



What is Heterodox About Alevism? The Development of Anti-Alevi Discrimination and Resentment

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Abstract

This article examines how the widespread denomination of the Alevi tradition as “heterodox Islam” was introduced in the academic field in the late 19th century. This denomination reflects the differentiation between Alevis and Sunnis, which originally did not base on religious differences but on the socio-political power struggle between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids/Kızılbaş. First, the historical development of this conflict and the spread of anti-Safavid/Kızılbaş propaganda in the 16th century will be highlighted. Second, it will be illustrated how the Kızılbaş were ‘rediscovered’ by Westerners in the late 19th century. Then, the development of anti-Alevi discrimination and resentment in the 20th century will be described. Finally, Turkey’s official line in regard to the Alevis’ religious status and the Alevis’ aggressive response to this will be shown.

Keywords

Alevi, Kızılbaş, Shi’a, Sunna, Islam, orthodoxy, heterodoxy, syncretism, heresiology, appropriation of terminology, identity, Ottoman Empire, Turkish Republic

The systematic division of religions into subgroups and sects, traditionalists, modernists and others, has dominated the academic field of the studies on religious history and other related subjects for the last centuries. In many religions the theological discourse itself elaborated such divisions. Thus, it is due to Christian theology that the terms “orthodoxy”, “heterodoxy” and “heresy” were formed to classify what should be seen as the “true” faith and what has to be considered a

deviation from it. Analogous to Christian theology we find an Islamic heresiology that dates back to early Islam, to the Mu'tazila school.¹ One of the major topics of Sunni heresiology is the comparison of Shi'ī to Sunni Islam. But apart from this issue, Sunni heresiology also focuses on numerically rather small religious groups that do feature Islamic elements but differ from Sunni Islam as far as many obligations are concerned. Generally, and contrary to the judgment of Sunni theology, the groups in question regard themselves as Muslim and even contest the claim of Sunni Islam as "righteous".

Since the late 19th and early 20th century, more and more Western Christian missionaries, researchers and travelers had the opportunity to visit the late Ottoman Empire and thus came into direct contact with the Alevi tradition in remote rural areas of Eastern Anatolia. What they discovered among the Alevis partly was in striking contrast to the Islamic tradition they had encountered elsewhere, like e. g. in Constantinople, in Jerusalem or even in Mecca and Medina. There were e. g. no mosques in Alevi villages, the inhabitants did not conduct the ritual prayer five times a day,² the women's headscarves did serve to conceal their hair and the men's beards and moustaches were not shaven in the Sunni style.³ Furthermore, the content of Alevi religion, as reported by Alevis themselves or by Sunni Turkish informants, was quite different from what was known about Islam in the rest of the world. The visitors' image of 'real' Islam was mainly influenced by the situation within the Ottoman Empire, which clearly divides the mass of Sunni Muslims from other religious groups such as the Kızılbaş/Alevis. The power structure of the majority of Sunni Turks at the center of society and the minority of Alevis at the periphery partly reflects this division. Additionally, the Western concept of religion was very closely

¹ John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (Albany, N.Y. 1998), p. 27.

² Frederick William Hasluck, "Heterodox Tribes of Asia Minor", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 51 (Jul.-Dec.) (1921), pp. 310-342, here p. 335.

³ Felix von Luschan, "Die Tachtadschy und andere Ueberreste der alten Bevölkerung Lykiens", *Archiv für Anthropologie: Zeitschrift für Naturgeschichte und Urgeschichte des Menschen. Organ der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 19 (1891), pp. 31-53, here p. 32 and 35.

connected to scripture (Qur'ān and *sunna*) as reference for what was the 'correct' Islamic belief and practice. Thus, the Alevi tradition, which was mostly unknown because of its esoteric characteristics prohibiting the disclosure of their religious writings, was classified in Western accounts and studies as 'heterodox Islam' in analogy to the Christian usage of the word "heterodox".

Generally, "heterodox Islam" is an unquestioned and somehow operational term in the academic area to denominate not only Alevism but also other religious groups like Druses or Aḥmadīs. Their relation to and deviance from Sunni Islam was undisputedly accepted for many decades, and sometimes still is. The concept of syncretism that either forms an alternative to the concept of heterodoxy or is used in addition to it, does not include the mostly depreciative connotation of the term, which implies that the group in question has gone astray from Sunni Islam or rather from an assumed Islamic "orthodoxy" without which a "heterodoxy" cannot 'exist'.⁴ In regard to Alevism, an important role for the implementation of the terms "heterodoxy" and "syncretism" has been played by two of the most famous academics in the field of Alevi tradition, Irène Mélikoff and her former disciple Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, who prominently represent the denomination of Alevism as "heterodox Islam" and "syncretistic tradition".⁵

⁴ Still, the terms "syncretism" and "heterodoxy" are often used as synonyms and without critical discussion of what they shall in-/exclude. Exemplary of this issue is that in most of the contributions to the proceedings of the conference on "Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East" (Berlin, 1995) the term "heterodox" is not only preferred but also undisputedly used (*Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East: Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevism in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the Past and Present"*, Berlin, 14-17 April 1995, ed. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele et. Anke Otter-Beaujean (Studies in the History of Religions: NUMEN Book Series; 76) (Leiden, New York et. Köln 1997).

⁵ See e. g. Irène Mélikoff, "L'Islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie", *Turcica* 14 (1982), 142-154; and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Un Aperçu général sur l'hétérodoxie musulmane en Turquie: Réflexion sur les origines et les caractéristiques du Kızılbaşisme (Alévisme) dans la perspective de l'histoire", *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East: Collected Papers of the International Symposium "Alevism in Turkey and Comparable Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East in the Past and Present"*, Berlin, 14-17 April 1995, ed. K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele et. A. Otter-Beaujean (Studies in the History of Religions: NUMEN Book Series; 76) (Leiden, New York et. Köln 1997), 195-204.

