; Kafadar 2007; Ozbaran 2004).
“Turk” was a term used, rather, by Europeans who meant to denote the Muslims in Ottoman lands and even beyond its territories (Kumrular 2008). The militant use of the term Turk as an ethnic identification dates back to the Young Turks of CUP (Committee of Union and Progress), military elite who were well read in French revolutionary literature, on which they based their nationalist and militaristic aspirations for progress and modernity. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, hailed as the father of modern Turkey, founded the CHP (Republican People’s Party) as an offshoot of CUP. CHP was the founding party of the single-party Republic, and it ruled the country until 1950. The very performative and declarative statement that “the Turkish Republic was founded on 29 October, 1923,” is repeated so often that it reveals the constant anxiety about the ideals of national unity. The establishment of the Republic of Turkey did not happen at once; its legitimacy was reiterated through a number of events, through state violence and through constitutional changes that dispossessed and forced the conversion and migration of Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Yezidis, and Dersimi Kurds in the early Republican period. Constitutionally, the state enforced Kemalist ideology as the ultimate Turkish nationalist doctrine based on the principles of laicism, statism, republicanism, nationalism, populism, and revolution. The Kemalist revolutionary ideology presented its regime as a huge rupture from the Ottoman Empire, which it deemed backward and despotic. The founding party, CHP, and its Kemalist elite in Turkey have been the cornerstones of what is called the Turkish state. Even in the multi-party period, extreme right or left wing parties were outlawed, and in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup the leftist movement was doomed.

In this milieu of post-coup Turkey, the ideology of Turkish Islam was promoted by the state, paving the way for the promotion of moderate versions of Islam in Turkish politics that had been circumscribed by the laicist military power. In this regard, the relationship between
Alevism and Islam is a central debate in Alevi politics. From another angle, the negotiations over the ethnic dimensions of Alevi identity are ambiguously positioned along the fractures between the Turkish left and the Kurdish left in this post-coup era. Kurdish Alevis, who identify themselves as Kurdish and take part in the Kurdish movement, instead disassociate themselves from the Alevi movement since *dedes* and privileged tribal affinities are not acceptable in the anti-colonial, Marxist struggle of the Kurdish movement (Bruinessen 1997). The Alevis who occupy the public sphere in Turkey for Alevi rights predominantly identify themselves as Turkish and almost exclusively ally with Kemalist ideology. It is significant that the rise to power in 2002 of the Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) has created another cleavage since it challenged the class privileges of the metropolitan Kemalist elite by favouring the bids of business entrepreneurs based in Anatolia. With a major constitutional change the AKP dominated government attempted to shatter the lasting hegemony of the Turkish army over Turkish politics and instead strengthened the police forces and prison system, which in turn control protest movements and incarcerate opponents of the current government. These new economic and political dynamics within Turkey have shaped the debates about the genealogies of modern Alevis and their relationship with Islam.

**Turkish “Love for Humanity” in Southeast Europe: The Post-2000 Tropes of Empire**

For Turkey, the fall of communist regimes in its neighbouring countries not only meant it would no longer be the only country in Eurasia, along with Greece, hosting American military bases, but it would also be involved in the privatization and development projects blossoming throughout Eurasia. By re-organizing its civil and state organizations, Turkey has played a key role in regional economic and political processes in post-socialist countries in the past two decades. From the perspective of foreign-policy makers in Turkey, the demise of the Soviet
Union also meant the opening of a new discursive space for serving the Turkic countries of Central Asia and the Turkish-speaking and Muslim communities in the Balkans.

Turkey’s privatization boom, which led to increasing dependence on money lent by transnational actors such as the IMF and the World Bank, dates to the 2001 financial crisis (Onis 2011). The post-2002 AKP (Justice and Development Party) rule prepared the legal and institutional grounds for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which constituted a significant portion of mass privatization in Turkey (2011:6-9). While the AKP lost its hopes for accession to the EU, neighbouring Eurasian countries became potential markets for trade agreements and construction projects, especially those driven by oil and gas pipelines (Onis 2009). In particular, the Turkish government introduced what is termed the PPP (Public Private Partnership), which finances most of the infrastructural projects in the Balkans and coordinates collaboration between multiple actors such as municipalities, governments, private banks, construction companies, and legal consultancy firms.²

In these economic initiatives that blur the lines between the public and the private and between state and civil society, capital does not circulate neutrally. However, these trade deals and construction projects have been attached to transnational configurations of Turkish nationalism since 2000; this, in turn, shapes efforts to disperse “Turkish culture,” especially among Muslim and Turkish-speaking minorities in post-socialist Southeast European countries. For instance, when Tayyip Erdogan became Prime Minister in 2003, he vowed that “Turkey will stand by Bosnia and Herzegovina.”³ A range of non-governmental organizations took a similar pro-nationalist position. For instance, the Turkology Project of the Yunus Emre Institute located

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in Turkey has the mission of “spreading the education of Turkish language, introducing the Turkish culture thus creating a body of people who could communicate in Turkish to assist the educational, cultural and social events in these countries, and to introduce Turkey.” Meanwhile, over three hundred schools and seven universities that promote “Turkey and Turkish culture” have been established in Eurasia by the liberal Islamist Gulen movement founded by Turkish expatriate Fethullah Gulen, who is based in the United States (Yavuz 1999). The marketing of Turkey entailed the establishment of particular networks of trust that accompany the aforementioned infrastructural projects. As the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan noted in his address to the 2011 Balkan Leaders’ Summit in the US, “capital needs trust,” which is meant to convey the message that ethnic conflicts are obstacles to the swift flow of capital. The images of a pluralist “Turkish Empire” that circulate in this post-socialist geography of neo-liberal investments are attributed to a number of ideologies such as neo-Ottomanism (Sahin 2010) or Turco-Ottoman nationalism (Yavuz 1999). These transnational business deals that invest in highways, hospitals, and schools in the Balkans are presented as “Turkish humanitarian aid” and go along with discourses of Turkish “love for humanity,” which underlie various stakes in cosmopolitan, pluralist, or multicultural imaginings of empire.