Obviously, the original negative connotation of Christian “heterodoxy”, signifying a different or foreign doctrine “that derives from other [than Christian] sources and penetrates the Church in the form of an anti-doctrine,”⁶ does not exist in the case of Alevism. Turkish academics use “heterodoks” in a strictly descriptive way, ignoring the originally negative connotation of “heterodox”. Today, even Alevi use the term to designate themselves and to promote Alevism as ‘better’ than “orthodox (Sunni) Islam” and as bearer of Turkish folk tradition. The usage of this term might be favored—especially by Alevi—since the Turkish quasi-equivalents have extremely negative connotations or serve as insults (e. g. *sapık* or *kafir*, which both mean “heretic,” “non-believer”). But still, regardless of the terms in use, it cannot be concealed that a prejudicial attitude of Sunni Turks towards Alevi, still for the most part religiously based, continues to exist. In the following, the origin of the distinction between Sunni/orthodox and Alevi/heterodox shall be pointed out. Furthermore, the development of anti-Alevi attitudes and rumors, and the recent appropriation of the term “heterodox” by the Alevi themselves will be illustrated. Due to its overview character, the following sketch will be a general one.

1. Power Struggle and Religious Dichotomy

The division of the manifold variations of Islamic tradition into one (main) orthodoxy and several (smaller) heterodoxies generally reflect the prevailing power constellations within certain Islamic societies. Although most of these constellations seem to re-enact religious conflicts, they are very often based on political and material reasons. In the struggle for material wealth or political and social status, religion is used as a means to certain ends—like justification, legitimation, agitation, etc. In such cases, the unequal power relations are often perceived by the Western observers as religious differences, using the labels of “heterodoxy” and “orthodoxy”. The non-religious aspects of

⁶ Notger Slenczka, “Orthodoxie: I. Zum Begriff”, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft: Vol. 6: N-Q*. 4th revised edition, ed. Hans Diether Betz, Don S. Browning [et. al.] (Tübingen 2001), pp. 693-694, here p. 694.

such relationships are often neglected, although they are essential for any understanding of them. Furthermore, the context to which the distinction between “heterodox” and “orthodox” applies has to be taken into account. Frederick William Hasluck hints to this in his article on heterodox (i. e. Alevi) tribal units in Anatolia whose “[...] unorthodox practices [...] are [...] to be referred [...] to the *Shia* branch of the Mahomedan faith, which, though orthodox in Persia, is to the *Sunni* Turks quite as much outside the pale as the Christianity of the Armenian is to the Greek or *vice versa*.”⁷ Here, he alludes to one of the important influences on Alevi tradition, i.e. the extreme Shi‘is (*ḡulāt*) of the Safavid order that founded the Twelver Shi‘i Iranian dynasty of the Safavids. During the military conflict of Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire for political, economic and territorial reasons in the 16th century, the religious dichotomy of both parties was put to the fore for justificatory reasons. The Ottomans started to promote Sunni Islam as “true” and condemned the Safavid variation of Shiism as “heretical”. The accusation of heresy was also aimed at the historical forerunners of today’s Alevis, the Turcoman tribes of Anatolia, who sided with the Safavids. It can be assumed that the beginning of the 16th century forms the initial point of anti-Alevi attitudes, which have ‘survived’ in the shape of rumors, prejudices and depreciatory judgments until today.

2. The Ottoman-Safavid Conflict: The Initial Point of the Dichotomy of Sunnis and Alevis

The term “Alevi” used today to denominate the group(s) in question is rather modern in its use. It was not until the late 19th century that it came into use as a self-designated name and was later on—even though slowly—adopted by non-Alevis as well.⁸ The historical denomination of Alevis was the name of their quasi-forerunners, the Kızılbaş.⁹ Parts

⁷ Hasluck, “Heterodox Tribes of Asia Minor”, p. 311.

⁸ For a short summary on this see e. g. Markus Dreßler, *Die alevitische Religion: Traditionslinien und Neubestimmungen* (Abhandlungen zur Kunde des Morgenlandes; 53.4) (Würzburg 2002), pp. 170-171.

⁹ In this article the term “Kızılbaş” is used to denote the ‘historical’ Alevis till the late 19th and early 20th century since from then on Alevis have designated themselves as

of these mostly Turcoman tribes settled in Ottoman territory in Eastern Anatolia but supported the Safavid Order from Ardabil (Persia) from the 14th century on.¹⁰ The Safeviye was a Sunni order which turned to extreme Shi'ism (*ḡulūw*) in the mid-15th century when the *şeyhs* of the order began to seek political and material power. According to Safavid tradition it was at this time that the term "Kızılbaş" was given to the members of the Turcoman tribes as an honorary title for providing the military backbone of the Safavid cause.¹¹

In 1501, the Safavids succeeded in constructing their own political reign on Persian territory under their first *şah* İsmail I. The policy of expanse of both Ottomans and Safavids met in those parts of Eastern Anatolia that were located between the Ottoman and Safavid spheres of power. After the battle of Çaldıran in 1514, from which the Ottoman Empire emerged victorious under the command of Sultan Selim I, the climax of Ottoman-Safavid armed hostilities was reached. Still, Kızılbaş riots and rebellions against the Ottomans—obviously encouraged and/or assisted by the Safavids—broke out repeatedly, and additionally, many Kızılbaş tribes left the Ottoman territory for Persia. This meant an important decline of taxpaying subjects and—even more fatal—the loss of manpower that would not disperse just anywhere but directly inure to the benefit of the Ottomans' enemy, the Safavid state and army.¹² The border between the two empires was closely watched by the Ottomans, and the Kızılbaş tribes settling on Ottoman territory were persecuted to avoid further Kızılbaş upheavals

"Alevi" and their tradition changed in many aspects. The combination of both terms as "Kızılbaş/Alevi(s)" is chosen when certain issues concern both the 'historical' as well as the 'modern' Alevi.

¹⁰ Roger M. Savory, "Şafavids: I. Dynastic, Political and Military History", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*. Vol. VIII, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Hamilton A. R. Gibb [et al.] (Leiden 1995), 765b-771b, here p. 766a.

¹¹ Roger M. Savory, "Kızıl-bāsh", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition*. Vol. V, ed. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, Hamilton A. R. Gibb [et al.] (Leiden 1986), 243a-245b, here p. 244a.