While this Turkish “love for humanity” is a euphemism for the country’s investments in the service sector, it meanwhile creates a language that describes infrastructural projects as public good. For instance, in 2009 the Turkish and Albanian prime ministers marked the opening of the highway that connects the Adriatic port of Durres in Albania to Kosovo with sentimental

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4 See http://yunusemreenstitusu.org/turkiye/index.php?lang=tr&page=34 Retrieved on January 26, 2012. The project was initiated by TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency), which was established in 1992 with the purpose of assisting restructuring projects in Turkic countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Since 2011, the Yunus Emre Institute took responsibility for Turcology Project missions from TIKA.

5 Gulen is noted as one of the most influential Islamic leaders in the world, whose writings on love, dialogue, and humanity places him as an Islamist equivalent of the Dalai Lama on the global stage of religious leaders.

statements such as, “This highway will also connect their hearts.” The presence of Albanian and Turkish state leaders at the opening showcase was a political move, since the highway was in fact built by a US-based engineering corporation in collaboration with a Turkish construction company. The American corporation also invested in oil and gas pipeline projects, nuclear power plants, and mining extraction.

Moreover, local alternatives to Eurocentric and universalist ideals of cosmopolitanism, as David Harvey (2009) suspects, can readily be incorporated into the militaristic agendas of neo-liberal projects such as “humanitarian military interventions” and “humanitarian aid.” Considering the military bases in the region, including those in Turkey, a promise for peace at one end of the pipeline is indeed built on the prospect of war erupting at its farthest end. Moreover, these networks of trust prey on the sentiments and political units that are shaped through the post–Cold War conflicts in the region.

If alternative visions of a cosmopolitan empire are becoming possible, it is happening within the logics of neo-liberal entrepreneurship and liberal multiculturalism. Most strikingly, imaginings of a pluralist Ottoman Empire are concomitant to discourses on “plural Islam.” These discourses travel in a geography that is “opening” its lands for privatization at a time when Turkey’s engagement with global capitalism is also increasing. Turkey’s presence in the region as a potential investor allows tropes of “Turkish empire” to circulate in this geography. As restructuring projects transform the landscape of both post-socialist countries and Turkey, the distinctive notions of public and private are becoming obsolete. Along those lines, in the following section I look at the transnational “Alevi” entrepreneurship rooted in Turkish civil society – realized through the enforcement of its “ownership” capacities as a foundation beyond

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Turkey – and I trace the Cem Foundation’s networking endeavours as they tie into global civil society.

**The Tower of Babel in Istanbul: Transnational Deals and Imperial Memories**

The Cem Foundation (Cem Vakfi) is the only Alevi organization in Turkey that has initiated new ventures into the Balkans beginning in the 2000s. It takes its title *cem* from the Alevi ritual of worship, and *vakif* is a legally constituted term denoting a foundation that can only be established on the condition of an individual or family owning a considerable amount of property. *Vakıfs* must have a stated purpose to benefit a community or public. These institutions are not legally allowed to make a profit; however, they are founded on the basis of a property and in this way they differ from *derneks* (associations), which are established by individual persons as non-profit organizations.

The Cem Foundation was established in 1995 with its headquarters located in Yeni Bosna (New Bosnia), a neighbourhood of Istanbul that is both a working-class residential area and home to industrial building and shopping complexes. The neighbourhood’s name is derived from its first inhabitants, Bosniaks who settled there as immigrants in the 1930s. Today the Cem Foundation has around twenty branches in various Istanbul neighbourhoods, most of which are located in the industrial peripheries predominantly inhabited by immigrants from the rural parts of Anatolia who have settled there since the 1980s. The organization makes use of Alevi’s strong ties with their village origins; although they hail from diverse villages scattered around Anatolia, the president of the foundation asserts, “they constitute one village here” under the framework of the Cem Foundation. The Cem Foundation organizes weekly *cem* rituals, which can host around five hundred women, men, and children, and opens its dining hall to the public on special occasions; it also has a public library and a bookstore that sells Alevi publications. The
foundation also owns Cem TV, a TV channel that broadcasts sports, discussion and music programs, news, and documentaries, along with programs that give moral messages. It is accessible in around thirty countries, including Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Bulgaria, where the Cem Foundation has established official branches. In its lobbying endeavours, the Cem Foundation brings forth the notion of “Alevi elites” and makes creative and contradictory uses of historical links between Bektashism and Alevism. This encounter between Bektashis from the Balkans and Alevis from Turkey is a process still in the making.

Sitting over tea in Istanbul, Dogan Bermek, the president of the Federation of Alevi-Bektashi Foundations (AVF) in Turkey, searched his cell phone index to share his contacts for Bektashis from the Balkans. Bektashi networks were consolidated as a Sufi order in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and mostly consisted of dervishes, tradesmen, and raider-commanders whose activities in Anatolia had been a constant cause of anxiety and tension for the central state authorities (Yurekli 2005). Similar to some Alevis, Bektashis recognize Hacı Bektaş as their patron saint. A legendary dervish from Khorosan, in modern-day Iran, he is known to have travelled in approximately the 13\textsuperscript{th} century to the “lands of Rum” (diyar-i Rum, as Asia Minor was called at the time), where his convent and shrine are located. The Bektashi order, along with other religious orders, was officially banned on November 30, 1925, when the Kemalist Republican regime in Turkey passed a law that laid out the closure of convents, small dervish lodges, and shrines. When the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) was founded in 1924, this act reified and solidified the religious authority under state control. After the Hacı Bektaş convent and shrine in the central Anatolian town of Kirsehir is closed, the Bektashi order headquarters moved to Tirana, Albania.\footnote{During Albania’s communist period, the leader of the Bektashi convent had to flee to Egypt and ended up in Detroit, Michigan, where a concentration of Albanian émigrés were located (Trix 1993). After the fall of}
Between sips of tea, Bermek described what he sees as the underlying political motive for the Cem Foundation’s efforts to build transnational political ties: strategic lobbying with Balkan Bektashis. Bermek was optimistic that such contacts would allow collaborative transnational projects in the future while also facilitating access to EU funds that support minority initiatives. However, Bermek foresees that transnational ties can provide Alevis in Turkey with valuable political leverage in the ongoing lawsuits being filed in the European Court of Human Rights against the Turkish state for its discrimination against Alevis. Despite these strategic motives for transnational ties, ideological differences have been difficult to bridge, and conflicting nationalist narratives on history and geography define such transnational ventures. This situation is captured in the following portrait of a recent transnational congress of Alevi leaders.

On October 29, 2010, the Cem Foundation organized the 5th International Meeting of Alevi Spiritual Leaders on the anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The organization transported participants by private buses from its branch offices in various neighbourhoods in Istanbul to the Bostanci Show Center on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. The event held at the show centre, which has a capacity of over two thousand, was full of men and women of all ages. Invited leaders from the Balkans and the Middle East represented Alevi, Bektashi, and various Sufi-oriented networks. The event was widely attended by the media and covered by mainstream newspapers.

A large Turkish flag was hanging on the back wall of the main stage. Next to the flag, several images served as expressions of the cults of personalities that have been marketed in Alevi circles in various forms over the last couple of years: a poster of Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic; a poster of Imam Ali, the first Shia leader of Islam, shrouded in communism in the late 1980s, Reshad Bardi re-initiated Bektashism in Tirana, and the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order was re-established in Tirana.
This eclectic variety of charismatic personalities recast a number of ideologies that are meaningful only in light of their constitutive parts. For instance, the poster of Imam Ali reflects the recent trend to understand Alevism within the boundaries of Islam but not as a Sunni group. Kabir Tambar (2011) captures how some Alevi communities in Turkey appropriate Shia interpretations of early Islamic history in their rituals and teachings; however, it would be illuminating to see the trajectories of people and objects that are part of these rituals. To localize a Shia tradition, the poster of Hacı Bektaş represents the Anatolian roots of Alevism. And lastly, to assure the status of secular religion, and in line with the Kemalist construction of Alevi genealogy, an image of the founder of the Republic, Kemal Ataturk, was on display and his name is commemorated during the rituals.

Participating Alevi leaders, almost all of whom carry dede titles, were in suits and ties, in sharp contrast to the traditional garb of Bektashi and other Sufi leaders from the Balkans. According to Hisen, a university student in his early twenties who was in charge of the Albanian-Turkish translations during the event, this strict dress code in Turkey reminds him of the religious bans in communist Yugoslavia. Hisen was born in Gostivar, a city in northwestern Macedonia, and he had been a Bektashi disciple in a Macedonian teqe (dervish convent). As a young student he had chosen, in line with his father’s wishes, to study history in Ankara, and to prepare for this he enrolled in a Turkish-language institute in Istanbul. Maintaining strong ties with Albanian and Macedonian Bektashi networks, Hisen often visits his family and the Harabati teqe in Macedonia. When we met in the summer of 2010, problems with his Turkish visa were making his travels back and forth between the two countries difficult. Hisen was familiar with

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9Souvenir objects and pictures bringing these three figures together at the annual festival of Hacı Bektaş in Kirşehir have recently become prominent.
the whole network of Bektashis in the Balkans since this network is mostly limited to Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania and is concentrated in the Albanian capital of Tirana, where the world headquarters of Bektashism is located. For Hisen, Bektashism is quite different from Alevism. As a history student, he emphasizes the textual tradition of Bektashism established in the domain of the Ottoman Empire as an urban, Sufi order, which has produced philosophical documents and left rich historical records. While for him the current situation of genuine Bektashism in Turkey is characterized by secrecy and caution, this condition resembles the Bektashi experiences in Yugoslavia when religious rituals were contained within the privacy of homes during the socialist era. Unlike older generations’ reticence to talk about the communist period, Hisen drew on the case of Yugoslavia to make sense of today, even though he was only two years old when the socialist regime collapsed. The parallel he draws between Yugoslavia and Turkey actually contrasts two visions of modernization. On the one hand, there is modernist Kemalism and its Europeanized dress code wherein Alevi leaders retain a modern tradition. On the other hand, traditional Bektashi dress is meant to posit religious freedom of expression, a prescription for post-socialist democratization.

During the Meeting of Alevi Spiritual Leaders, Hisen served as the translator for Hajji Baba Edmond Brahimag (Baba Mondi), who in 2011 became the head of the Bektashi World Center in Albania. At the time the meeting was held, Baba Mondi was the main dervish in the Harabati teqe in Macedonia. When I briefly met him during a break in the meeting, he mentioned his upcoming visit to Canada for the celebration of Albanian Independence Day on November 28, 2010, which was to be hosted by the Albanian-Canadian Community Association in Toronto. In his speech during the meeting, he praised democracy and stressed the importance of a state in maintaining an equal relationship with all its citizens so that everyone would be equal in the face
of law. He agreed with Izzettin Dogan, the founder of Cem Cem Foundation and a professor of international law, who invokes law, education, science, and discourses of progress to emphasize the Cem Foundation’s mission of service to the Alevi community.