¹² For the inner-Ottoman situation in the 16th century see e. g. Hanna Sohrweide, "Der Sieg der Safaviden in Persien und seine Rückwirkungen auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert", [Hamburg, Univ., Diss., 1965], *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients* 41 (1965), pp. 95-223. Especially on the rebellions following the battle of Çaldıran see *ibid.*, pp. 164-168.

and oppress Safavid propaganda among them. Amongst the harsh measures taken against Kızılbaş within the Ottoman Empire were e. g. the very often imposed death penalty, the banishment of families, custody or heavy labor on galleys.¹³

In the course of this conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids, the original argument of political supremacy was relegated to the background. Both parties began to emphasize the religious differences between each other in order to legitimize their aggression against the Muslim neighbor. On the Ottoman side this led to “the development of legalistic Sunnism as Ottoman state doctrine.”¹⁴ This Turkish Sunni variation of Islam as the scale for “correct” belief was built in direct (and intended) contrast to the Shi‘i tradition of the Safavids and the Kızılbaş tribes. To continue Drefßler’s argument: The invention of Sunni orthodoxy accompanied the declaration of Safavid and Kızılbaş heterodoxy and therefore the aggression against them was considered just from the religious point of view.

3. Polemical writings and official accusations: Anti-Alevi policy and the stoking of resentments

The Safavids and the Kızılbaş represented a religious extremism (*ğulūw*) that demanded socio-political disturbance and disobedience towards any power other than their own leadership and agents or the proclaimed ‘Messiah’ (*mehdī/mahdī*) himself. Besides that, the ‘deviant character’ of the Safavid and Kızılbaş ‘ritual agenda’ did not differ much from that of other non-Sunni Muslims within the Ottoman domain, such as the manifold Dervish orders—leave alone the folk religious variations of Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, the Ottomans felt compelled to react to the vast array of Safavid and Kızılbaş adherents within the Ottoman Empire and the powerful support and agitation by the Safavid leadership. The less favorable economic situation within the Ottoman Empire, namely land expropriation, high tax burden,

¹³) Sohrweide, “Der Sieg der Safaviden in Persien”, pp. 192-195.

¹⁴) Markus Drefßler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict”, *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke et. Maurus Reinkowski (The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage; 34) (Leiden et al. 2005), pp. 151-173, here p. 151.

plagues and crop failure, had already caused the Turcoman tribes to affiliate with the Safavids and contributed to the participation of more Ottoman subjects in Kızılbaş riots.¹⁵ The Ottomans tried to dispel this threat by the official order to persecute Kızılbaş and anyone sympathizing with them. The description of Kızılbaş as “offenders against the law and order” was elaborated by polemical writings that underlined the accusations by calling them heretic and immoral.

Among the historical sources that demonstrate how the Ottomans constructed the idea of Kızılbaş heresy are juridical documents, mainly imperial orders (*fermans*),¹⁶ and polemical writings¹⁷ from the 16th century. The polemics unequivocally represent the impetus of the political and historical situation. Besides the accusations of religious deviance, the past and future conquests of the Safavids and their ‘tyranny’ is denounced¹⁸ in order to justify the Ottoman aggression. Although it is possible that the polemics were ordered by the imperial command, some of the polemics are written by Sunni Persians who left Persia (voluntarily) or had to leave since the Safavids had enforced Twelver Shiism. Therefore, their anti-Safavid/Kızılbaş writings might be composed out of personal reasons as some sort of gratification for their lost status. For the Ottomans they were a welcome possibility to promote their anti-Safavid/Kızılbaş policy.¹⁹

The polemical writings served to emphasize the following issues: a) characterization of Safavids and Kızılbaş in regard to their military and political tyranny, but most of all to their religious deviance; b) justification of aggression against them as legitimized duty of Holy War (*cihadl’ğihād*); and c) stoking of fears within the Ottoman population

¹⁵ Dreßler, “Inventing Orthodoxy”, pp. 153-154.

¹⁶ See Ahmet Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda Rafizilik ve Bektaşilik [sic]: On Altıncı Asırda Türkiyede Rafizilik ve Bektaşiliği Dair Hazinesi Evrak Vesikalarını Havidir* (Istanbul 1932), pp. 29-41; and Colin H. Imber, “The Persecution of the Ottoman Shi’ites According to the Mühimme Defterleri, 1565-1585”, *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients* 56.2 (1979), pp. 245-273; and Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, “Qizilbash “Heresy” and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia During the Sixteenth Century”, in *Anatolia Moderna / Yeni Anadolu* 7 (1997), pp. 1-13.

¹⁷ See e.g. Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* [Freiburg i. Br., Univ., Diss.] (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen; 3) (Freiburg i. Br. 1970).

¹⁸ Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 112.

¹⁹ Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, pp. 53-60.

in regard to wealth and order as well as religious integrity and salvation. Compared to the elaborated polemics, the official orders contain only a few of these issues, due to their short and concise character. But still, both sorts of texts encouraged the use of “Kızılbaş” as synonymous for Safavids in Persia and Kızılbaş on Ottoman territory. Hence in the Ottomans’ use, the term lost its original positive meaning as honorary title.²⁰ As the following chapters will show, “Kızılbaş” became an insult in the Ottoman Turkish language usage.

One of the most comprehensive lists of the ‘Kızılbaş criteria’ to detect the rebellious heretics is included in an imperial command from 1581:

[...] [T]hey curse and revile the Four Chosen Friends [i. e. the four first caliphs after Muhammed], [...] they openly address Muslims with the words “Yezîd geldi”, [...] they assemble at night, bringing wives and daughters to their assemblies, where they have disposal of one another’s wives and daughters, [...] they know neither prayer nor fasting [...] they never call their sons Abû Bakr, ‘Umar or ‘Uthmân and, since none of them bears these names, it is clear that they are heretics.²¹

In the polemics, there are further accusations such as the consumption of alcohol or the disregard shown towards the Qur’ân.²² Those accusations of deviance from the religious norms of Sunni Islam have been based to the present on some of the characteristics of Kızılbaş or Alevi practice—almost all Alevis do not fast in Ramadan, do not conduct the five daily prayers and do not recognize the prohibition of alcohol. But these facts about the religious Kızılbaş tradition obviously did not suffice to brand them as heretics. They were accused of further misdeeds that are not at all linked to the reality of their religious prac-

²⁰ Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 72.