When a professor from Baku State University in Azerbaijan took to the stage, he pointed to the historical personality of Shah Ismail (the 16th century Shia ruler of Safevid Iran), who fought against the Ottoman Empire and assumes a heroic role in Azeri national historiography. Shah Ismail also had Kizilbash followers in Anatolia, thus invoking this name reminded the audience of the heterodox community to which Alevis trace their origins. The Azeri professor argued that folk songs and hymns commemorating Shah Ismail should be recognized as Azeri, not Turkish, since Azeri, according to him, does not have a designated geographical area but a common culture. Following the professor, an Alevi minister from Denmark complained that Alevi politics in Turkey serve as a platform for propaganda for particular political parties. He was referring to the two parties, the Kemalist CHP (Republican People’s Party) and Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party), that polarized the electoral votes in the early 2000s.

The Cem Foundation’s promotion of what it terms “Alevi Islam” was reified in the address by the head of Alevi-Islam Religious Services, a sub-unit of Cem Vakfi that was established in 2003. This leader’s proposition that Alevis “believe in the Quran but not in the Arab way” affirms the underlying logic of modernist Kemalism, which imagined its modernity in opposition to the Orientalist reading of Ottoman history and where Arab is viewed as distinct from Turk. “Not in the Arab way” also aligns with the Bektashi stance against “Saudi Islam” in the Balkans. However, especially significant in light of Alevi politics in Turkey, this statement asserts that Alevism should be defined within the boundaries of Islam. The head pointed out that

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10 See Esra Ozyurek (2009) for the political tension between Alevi organizations in Turkey and in Europe.
Yunus Emre, a 14th century Sufi poet, wrote in Turkish, which the professor from Azerbaijan would insist on calling Azeri Turkish. Following that, an elderly dervish from Kosovo thanked the Turkish army and the government for their aid during the Kosovo War. In doing this, he was drawing a parallel between the recent aid of the Turkish government and “Ottoman justice,” which “protected all the races for five hundred years of its rule.” Obviously, many would not share this reading of the Ottoman past, including the Bektashis in Albania who do not depend on Turkish government aid and whose national historiography glorifies the heroic figure of Skanderbeg, who represents anti-Ottoman resistance in the 15th century. Different periods of the 20th century Albanian history promoted differing interpretations of the national significance of Skanderbeg. While Zogu’s rule emphasized Skanderbeg’s resistance to the Ottomans on the frontiers of Europe as a way to tie Albanian identity to European history, Enver Hoxa’s Skanderbeg mobilized a peasant struggle against the Ottomans and the feudal lords (Fishta and Schmidt-Neke 1997).

In this chaotic international medium of expression, a global discourse on “love for humanity” is emphasized mutually. Underlining all these narratives was the construction of “good Islam” or the advocacy for “Islamic pluralism” in contrast to “radical Islam” in the global post-9/11 context. While performing national differences and negotiating national genealogies, a common thread running through these narratives is the compatibility of Islam with Western modernity. As representatives of civil society organizations, the narrators of the event perform their roles as moderate Islamists, and they place these networks within the legitimate boundaries of global civil society. An emphasis on the “rule of law”, as Ruth Mandel (2002) notes, travels to the

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11 Extracts from author’s recordings made in the “Meeting of Alevi Spiritual Leaders,” 29 October, 2010, Istanbul.
South in the form of prescriptions for international development aid; this emphasis also conforms to the economic and social missions of structural adjustment policies.
2. ALEVI PILGRIMAGE TOURS TO POST-SOCIALIST BALKANS

“Back to” Rumeli

The rush of international aid to post-socialist countries for reconstruction projects in post-conflict situations, or to give ammunition and human force as in the example of Bosnia, has been particularly marked by the efforts of Islamic charities and NGOs. It is noteworthy that the funds coming from what is called “Saudi Islamic” or “Orthodox Islamic” sources flowed into towns that have remained on the peripheries of the new circuits of capital. This financial aid shaped the cultural and economic landscapes of these economically impoverished towns by paying for the construction of schools and mosques and educating its followers in accordance with the rules of the source (Ghodsee 2010). In this section, I look to the Cem Foundation’s efforts to claim, share, or re-appropriate the shrines in several Southeast European countries as its own. Here the “ownership” of the shrines has a strong rhetorical dimension – they are “owned” as culturally Turkish not necessarily as property – except in Bulgaria where the Cem Foundation has two branches. In the pilgrimage tours organized by the Cem Foundation, I look at the historical narratives that render Rumeli shrines as belonging to Alevi-Turkish communities; however, I believe that the rhetorical ownership of these shrines by the Cem Foundation, and by association the Turkish state, cannot be separated from physical ownership. This rhetorical ownership has a double context: the relationship of Islamic charity organizations to their original states’ funding construction projects in post-socialist countries and the changing property relations after communism.

These historical narratives on shrines use what Katherine Verdery (1999) terms as “dead body politics” of post-socialism – a distinctive phenomenon that characterizes the post-socialist political transformation in the aftermath of the regime changes in the former Yugoslavia and the
former Soviet Union. At that time, a large number of graves were opened (including mass graves), bones travelled across national borders, people took part in reburials and repatriations, and across the region statues of state leaders were torn down. These politics re-order the symbolic past for newly emerging nation states. All of this is indicative of changing property regimes and a changing relationship between time and space in the realm of post-socialist politics (Verdery 1999). Symbolically, this cross-border traffic of dead bodies lies at the heart of post-socialist competition in the newly opened “religious market,” and in related processes of land privatization and ethnic nationalisms that carved the political landscape of Southeast Europe after the fall of communism.\footnote{Verdery (1999) tells the story of the Greek Catholic bishop Inoehentu Michu of Transylvania (died 1768) whose bones were reburied in Romania in 1997 after two centuries in Rome. The biography of Inoehentu from 18\textsuperscript{th} century Transylvania was carved in the midst of imperial struggles between the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires and is re-appropriated in the post-socialist competition between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church in present-day Romania.} In the midst of these mobile dead bodies moving across national borders, places do not clearly ally with nationalist claims. Instead, they are sources of negotiation for land, for one’s version of nationalist historiography; thus it is useful to imagine places in their performativity.

Since the regions corresponding to former Ottoman lands began to be transformed by the rules of the free-market economy after the fall of the Soviet Union, it has been possible to imagine Rumeli (the Ottoman lands in Europe) through the possessive icons of private property. This is also a time when the new tropes of empire are mapped onto the geopolitical imagery of neo-liberalism. Parallel to the “Turkish aid” flowing into post-socialist countries and the construction projects reshaping the built environment are the cultural intrusions of Turkishness. In this way, Ottoman imperial history provides metaphors of expansion and invasion alongside a
rich textual material to be borrowed, re-interpreted, and manipulated while re-crafting Turkish nationalist imagery and making sense of Turkey’s engagement with global capitalism.

Turkish nationalism in the 21st century is envisioning the Ottoman realm as a dignified power that was defeated by Western imperialism and is now rising out of its ashes – even if it is doing so with credit from the IMF and the World Bank in exchange for the privatization of large sums of land and state enterprises in Turkey. In a post-socialist era significantly defined by the process of privatization, various stakes of Turkish nationalism travel in “Turkish” Rumeli.

Since 2009 the Cem Foundation has embarked on a project of establishing political solidarity with several Bektashi convents and shrines in the Balkans and has begun to organize pilgrimage tours to these places. These annual, week-long Balkan visits (ziyaret) to shrines in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece consist of bus trips departing from Istanbul and involve about forty participants with various motivations. The tour is only affordable to middle class travelers who pay slightly more than what a regular holiday package deal to Europe costs. Until 2011, when the Cem Foundation established its own tourism firm, Allıturna, the Foundation arranged accommodation, bus service, and visa applications with a professional tourism firm.13

Occupying the thin line between tourism and pilgrimage, the Cem Foundation’s visits to Balkan shrines and its homage to Rumeli saints are neither a nostalgic voyage to an ancestral land nor a journey to enjoy the exoticism of the unknown. While it renders Rumeli shrines into national memorials, the audience of this “back to Rumeli” narrative is not restricted to the participants of the tour who leave Istanbul each year. The tour is broadcast on Cem TV. Its purpose is to visit the shrines of “Turkish nobles” who are either depicted as raider-commanders taking part in the expansion of Ottoman imperial territories or as “colonizer dervishes” who

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13 Even though the firm mainly allies itself with spiritual tourism and organizes pilgrimage tours to Balkan shrines, Anatolian shrines, and Kerbala, it also offers recreational holiday packages.
induced the religious conversion of Christian populations of Rumeli. In this imagination, depoliticized folk tradition is merged with a number of texts and personalities to characterize the humanist teachings of Bektashis and Alevis as a manifestation of indigenous tradition of those lands. In the hagiography of Hacı Bektaş, the saint travelled long distances, performed miracles, and journeyed through a borderless landscape. The hagiographical narratives employed by the guide for the Cem Foundation’s Balkan pilgrimage tour hinge on imagining Rumeli as an extension of Anatolia through the movement of significant saints; however, these narratives are intriguingly refracted through the prism of Turkish nationalism as it took on a new shape in the 20th century.

Ayhan Aydin, a journalist, researcher, public relations employee of the Cem Foundation, and organizer of the Balkan trips, contrasts historical verity with mythology: “If we happen to believe in mythology, anything can happen; saints kill the dragons. Of course there is such a dimension of the whole story; I love the miracles dearly, but there are also facts. Historians tell us that Turks had lived here before.”

Historian Cemal Kafadar (1995), however, tells us that the biographies of raider-commanders who took part in the conquest of Rumeli in the 13th century had been incorporated into the official narratives of the newly consolidated Ottoman central authority in the 16th century. Far from being servants of the state, these frontier warriors could claim sovereignty over places they conquered or they could align themselves with the Byzantine forces to fight against the principality of Otman. As Cemal Kafadar notes, the textualization of the saint biographies is a historical and political process; and, much like their counterparts in the Catholic Church, saints are appropriated by the centre, centuries after they die. The process is indeed one that continues to this day.

14 Extract from an interview with Ayhan Aydin, Istanbul, July 2010.
In the Cem TV broadcast of the pilgrimage, the first shots of the camera show the landscape of mountains and meadows in which any sign of cultural identity is absent; however, behind this naturalized landscape – which is a persistent theme of nationalist representation – are lands that are incorporated into the logics of the free market and have become accessible as private property. Devoid of temporal dimensions, these representations are often gendered in idioms of beauty and possessiveness (Massey 1994) that are crafted in reference to a romanticized tradition. Such representations of space in abstraction erase histories of violence, buttressing the legitimacy of state power and flattening the various grids that capitalist interventions leave on the land (Lefebvre 2009). This naturalized landscape, fixed and flattened, on the one hand, opens up possibilities for the tourist gaze in which the visitor is a stranger at leisure. On the other hand, this abstract space can accommodate “cultural intimacy” as a zone of familiarity and can be imagined as a homeland through the affective devices of folk literature and folk songs.\textsuperscript{15}

This comes to the fore when the Cem TV camera zooms in on the Turkish village of Mandacilar (Bivolyane), where the Elmali Baba shrine and convent is located in Bulgaria. This shrine is the first stop on the trip, very close to the Bulgarian-Turkish border, in the Kardzhali (Kiricaali) province in the eastern Rhodope Mountains of southern Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{16} It is the second region in Bulgaria – after the Deliorman region – where the Association of Alevi-Bektashis was founded and supported by Cem Vakfı. The president of the association in Bulgaria stated that the Bulgarian government recognized the association and pronounced the name of the organization in Turkish, “Alevi Bektaşi Dernegi,” adding that the Bulgarian name is “something different.”