²¹ “[...] çar yarı güzin [...] sebbü şetim idüb müslümanlara alâniyyeten Yezid geldi deyu kelimat idüb ve gice ile cemiyet idüb avretlerin ve kızların meclislerine götürüb birbirlerinin avretlerin ve kızların tasarruf idüb salât ve savm bilmeyüb ve oğullarına Ebubekir [...] ve Ömer [...] ve Osman [...] isimlerin ıtlak etmeyüb ve içlerinde dahi bu isimler ile müsemma kimesne olmamağla mühlid oldukları zâhir olub [...]” (Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda Rafızilik*, p. 40; translation from Imber, “The Persecution of the Ottoman Shi’ites”, pp. 261f.).

²² For these and further accusations see e. g. the detailed elaboration on polemical writings in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, pp. 84-116.

tice. The most common one of these accusations is the widespread rumor that Kızılbaş would assemble at night to abandon themselves to sexual debauchery, even within the prohibited degrees. This calumny on the level of the morals of sexuality was often put forward in connection with Kızılbaş. As a result, the word “Kızılbaş” became an expression of insult when blaming a person (or a group) of immoral and sexual debauchery, most of all of incest.²³ Colin Imber writes on this issue, “This accusation of sexual immorality appears to be a caricature of *kızılbaş* ceremonies in which both sexes participate. [...] The same accusations occur in contemporary reports of the secret activities of the *melāmīs* in Bosnia.”²⁴ His explanation combines two of the most important factors that might encourage the spreading of such a rumor: In the Kızılbaş ritual, men and women participate together—there is no separation of the sexes. For Sunni Muslims, it is impossible to accept a ritual of this kind as ‘worship’. Furthermore, because of the esotericism of Kızılbaş tradition, the rituals were conducted in secrecy, which raised suspicion among the Sunni Muslims whose religious practice is carried out in public.

The stigmatization of Safavids and Kızılbaş as unbelievers and heretics served to legitimize military actions against them, and most of all to propagate this fight as the religious obligation of *ğihād*. Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān, who dedicated his polemical writing to Sultan Murad III, emphasizes that “the Holy War and the fight against him [i. e. a Safavid/Kızılbaş] is a duty for the sultan of Islam.”²⁵ Later on he writes that it was lawful for the army of Islam to fight against the “unbelievers”, that the killing of one of them is the most deserving *ğihād*, and that anyone killed by a Kızılbaş would be a highly-respected martyr.²⁶

Another aim of the Ottoman propaganda was the stoking of fears among the population at large. In the polemical writing of Qāsim an-Naḥḡuwānī, the Kızılbaş are said to be “a people of impudent

²³ See e. g. Drefler, “Inventing Orthodoxy”, p. 165, footnote 20.

²⁴ Imber, “The Persecution of the Ottoman Shī‘ites”, p. 261.

²⁵ *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwīl* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 220, line 12-13: “Fa-waḡaba ḡihāduhu wa-qitāluhu ‘alā sulṭānī ‘l-islām [...]”.

²⁶ *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwīl* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 220, line 17-p. 221, line 1.

oppressors” and are accused of “tyranny, injustice, arrogance, and opposition.”²⁷ Their reign would lead to political and social disorder, which is inseparably connected to religious lawlessness (*ibāḥa*) and would affect the population’s wealth. To ally oneself with the Kızılbaş, especially with Şah İsmail I, would not only lead to political and social disorder but would change the status of a Muslim into that of a non-believer, a *kāfir/kāfir*. From then on, the *tekfir/takfir*, the declaration of a person as gone astray from Islam, would determine that this person was outlawed, that their lawful status was lost. As Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān writes, “It is lawful to kill them, to rob their possessions and to shed their blood.”²⁸ Sohrweide also mentions a few cases of ordered executions e. g. by drowning the condemned in Lake Kızıl Irmak that had to be conducted clandestinely because it was against the *şeriat/şarī‘a* law.²⁹ Compared to a *zimmil/zimmī*, a member of a religion possessing a scripture (*ehl el-kitāb/ahl al-kitāb*), whose status was lawfully established and regulated in regard to e. g. taxation, possession or garment, a Kızılbaş was not considered a believer at all since he betrayed the religion of Islam and propagated a “wrong” interpretation of it. This is even more serious when we consider that in most cases a Kızılbaş was a former Sunni Muslim. In addition, the people should not only fear the loss of the wealth and social order, but be anxious about their religious integrity and salvation because “[...] [the Kızılbaş] stray from the [right] way [of Islam] and they mislead [others from the right way of Islam]”.³⁰

To sum up, the accusations against the Safavids and Kızılbaş that marked the beginning of today’s anti-Alevi attitudes were based primarily on two pillars of argument: One was the emphasis of the differences in the Kızılbaş religious tradition that had gone astray from the true belief and practice of Sunni Islam and was characterized as “heretic”. The other pillar was the spreading of rumors about their alleged immorality, impurity, incest that were most probably incorrect and in

²⁷ Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 113.

²⁸ *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwil* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 224, line 10: “Wa-ḥalla qitāluhum wa-nahbu ‘amwālihim wa-safku dimā’ihim”.

²⁹ Sohrweide, “Der Sieg der Safawiden in Persien”, pp. 194f.

³⁰ *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwil* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 229, line 9: “Fa-ḥallū wa-‘aḥallū ‘ani ‘s-sabil”.

no way connected to their religious tradition but served to further denigrate them.

4. The Kızılbaş Between the 17th and the mid-19th century

While the Kızılbaş still appear in official documents of the 16th century, they seem to have “disappeared from the scene”³¹ from the 17th-century onward. As a result of severe persecutions that took place until the end of the 16th century, a social, political and economical isolation of the Kızılbaş communities set in and led to their marginalization and withdrawal into remote rural areas of south and (south-)east Anatolia. It can only be speculated about what happened to the Kızılbaş (communities) until the mid-19th century when especially Western Protestant missionaries, travelers and researchers were able to explore the isolated and remote areas of Anatolia and wrote about their encounters with those groups.³²

While the role of the Kızılbaş tribes among the Safavid army was rather easily accessible to research, due to the written accounts of this period, the fate of the Kızılbaş communities in the Ottoman lands remained almost unknown. All one can learn from then on is that the former Kızılbaş tribes gave up their nomadic way of life and the rebellious mentality since the Ottomans had broken their will to revolt and had deprived them of their military (and religious) leader, the Safavid *şah*. They became sedentary, conducted agriculture, and, in separation from the Sunni Muslim communities and institutions, the dispersed communities developed a system of social and religious norms that

³¹ Schriban Sahin, *The Alevi Movement: Transformation from Secret Oral to Public Written Culture in National and Transnational Social Spaces*, [unpubl. Diss., New School University, New York 2001] (UMI Microform; 3027098) (New York 2001), p. 40.

³² For the Protestant missionaries see e. g. Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia: The Interactions between Alevis and Missionaries in Ottoman Anatolia”, *Die Welt des Islams: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 41.1 (2001), pp. 89-111. For travelogues see e. g. Felix von Luschan, “Die Tachtadschy und andere Ueberreste der alten Bevölkerung Lykiens”, *Archiv für Anthropologie: Zeitschrift für Naturgeschichte und Urgeschichte des Menschen. Organ der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 19 (1891), pp. 31-53; or J. W. Crowfoot, “Survivals Among the Kappadocian Kyzylbash (Bektashi)”, *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900), pp. 305-320.

kept them alive. Although the isolation and dispersion of the Kızılbaş communities calmed down the atmosphere of riot and civil commotion within the Ottoman Empire, another result of the marginalization was an even larger distance between Kızılbaş and Sunni Turks. This was an ideal nutrient for suspicion, distrust, and calumny because

[o]nce [...] separatism exists, however, the ground is laid for all sorts of psychological elaborations. People who stay separate have few channels of communication. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups, and readily misunderstand the ground for it.³³

Still, it is unclear to which extent the state and thus the religious or other official institutions contributed to the spread of rumors and prejudices about the reputed nefarious attitude and behavior of the Kızılbaş, but the early travelogues of the 19th and 20th century show that the public opinion amongst Sunni Turks towards Kızılbaş resembles the content of those 16th century polemical writings and juridical documents.

5. The ‘Rediscovery’ of the Kızılbaş: Prejudices or Facts?

When Western academics ‘rediscovered’ the Kızılbaş, they received much information about them from Sunni Muslims, and although most academics were aware of the Sunnis’ animosity towards the Kızılbaş, it was not easy for them to separate prejudicial rumors from facts. Furthermore, the observers’ knowledge about Islam was highly influenced by the scripture-based and prestigious traditions of Sunni and Twelver Shi‘i Islam. Thus, the irrational prejudices and accusations of immorality or impurity were dismissed as rumors, but it was mostly conceded that the Kızılbaş tradition was a deviance from Sunni Islam. Therefore, it is understandable that the term “heterodox” was chosen to denominate these groups since it does not have the negative connotation of “heretic” and implies the relation to the Sunni tradition as (original) norm.

³³ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA [et al.] 1954), p. 19.

The account of the Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan, who conducted his research among the Alevi subgroup of Tahtacis in Lycia, is typical of the *mélange* of information that entered the Western academic area at this time:

Formally, the Tahtacis are treated as catholic, indeed every real Muslim considers them as *kafir* and himself as authorized to denigrate them. [...] All the immense vices are imputed to them, and especially their grand orgies are recited endlessly. Once or several times a year, according to other accounts even weekly, all the habitants of one village would assemble at night, would drink wine and would make long agitating speeches; then all the lights would be extinguished, and about what happens then Turkish *zabtiyes* [i. e. gendarmes] or land laborers give their fancy full scope; and it is even difficult to make comprehensible to intelligent Turks that those fairy tales are missing their actual basis—namely a large room where several families can assemble [...].³⁴

Von Luschan points at the most common prejudice (he calls it “fairy tale”) against Kızılbaş/Alevi, which includes sexual debauchery, incest and adultery and is simply known as *Kızılbaşlık* or *mum söndürmek*—i. e. the alleged practice of “extinguishing the candle”. Frederic William Hasluck, the British anthropologist, emphasizes in an article of 1921 that information about this is based on prejudice and calumny.³⁵ Since Kızılbaş tradition is esoteric, non-members are excluded from ritual gatherings and most parts of community life. This secrecy, as

³⁴ “Formell werden ja die Tachtadschy als rechthgläubig behandelt, in der That aber hält sie jeder richtige Mohammedaner für “Kafir” und sich selbst für berechtigt, schlecht von ihnen zu reden. [...] [Ihnen werden] die grössten Laster zugeschrieben, und besonders von ihren grossartigen Orgien wird unaufhörlich erzählt. Ein- oder mehrmals im Jahre, nach anderen Berichten sogar allwöchentlich, kämen alle Einwohner eines Dorfes des Nachts zusammen, tranken Wein und hielten lange aufregende Reden, dann würden alle Lichter verlöscht, und was dann vorgeht, das wird in der Phantasie türkischer Saptiehs und Pferde knechte natürlich in satten Farben ausgemalt, aber auch intelligenten Türken kann man nur schwer begrifflich machen, dass diesen Märchen zunächst die actuelle Grundlage fehlt—nämlich der grosse Raum, in dem mehrere Familien sich versammeln können [...]” (Felix von Luschan, “Die Tachtadschy und andere Ueberreste der alten Bevölkerung Lykiens”, *Archiv für Anthropologie: Zeitschrift für Naturgeschichte und Urgeschichte des Menschen. Organ der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 19 (1891), pp. 31-53, here p. 32).

³⁵ Hasluck, “Heterodox Tribes of Asia Minor”, p. 338.

already mentioned by Imber, raised Sunni suspicion. It is often argued that the secret gatherings of Kızılbaş were to conceal nothing else than the unmoral acts that they were accused of. The case of *mum söndürmek* is the example *par excellence* of a rumor that fortifies a certain 'anti-attitude': The original rumor, which most probably goes back to actual cases of adultery (*zina/zinā*) or temporary marriage (*muta/mutʿa*)³⁶ among Safavids and/or Kızılbaş, has been modified to an exaggerated and even more negative content. Such negativity is a typical feature of rumors since people's interest in negative news is greater than in positive ones.³⁷ Thus, negativity helps to stabilize rumors and fortify the belief in them. The same applies to prejudices that are often transmitted and supported by rumors. As von Luschan mentions, it is hard to convince Sunni Turks of the opposite since knowledge about this is taken for granted.