\textsuperscript{15} There is a “tension between official and vernacular cultural forms” that is linked to nationalist sentiments (Herzfeld, 2002:23).

\textsuperscript{16} Along with the Deliorman (Ludogorie) region in northeastern Bulgaria, Kircaali and Haskoy (Haskovo) in southern Bulgaria are regions where Turks of Bulgarian decent predominantly live.
In each shrine visited in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Greece, *devis* (Alevi hymns), sung in Turkish, create a sense of familiarity with the landscape of the Balkans as a seamless extension of Anatolia. The memories of violence that mark places in an abstract geography are political processes of place making and, as Keith Basso suggests, “a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities” (1996:5). Cem Vakfi’s nationalist stance on Turkish Islam rejects the idea that there are Alevis who are Kurdish or Armenian, thus situating Alevi identity as essentially Turkish and prescribing it as having an indigenous soul of Anatolia.

However, while it mourns for the massacre and oppression of “Turkish” Alevis in Anatolia, the Cem Foundation celebrates the colonizing state in the Republican history of Turkey and in the historical geography of the Balkans. In this way, this pilgrimage tour imagines the Balkans as an extension of the Turkified Anatolian geography. Here the cosmopolitan desires of a borderless world blurs into imperial desires for colonial expansion.

In the TV broadcasts, various narrators including local villagers, staff members from the local association or convent, the organizer from Cem Vakfi, or tour participants comment on the importance of the visited shrine, the biography of the saint, his historical achievements and miracles, and how they feel about visiting the shrine. The narrator can be a professor of Turkish literature in Turkey who, as a tour participant, recounts the socio-economic importance of the convent complexes in the Ottoman Balkans, or a PhD student of anthropology doing fieldwork who reflects on the continuity of tradition in the region, or an elderly local villager who talks about the miracles of the saint while singing *nefes* and playing his *baglama*. The organizer of the trip reads an Alevi folk poem or a passage from a *velayetname*, and in another segment a tour participant takes us to the battleground details of history, describing the saintly dervish in
question as a warrior who contributed to the Battle of Nicopolis (Nigbolu) in 1396, when the Nigbolu fortress was captured by the Ottomans in the battle fought against the Crusaders.\footnote{17 The Velayetname deals with the hagiography of the Hacı Bektaş, which has various versions and translations.}

At the intersection of these narratives, shrines do not prosaically host where things happen or have happened. In these narratives, the tour participants produce a historical space that appropriates the geography as “once our own” through the ardent tales of invasion or a distant recounting of Ottoman rule. What is the source of power that produces shrines as the locus of conflicting narratives? Is it the saint? If so, who is the saint? Or is it the materiality and monumentality of the stone building complex that readily posits an imperial presence? The crucial question is not simply about performance in places such as making a ritual sacrifice (\textit{kurban}), singing \textit{nefes}, leaving embroidered muslin and towels at the tomb, making wishes, or saying prayers. Instead of taking the materiality of places for granted, we can understand these places as events that are mobilized and animated by narratives (Coleman and Crang 2002:11).

This perspective shatters the taken-for-granted notions of stability (and authenticity) of places which in modern times appear in the metaphor of a rooted tree that attributes these vertical features to a “nation” (Malkki, 1999) and that sustains “genealogical imagination” (Shryock 1997). The imagining of places as temporally and spatially fixed entities that can be subject to change only within the linear history of destruction by storms, earthquakes, cannons, or bombs might be considered a state ideology. To go beyond one-dimensional stories that coordinate time and space within a plot, we need to turn to three-dimensional “narrative acts” that take the narrator and the context into account. As Coleman and Crang argue:

Too often, dramaturgical metaphors suggest performance occurs in a place – reduced to a fixed, if ambient, container. We should instead see places from the perspective of a performance that takes them up and transforms them, redeploy them and connects them

Recognizing the “performativity of places” entails an inquiry into how competing narratives of political actors can mobilize places in distinct ways. However, all of these narratives’ attempts to fix the place and claim their roots are often underscored in nationalist rhetoric. For instance, Bowman (2003) contributes to the debates around religious antagonism by comparatively looking at the Israeli-occupied territories and the former Yugoslavia. Contrary to the arguments about religious antagonism inflamed by historical violence, he looks at how a contemporary “nationalist imaginary” frames the past in a way that members of a nation come to imagine themselves as the descendants of the victims of an erstwhile violence inflicted upon them by an enemy. After the fall of the Soviet Union and during the partitioning of Yugoslavia, religious sites in the Balkans also increasingly became (and continue to be) a battleground for nationalist causes, both literally, as strategic targets of military attacks during the war, and figuratively, as the locus of competing claims over history and memory.

The Serbian Orthodox shrine of Gračanica in southern Kosovo is another site of such competing claims over history and memory. Annually it hosts a pilgrimage of both Muslim Roma and Orthodox Serbs, in which each group performs different rituals and uses the space of the shrine in different ways (Duijzings 2000:68-71). For the Serbian visitors to Gračanica, the principal ritual is the commemoration of the Battle of Kosovo (1389), when the army of Prince Lazar was defeated by the Ottoman army; this is the key historical event in Serbian nationalist historiography (Duijzings 2000). A few kilometres away from Gračanica, on the Macedonian side of the international border, the Harabati Baba convent in Tetova stands for another cause. This Bektashi convent was recently occupied by the Wahhabi-dominated Bashkësia Fetare Islame (Islamic Community of Macedonia). After a Wahhabi group of armed men occupied the
convent one night and forced the attendants of a Bektashi supper out, political tension between the two groups escalated. Wahhabis transformed the tower of the convent into a minaret and began to perform Sunni rituals in the common room. The debate over who can use the convent space (and how) is accentuated by claims over rights to land, and the case was recently appealed in Macedonian court. Resisting such efforts to incorporate heterodox spaces into Sunni orthodoxy constitutes a common meeting ground between Turkish Alevi and Albanian Bektashis.\(^{18}\) This allegiance has further justification in light of the possibility that if a Harabati teqe is converted into a mosque, its imam will most likely be appointed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey.\(^{19}\) The liaison between Turkish Alevi and Albanian Bektashis is undergirded in part by their common rivals, orthodox institutions such as the Islamic Community of Macedonia and the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey.

In “Nationalizing the Sacred,” Bowman (1993) addresses the ways in which discourses and practices related to shrines can be framed by institutional authority. Instead of characterizing the multivocality of shrines in terms of “antagonistic tolerance” or “competitive sharing” between Muslims and Christians (Hayden 2002) – a perspective in which “history” naturalizes contemporary ethnic conflicts – Bowman accentuates power relations at play,\(^{20}\) arguing that these power relations are not configured between an abrupt and highly politicized category of Muslims and Christians, but with respect to who holds the institutional power to inscribe a particular meaning to a place and mobilize it for political ends.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{18}\) The convent is located in the city of Tetova, which is known as the castle of Albanian nationalism in Macedonia. The convent is also visited during Cem Foundation’s Balkan tour.

\(^{19}\) See Cintak (2010) for the use of Diyanet as “Turkish foreign policy instrument.”

\(^{20}\) Pierre Nora’s (1989) distinction between memory and history can be useful to historicize the collective emotions of anger and revenge claimed to perpetrate post–Cold War ethnic conflicts in Southeast Europe.

\(^{21}\) See “Eastern Christians” (2010).
To illustrate, Bowman describes the discrepancy between the accounts of the Greek Orthodox Church and the local people in the shrine of Mar Elyas in Bethlehem during St. Elias Day. While the church authorities incorporate the life-story of the saint into the history of the church and mark the day of St. Elias by venerating the saint, the narratives of the visitors stress the significance of the shrine *only* in terms of “the efficacy of the chains” that lie inside the Greek Orthodox Monastery. In the latter narrative, the significance of the place is derived from the power of the chains, which are believed to have the power to transform a curse into a blessing and to bring good fortune to those who ask for it. As to the identification of the visitors, Bowman notes, being Palestinian is something unfamiliar to the Greek Orthodox Church, and the local practice of “utilizing” the chains that lie in the monastery is deemed foreign (non-Greek) by church authorities. Those who visit the shrine distance themselves from the Palestinian cause, from the perspective of those who believe in the incessant struggle for the independence of Palestine. In other words, Bowman suggests the impossibility of separating place narratives from the surrounding political and social context; however, he acknowledges the possibility of local practices temporarily endowing the shrine with a healing power that is independent from the claims over sovereignty of both the Greek Orthodox Church (with its sovereign space on the property of the monastery) and Palestinian nationalism (with its struggle for the sovereignty of Palestine).

Conflicting shrine narratives often bargain along national fault lines that show the limits of (state) sovereignty and reflect the conceptual tension between power and authority. As Bruce Grant (2011) explores in the context of the Caucasus, state sovereignty is not omnipotent. He demonstrates this in examining dissident narratives in the mountainous rural area of northwestern Azerbaijan, in the village of Bash Shabalid. The village was only occasionally accessible to
Soviet officials, who communicated with the centre via the medium of a paper bureaucracy. Grant shows how state sovereignty has boundaries that are negotiated with local sources of power (2011). Contrary to the expectations of a strict ban on religious observance in the Soviet era, Grant notes how locals invoked burying or mourning the dead as an acceptable alibi for their “religious” practices performed around the tomb of Sheikh Baba. These obfuscations of ritual practice related to the lineage of the saintly Sheikh Baba are part of long-term political dissidence against state authorities; frequent trouble with tsarist officials in the mid-19th century, and a rebellion against Soviet authorities in the early 20th century, bespeak the political power of saintliness. However, the autonomous space created by the local sources of power is contingent on the historical context and is meaningful in relation to what the sovereign stands for. In other words, the notion of political dissidence has a historicity that attests to “how logics of authority, power and reality itself shift across time and space” (Grant 2011:658).

In this light, it is important to address how ancestral memory of dissidence embedded in modern Alevi consciousness is underpinned by unstable notions of authority and dissent. Situating today’s Alevis as the descendants of the Kizilbash is the most common way of addressing Alevi anti-state subjectivity. Kizilbash, or “red head”, was a pejorative name used by Ottoman authorities to refer to Anatolian Shi’ites (Faroqhi 2006:2) or Turkoman nomads who allied with the Shah of Safevid Iran in the mid-16th century. For instance, the poems of Pir Sultan Abdal, the legendary Kizilbash minstrel and rebel who was executed by the order of an Ottoman governor for not abandoning his loyalty to the Shah of Iran, were popular in Turkey among leftist activists in the 1970s. Within the contemporary Alevi movement, Alevi identity is often formulated in a counter position against state zulum (oppression), a position which translated to

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22 Simply translated as “saint” in English, əvliyyə in Azerbaijani (and “evliya” in Turkish) derives from “an Arabic wala, to be near, and waliya, to govern” (Grant, 2011:660).
the 1970s leftist movement through idioms of modern political vocabulary as socialist or democrat.\textsuperscript{23}