Von Luschan is very critical about the widespread information that concerns the Tahtacı, and he seems to recognize the religious but also social difference between Sunnis and Tahtacı when he writes, "[...] even a traveler who is only passing through will soon recognize—if he is able to speak the language of the country—that his Muslim servants regard those people as of a quite lower status than themselves."³⁸ But nevertheless, his opinion on this Kızılbaş subgroup's religious tradition is as follows: "[T]heir connection to Islam is still only pretended, actually it is even fictitious."³⁹ Evaluations like this were common and it was often argued that Kızılbaş could be some sort of crypto-Christians or combine practices of "the primitive stratum of religion [...] and [of] the *Shia* branch of the Mahommedan faith."⁴⁰

³⁶ Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, pp. 92-95.

³⁷ Michel-Louis Rouquette, "Le Syndrome de rumeur", *Communications* 52, pp. 119-123, p. 120.

³⁸ "Außerdem wird auch ein flüchtiger Reisender, wenn er nur die Landessprache versteht, bald merken, dass seine mohammedanischen Diener diese Leute als wesentlich unter sich stehend betrachten [...]" (Luschan, "Die Tachtadschy und andere Ueberreste der alten Bevölkerung Lykiens", p. 32).

³⁹ "[...] [I]hr Zusammenhang mit dem Islam ist trotzdem nur ein scheinbarer, eigentlich sogar ein fingirter" (Luschan, "Die Tachtadschy und andere Ueberreste der alten Bevölkerung Lykiens", p. 32).

⁴⁰ Hasluck, "Heterodox Tribes of Asia Minor", p. 310f.

6. The Development of Anti-Kızılbaş/Alevi Resentments and Prejudices in the 20th Century

The accusations and prejudices against the Kızılbaş/Alevi were obviously accepted and present in the public mind when the first ‘modern’ accounts of travelers and academics were published. In almost every publication the two major pillars of anti-Kızılbaş propaganda are mentioned: the contempt of the obligations of Sunni Islam as well as the different beliefs and practices and the immoral behavior and impurity of Kızılbaş. But this has changed—the acceptance of prejudices and resentments in public is low and their presence is especially rare in an official context or in the media. But still most of the prejudicial attitude continues to be spread in form of rumors and jokes that are predominant in the private domain.

Approximately until the beginning of the 20th century was the anti-Kızılbaş/Alevi attitude part of firmly implemented prejudices that were not questioned and could be voiced in public as certain historical sources demonstrate, e. g. the above-mentioned Western travelogues or encyclopedic works from the late Ottoman period.⁴¹ But with the end of the Ottoman Empire, the acceptance of those prejudices began to decline due to the Western oriented modernism of the Turkish Republic and the beginning emancipation of the Alevi. The Turkish Republic took a different stance on Alevism than the Ottoman policy: Officially, Alevi were neither discriminated against nor persecuted for religious reasons since the secular constitution of the Republic guaranteed not to differentiate citizens on the ground of their confession. Even more, Alevism was not considered to be a religious deviance of Islam but an entity of groups that represent the Turkish folk tradition. This policy was chosen in order to avoid that religious or any other kind of heterogeneity could imperil the ‘young’ state’s unity. Thus, the Alevi were integrated into the secular “Turkish state” as bearers of the Turkish cultural heritage. Many Alevi who had experienced discrimination

⁴¹) Johannes Zimmermann: “Das Alevitentum und seine religiösen Institutionen (dede, ocak) in osmanischen Wörterbüchern des 19. Jahrhunderts”, *Ocak und Dedelik: Institutionen religiösen Spezialistentums bei den Aleviten*, eds. J. Karolewski, R. Langer et. R. Motika (Heidelberger Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Vorderen Orients) (Frankfurt a.M. 2008) [in print].

because of their religious tradition appreciated this new situation but ignored that their religious tradition— although the officials paid no attention to it – was not accepted. Latent prejudices against the Alevi became apparent in the 1970/80s when many young Alevi participated in the Leftist Movement and the state reinforced its efforts against them by using the anti-Alevi resentments as an instrument. With regard to the political situation of this period, the Alevi were associated with Communism and Kurdish Nationalism, which threatened the political order of the state. Now, the anti-Alevi attitude was determined by a strong recourse to the historical situation of the 16th century when the Kızılbaş upheavals brought social and political disorder. The Alevi were perceived as continuing this rebellious tradition—they were seen as hostile to the state authority and were expected to remain this way. The description of the Kızılbaş upheavals as nothing more than rebellious actions against the state authority is only one part of the historical situation, but this part conveniently served to stoke anti-Alevi attitudes. The other part of historical processes, namely the fact that the Kızılbaş upheavals were caused by social and political inequality, was taken up by the Alevi who considered themselves as exponents of a historical tradition that advocates the cause of the socially disadvantaged. Alevism was seen as a humanistic attitude towards life or as a socialist worldview by many Leftist Alevi who wanted to break with a religious tradition that to them included and justified exploitative practices.⁴² But after the military coup of 1980, when the political Left was put down, most of the former Leftist Alevi were influenced by the official support for Sunni Islam that set in at this time. Since the early 1990s, the Alevi activists have strictly differentiated between Alevism and Sunni Islam, which

⁴² The most criticized feature of Alevi tradition was the division of the members into laymen (*talibs*) and religious specialists (*dedes*), the latter having religious and social power. The *talibs* had to contribute a certain kind of material duties (*hakkullah*) to the *dedes*. Some Leftist Alevi considered the *dedes'* exploitations and the suppression of the laymen to hinder the social enlightenment in Alevism (Hüseyin Ağuışenođlu, "Das alevitische Dede-Amt", *Migration und Ritualtransfer: Religiöse Praxis der Aleviten, Jesiden und Nusairier zwischen Vorderem Orient und Westeuropa*, ed. Robert Langer, Raoul Motika et. Michael Ursinus (Heidelberger Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Vorderen Orients; 33) (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin [et. al.] 2005), pp. 132-145; here p. 143).

finally led to the “Alevi Revivalism” whose “first visible signs [...] were the emergence of Alevi periodicals and newspapers, a great number of (mostly apologetic) publications by Alevi authors on Alevilik, and the establishment of community-based associations throughout Turkey and in the European diaspora.”⁴³

In various parts of the Turkish society, namely among radical Sunnis, Turkish nationalists and anti-Communists, the prejudicial contents were consciously misused to mobilize the masses against the Alevi—this anti-Alevi propaganda cleared the way for a latent aggressive attitude towards Alevi that resulted partially in violent actions like the anti-Alevi pogroms of Maraş and Çorum in 1978, and not to forget the incidence of Sivas in 1993.⁴⁴ Besides these ‘new’ prejudices, which connect Alevi to subversive attitudes such as Socialism or Communism and Separatism, derogatory opinions regarding the Alevi religious tradition still existed then. As do also the calumny and rumors about *mum söndürmek*. However, they are rarely present in official contexts but can be found in the form of malicious agitation or jokes among Sunni Turks.