However, this aura of trans-historical dissidence is always positioned against changing adversaries. It is noted that in the shifting political context of the 1960s and 1970s Turkey, while experimenting with the multiparty regime, the trend of neo-Kemalism—which re-formulated the ideology of the single party rule of the Kemalist Republic (1923-1945)—re-configured Alevism as an Anatolian folk tradition and incorporated it into the nationalist imagery (Bozarslan, 2000:6-8). A significant dimension of the Kemalist incorporation of Alevism was the manipulation of historical links between Bektashism and Alevism.\textsuperscript{24} This link also entailed the understanding of Bektashism as a pro-state order of the Janissaries. Cem Vakfi can be considered an ally of this Kemalist-Alevi trend that emerged in the conjuncture of the experiments with populist multiparty politics. In this Kemalist interpretation of Alevism, a new genealogy, one among many other genealogies, is written for Alevis. In this narrative, Alevism is interpreted as state-friendly but anti-Sunni, as representative of secular Islam but not Islamism. Thus it reflects Kemalist ideology’s Janus-faced perspective on Ottoman history.

Andrew Shryock (1997) suggests that narratives about ancestral genealogies might prove useful in contemporary electoral politics to mobilize votes on the basis of lineage brotherhood. Oral traditions which recount genealogies “serve as commentary on now as it happened then” (1997:146), and thus, re-order contemporary nexuses of power in reference to a purported history of brotherhoods. Since ancestral stories remain contentious in spoken words --as to which man’s family held the political power, what was the relationship between different lineages and their

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{23} Zulum comes from Arabic \textit{al-zulm} and denotes a sense of physical violence perpetrated by \textit{zalim} the oppressor.
\textsuperscript{24} See Bozarslan (2006). Bektashis had probably embraced the Kizilbash in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, and it is even likely that there were followers of the Shah among the Bektashis (Farqhi, 2006:45). It is noted that Bektashis, situated within the urban and literate networks of power, participated in the Turkish nationalist “Committee of Union and Progress” (Kucuk, 2002).
\end{footnotesize}
relationship to the central authority -- depending on who the narrator is, any attempt to write them down in a chronological order is paradoxical and in contradiction with the logic of orality. The recent emergence of the “Alevi documents” -- which are revealed by dede families -- (Karakaya-Stump, 2010) might be contextualized within the shifting configurations of party politics that network around ‘religious’ brotherhoods in the post 1990s.

These documents attempt to authenticate holy genealogies of dede families and can be considered part of the larger trend of textualizing and researching Alevi origins in history. These Alevi genealogies, along with the recent boom in print literature about Alevis, which often occupy the “history” section of bookstore shelves, inform the various endeavors for establishing a coherent and continuous history of Alevis. As Andrew Shryock suggests, attempts to textualize oral histories entail the silencing of the multivocal and contentious nature of oral accounts, and tend to merge into national meta-narratives. In other words, these ‘tribal’ genealogies establish ties to national myths of origins for a “political community in which ancestors lived” (Shryock, 1997:65) and thus provide various actors with diverse historical pathways to connect with an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006).

Metaphors of kinship are staples of nationalist imagination. Ancestors can be names, titles, or a knowledge that can be commercialized or used for defining new terms of relatedness and I argue that genealogies are continuing and contestable processes that are part and parcel of commercial exchanges. In this way, far from being tribal affiliations which liberal imagination places squarely at the opposite edge of impersonal modern bureaucracy and free market economy, as Povinelli (2006) suggests, genealogies operate in liberal forms of governance, manage differences and can commodify these differences.
3. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis attempts to capture a contemporary moment of encounter between Alevi and Bektashi networks across Southeast Europe and Turkey. Since these networks are newly forming and still in the making, they constitute a telling case to understand the shifting terms of modernity by comparatively looking at the reinvention of Bektashism under post-socialism and the re-appropriation of Alevi dissidence in the 1990s Turkish civil society. In order to examine these trends, I chose to follow two trajectories defining the ways in which an Alevi NGO in Turkey joins in transnational ventures. At the national level, it strives to establish its own elite minority status. Its foundation (vakıf) status allows it to emphasize “service” to communities. As a vakıf that holds a considerable amount of property and land, it also joins the conflicting endeavors of Islamic charity organizations in the “religious market” of post-socialist countries. In the post-socialist milieu of free entrepreneurship, if the financial aid comes from free entrepreneurs connected to transnational capital, the targets of these funds are those who remain in the peripheries of the circuits of transnational capital.

The Balkan ventures of Cem Foundation also highlight the stakes of Turkish nationalism on the Balkan landscape. I analyzed Cem Foundation narratives on Rumeli shrines as a cross-section of what Verdery (1999) termed “dead body politics” of post-socialism. At the backdrop of the contestation over the architectural symbolism of minarets, mosques and shrines, contesting versions of national historiographies come to the fore among the groups which mobilize under heterodox labels against the intrusion of “orthodox Islam” or “Saudi Islam.” Each community with its unique histories and memories that defines it under heterodox labels translates its position in the post 9/11 context as ‘good’ or ‘soft’ Islam.
By following these threads, in this thesis, I explored the re-making of Alevi genealogies in transnational processes. The processes in which Alevi-Bektashi institutions form international alliances with reference to transnational values of moderate Islam institutionalize Alevi genealogies and fashion new origins for an identity that is in search of its meaning. These institutional genealogies accompany holy genealogies of dedes. The process of crafting genealogies is a continuing one, and in the future, it would be possible to see holy genealogies constituting more overt and legitimate means of claiming rights (to land and to do business), which also means the right to claim the representativeness of a community. Since rights of representation are readily transformed into rights to profit, it will be intriguing to see how genealogies of dissidence assume commercial roles in the newly configuring economic relations of Turkey in the 21st century.
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