One of the rare but striking examples of the use of anti-Alevi rumors as the basis of jokes was an incidence in a Turkish television show in 1995. In the course of a conversation that was designed to be funny, the show’s host Güner Ümit asked an actress whose role was that of a pregnant woman to reveal the identity of the baby’s father. After some exchange of words, the woman said, the baby’s father was her father as well. Thereupon, Ümit retorted by asking whether it was indeed her own father’s baby and whether she was (therefore) a Kızılbaş (“Bu çocuk babandan mı, sen Kızılbaş mısın?”⁴⁵ This incident demonstrates that the rumor about *mum söndürmek* and the denomination of *Kızılbaş* are still known by many Sunni Turks as some sort of insult

⁴³ Reha Çamuroğlu, “Alevi Revivalism in Turkey,” *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives: Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, November 25–27, 1996*, ed. Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga et. Catherina Raudvere (Transactions: Svenska Forskningsinstitutet Istanbul / Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul; 8) (Istanbul 1998), pp. 79–84; here p. 79.

⁴⁴ Sahin, *The Alevi Movement*, pp. 55f.

⁴⁵ <http://www.huseyin-simsek.com/tr/yazilar/article/8/tuerkce-edebiyatta-alevi-kizilbas-ve-bektasiler.html>.

suitable for jokes and accusations—otherwise Ümit would not have designed the exchange as he had and his joke probably would have been misunderstood.

Another still wide-spread prejudice is that of the Alevis' impurity, which is not only restricted to the level of ritual (im)purity. The non-existence of the Islamic ritual ablutions of *ğusl* and *wudū'* in the Alevi tradition is extended in various rumors from the level of symbolic purity to the level of personal hygiene. Corresponding to the unofficial nature of rumors and prejudices, it is almost impossible to find public expressions of Sunni Turks that exemplify the maintenance of this anti-Alevi resentment. Apart from the aforementioned accounts from the beginning of the 20th century, recent socio-scientific works of non-Turks or Turks with an 'objective' stance on the matter are most comprehensive on this and other prejudicial attitudes since they reproduce unofficially expressed remarks of Sunni Turks on Alevis.⁴⁶ Another written source of the detection of anti-Alevi attitudes and their circulation in the Sunni Turkish community is Turkish as well as foreign fiction on this issue. Still, there is no profound study on this sort of text although Alevism was touched on in many novels of the last decades.⁴⁷

7. From Kızılbaş to Alevis and the Question of Religious Status

In the course of the "Alevi Revivalism" the Alevis succeeded in fortifying their political, juridical and social status. They achieved access to all educational levels, and thus climbed the social and economic ladder. The establishment of Alevi associations and organizations helped the Alevis to regain self-assurance and encouraged them to resist discrimination. One of the attainments of this emancipation process was the banishment of officially accepted prejudices from the public domain since the Alevis started to protest against public insult and discrimina-

⁴⁶ See e. g. Nur Yalman, "Islamic Reform and the Mystic Tradition in Eastern Turkey", *Archives Européennes de Sociologie / European Journal of Sociology* 10 (1969), pp. 41-60; on the issue of impurity see p. 53.

⁴⁷ See e. g. Ali Yaman, *Alevilik & Kızılbaşlık Tarihi* (Istanbul 2007), pp. 137-140. For a short list of some of these novels see <http://www.huseyin-simsek.com/tr/yazilar/article/8/tuerkce-edebiyatta-alevi-kizilbas-ve-bektasiler.html>

tion whenever possible. In the aforementioned case of Güner Ümit, the Alevi protest about depreciatory comments on Kızılbaş caused this incidence to be discussed in the media and Ümit was discharged.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, prejudices and rumors cannot be controlled or prohibited, even though they are officially declared as “false” or “unjust.” Besides this, although the social, juridical and political discrimination could be abolished to a certain degree, the Alevi tradition is still missing its religious acceptance. The official debate that ‘negotiates’ the religious status of the Alevi is moving in a circle albeit the harsh tone and radical judgments of the last centuries was replaced in favor of the ignorance of the Alevi tradition as a religious and Muslim one.

The aforementioned 16th century sources do clearly demonstrate that the religious tradition of Safavids/Kızılbaş was declared heretic. The accusations against the Kızılbaş should eliminate any possibility to argue in favor of them. The reported transgression of *şeriat/şarīʿa* law and the contempt of the prophet Muhammed, the Holy Quran and Sunni Islam in general, were—according to Sunni heresiology—clear indications of heresy. Muṭaḥḥar b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān emphasizes e. g. that “this [sectarian] group [i. e. Safavids/Kızılbaş] is not part of the real Shīʿa”⁴⁹ and therefore announces that they do not even abide by the Shīʿi doctrines and pretend to be what they are not. The terms used for Safavids/Kızılbaş were the common denominations in Islamic heresiography *rafizil/rāfiḍī*, *mülhid/mulhid*, *zındıkl/zindīq* or *kafir/kāfir*.⁵⁰ Today, these terms—with a partly exception of *kafir*—are not used very often, sometimes they are not even known because they do not belong to the general vocabulary of the Turkish language. In the course of time and especially influenced by the different state-initiated efforts to replace mainly Arabic and Persian loan words by Turkish words or

⁴⁸ Yaman, *Alevilik & Kızılbaşlık Tarihi*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwīl* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, p. 222, line 19-20: “[...] hādīhi ʿṭ-ṭāʿifa laysū mina ʿš-šīʿati ʿl-hāliṣa [...]”.

⁵⁰ Besides the denominations of individuals the corresponding abstract nouns or adjectives were used as well (*rafizilik*, *rafız*, *ilhad*, *zandaka*, *küfr*, etc.). See e. g. official orders from the Ottoman administration in Refik, *On Altıncı Asırda Rafizilik*, passim, or in the polemical writing *Muṣṭamil al-aqāwīl* of Muṭaḥḥar b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān as reproduced in Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden*, pp. 220-229.

neologisms, they disappeared in favor of e. g. *sapık* (abnormal) or periphrases like *müslüman olmayan* (non-Muslim). But still, because of the open official discussions on the religious status of Alevis, terms such as *sapık*, which highlight the Sunni assumption that Alevis are non-Muslims, are seldom used in official contexts and are often criticized.⁵¹ Among Sunni Turks the opinion that Alevis were non-Muslims is especially dominant in ‘radical’ and ‘fundamentalist’ circles, but even ‘liberal’ Sunnis might be of that opinion out of ignorance and their blind trust in hearsay.

The official debate which is not only run by the state Ministry for Religious Affairs, the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, but also joined by many Sunni Turks in the media, in politics and the private domain, is not free from judgment in regard to their own religious practice and belief. Each characteristic feature of Alevi tradition is compared to Sunni Islam. The distinctions from Sunni Islam like e. g. the non-existing prohibition of alcohol or the exalted position of Ali, Hacı Bektaş and other saints, remain evidence of mis- or unbelief instead of being neutrally regarded. Here, analogous to the preceding centuries, the majority of Sunni Turks dominates the discussion about “true” belief, namely about the authority as to who is a Muslim and who is not.

The official stance of the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* towards the Alevi tradition is the following: The Alevi tradition is not a religion but a culture: “Alevi kültürü.” As the president of the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* Ali Bardakoğlu declares, the Alevi tradition cannot be accepted as Islamic since

[i]t is very clear what are [the acts of] worship in [Sunni] Islam, what are the religious principles in [Sunni] Islam, [and] what are the moral principles in [Sunni] Islam.⁵²

His reference to worship and religious principles can be explained as follows: In many premises of Alevi associations in the urban context as

⁵¹) See e. g. the essay of Yalçın Bayer: “Sapık Kim?”, *Hürriyet* 13.10.1998, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=-42682&yazarid=42>.

⁵²) “İslam’ın ibadetlerinin ne olduğu, İslam’ın inanç esaslarının ne olduğu, İslam’ın ahlâk esaslarının ne olduğu çok belirgindir.” (<http://www.diyaret.gov.tr/turkish/bildiri.asp?id=115>).

well as in the rural, Alevis meet to conduct their ritual of *cem*. To the Alevis this ritual is their form of worship corresponding to the Sunni *namaz/namāz* (respectively *salat/ṣalāt*). Thus, the Alevis claim that those premises which they call “house of *cem*” (*cem evi*) shall be accepted as “place of worship” (*ibadethane*)—a term that is applied to the Sunni mosque (*cami*). But the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* refuses this claim by arguing that the *cem* ritual is not to be compared to the Sunni form of worship, which is clearly prescribed in the sources of Sunni Islam. This refusal does not include the prohibition of the Alevi ritual, as Bardakoğlu says “All right, they [i. e. the Alevis] can find mental well-being [in the *cem evi*], they shall find it, all right ...”⁵³ Besides the refusal to accept the Alevi ritual as worship, Bardakoğlu insists that “Alevis are actually Sunnis” and “they also have to observe the feast [in Ramadan]”⁵⁴ Although Bardakoğlu later countermanded this statement, it demonstrates the official attitude towards Alevis. The Alevi tradition is not accepted to be religious and Islamic, but the Alevis themselves are considered to be Muslims who would be accepted as such if they only observed the obligations of Sunni Islam. The state’s recognition of the Alevis in daily routine exemplifies this: The entry “religion” on their identity card is “Muslim” and Alevi pupils have to attend the Sunni Muslim religious education.

8. The Alevi Reactions Towards Discrimination and Resentment

The emancipation of Alevism encouraged the Alevis to react to the discrimination and resentment against them, which they had borne for the last centuries. But not only did this reaction include the protest against their less favorable situation and the will to appear as a self-assured and powerful entity. The previous discrimination and resentment influenced the construction of their ‘new’ identity. On the one hand, Alevis studying their own history deal aggressively with the dif-

⁵³ “Tamam, huzur bulabilirler, bulsunlar, tamam...” (<http://www.diyamet.gov.tr/turkisch/bildiri.asp?id=115>).

⁵⁴ “Alevilerin asıl Sünniler olduğu [...]”; “[...] [O]ruç da tutmalılar” (“Aleviler Oruç Tutmalı”, *Hürriyet* 24.05.2006, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=446555&tarix=2006-05-24>).

ferences in regard to Sunni Islam and do not mind to adopt terms like “heterodoks” and “Kızılbaş” as self-designation. On the other hand, the long-existing suppression has provided the Alevis with strategies of self-justification and assimilation to Sunni Islam, and some of them strive to achieve acceptance of Alevism as an Islamic tradition.

9. Conclusion: Proud of Being ‘Heterodoks’ and ‘Kızılbaş’

Although “heterodox” and “Kızılbaş” have a negative connotation, more and more Alevis adopt these terms themselves. Since the Turkish language lacked an equivalent for “heterodox” and the term was used in the academic field without reference to Christian heterodoxy, it was adopted fairly easily. Furthermore, the usage of “heterodox” makes it possible to present Alevism in contrast to the “orthodox” counterpart, Sunni Islam. To many Alevis Sunni Islam places high value to the observance of obligations, restricts the personal development by rules, and pushes women to the social and ritual periphery. Alevism, instead, would lead its adherents to deeper religious knowledge without restrictions like the *šarī'a*, and stands for a religious tradition that is at the same time social and humane.⁵⁵ Most Alevis, that call themselves “Kızılbaş”, put the social and humane qualities of Alevism to the fore. The Kızılbaş upheavals against their suppressors and martyrs such as Pir Sultan Abdal are idealized. In addition, they refer to the original positive meaning of “Kızılbaş” and use this term to remember that their tradition was falsified by the Sunnis so they would no longer use this formerly honorary title for themselves since it had become a depreciatory insult.

The case of Alevism exemplifies that the usage as well as the meaning of “heterodox” and “orthodox” depend to a high degree on the socio-political context and on the distribution of power between *the* heterodox and *the* orthodox. Once, this power constellation turns, *the* heterodox can be self-determined in regard to their own tradition and aggressively use the term “heterodox” to underline their own non-orthodox and therefore liberal and egalitarian tradition.

⁵⁵ <http://www.yunus.de/specials/alevi/vorurteil.htm>.