ʿAlawi Youth in Germany

Narratives of Secrecy, Religious Practices and Identification

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List of abbreviations

ISIS Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

AKP Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)

DIB Diyanet/Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs)

CHP Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)

AfD Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland)

AAAF Avrupa Arap Alevileri Federasyonu (The European Federation of Arab ʿAlawis)

NRW North Rhine-Westphalia

WWI World War I

Note on language

ʿAlawis born and raised in Germany are in general bilingual and speak German as the first language and Turkish as the second. The ritual language is Arabic. During my interviews, my interlocutors often shifted between German and Turkish. For the transliteration from Arabic, I followed the recommendations given by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

Arabic words and phrases quoted from secondary sources, which involve diacritical marks (macrons and dots) are italicised and spelled as they appear in these sources. Following the format of the IJMES, the Arabic words found in Merriam–Webster's Collegiate Dictionary are spelled without diacritics and without italicisation, for example, shaykh or mufti.

In order to better reflect the emic perspective of my interlocutors, when speaking of their contemporary religious practices, the Arabic terms enunciated by them in Turkish are also spelled in Turkish in the text, for example, *ziyaret* (pilgrimage site) or *dua* (invocation to God). Such cases can be inferred from the context. All other Arabic terms essential to the practice of ʿAlawism appear in their English equivalents, such as the word *taqiya*. In this book, when discussing the contemporary ʿAlawi community, their self-naming as ʿAlawi, is used. The term *Nusayri* will also be employed, but not in a derogatory sense, for the designation of the community when quoting from secondary sources and when referring to the community in a historical timeframe. The names of my interlocutors that appear in this book are pseudonyms.

For writing this book, the APA (American Psychological Association—seventh edition) writing style is used. Accordingly, key terms or phrases appear in italics only once and appear elsewhere in non-italic form. The quotes that involve American English have not been converted to British English.

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1. Introduction to the ʿAlawi youth of Germany

> Nobody knows anything about us, since we keep everything secret, we are actually unknown, we are actually without identity.
>
> —Sercan, 21 years old, university student, from Berlin

ʿAlawis are a religious community (historically originating from the area which is today known as Syria) whose members are bound together by the pledge of secrecy. It is the practice of secrecy that serves as an organisational basis for the ʿAlawi religion. The codes of secrecy set the social and religious boundaries between ʿAlawi men and ʿAlawi women. It is, after all, the politics of secrecy that provide the basis for social relations between ʿAlawis and non-ʿAlawis. Although secrecy needs not to be practiced everyday, the ongoing effects of its longitudinal practice on contemporary ʿAlawi' life are pervasive, just like in the quotation above, in which the interviewee, Sercan, conceives of the practice of secrecy as the reason for his community's lack of identity. While recognising the secrecy as an essential aspect of the ʿAlawi' religious and social order, this book, as the first (English-language) extensive research on ʿAlawi youth, retains its underlying focus on gaining deeper insights into the ways in which contemporary ʿAlawi youths living in Germany negotiate their religious identifications and practice their religion.

ʿAlawis are a Muslim minority affiliated to Shiʿi Islam. The origins of the community's belief system date back to the ʿAlawi religious leader, Muhammad Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri who lived in Baghdad during the ninth century. According to historical sources, Ibn Nusayr was in contact with the 10th and the 11th Shiʿi imams (Friedman, 2010, p. 7; Winter, 2016, p. 12). However, in contrast to most of the previous studies, recent studies consider ʿAlawi religious leader and scholar Husayn ibn Hamdan al-Khasibi as the main founder of ʿAlawism as an organised religion (Friedman, 2010; Winter, 2016). The description of the community as Nusayri, which has long been popular in the literature on ʿAlawis, is regarded as pejorative by contemporary ʿAlawis. ʿAlawis are scattered over different countries, such as Syria (with the largest ʿAlawi population), Lebanon, Turkey (with the second largest ʿAlawi population), Europe and Latin America. One of the important arguments about the community's religious origins has been made in the recent publication of historian Stefan Winter (2016) who asserts that "'Alawism was not an 'offshoot' of 'mainstream' Iraqi Twelver Shiʿism but rather constituted one of its central tendencies." The Community's condemnation of heresy, according to the author, is a retrospective attribution and traces back to the 11th century (p. 7).

The way in which ʿAlawis practice their religion differs from mainstream Islam on a variety of liturgical and theological principles. Their religious difference, practiced under the veil of secrecy, is the major reason why they have been accused of heresy by other Muslim communities. Throughout history, some Sunni religious leaders, who considered the ʿAlawis' difference as a danger to their own communities, often did not eschew incitements of violence against them. Hostile attacks, persecution, fear, and discrimination have been a part of ʿAlawis' everyday lives for centuries.

Individual ʿAlawi families in Syria immigrated to Antakya (Antioch), İskenderun, and the Çukurova plain of Adana in the 19th century (p. 224). With the incorporation of ʿAlawi-inhabited areas (formerly known as the Sanjak of Alexandretta) into Turkey in 1939,[1] ʿAlawis who became citizens of the Republic of Turkey found themselves in a process of becoming Turkish. For the majority of ʿAlawis, this process meant, concomitantly, a discontinuance and reconfiguration of their connections and personal networks with their motherland, Syria.

In pursuit of prosperity, the ʿAlawis of Turkey decided to leave rural areas and moved to urban centres and bigger towns. While the ʿAlawi' migration within Turkey rapidly increased, the gradual adoption of Turkish culture began to mark the eclipse of ʿAlawis' traditional culture. To be seen and to be perceived as sufficiently Turkish by their neighbours, colleagues, friends, classmates, and the municipal authorities, it was necessary for ʿAlawis to conceal their cultural differences. In maintaining their invisibility and strengthening their physical protection, strategies of secrecy have turned into powerful tools for ʿAlawis.

In the pursuit of passing as Turks in Turkish society, the ʿAlawis of older generations did not really try to sensitise the new generations of ʿAlawis to the assimilationist policies of Turkey but rather encouraged them to adopt the Turkish language and culture instead of resisting them. Today, we can observe that the majority of the new generations of ʿAlawis have almost completely adopted Turkish culture and Turkish social life. ʿAlawis have Turkish names and can speak the Turkish language without a foreign accent, this guarantees them a successful integration into Turkish society.

ʿAlawis continued to search for new economic opportunities. The German–Turkish bilateral agreement signed in 1961 opened a new era for the community members in this regard. From their arrival in Germany onwards, ʿAlawis have continued to conceal their reli-

[1] In 1937, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, which previously was part of the French Syrian mandate, became independent. In the following year, it was renamed as Hatay by the Sanjak Assembly. On June 23, 1939, as a result of a treaty signed between the French and the Turks, Hatay became an official province of the Turkish Republic (Shields, 2011, pp. 175–239).

gious identities and to practice their religion in secret because they have found themselves in an ethnically and religiously diverse society. ʿAlawis have been socialised to know that living together with a diversity of cultures requires the ability to behave and speak in discreet ways. Keeping their ethno-religious identities secret, just like their coreligionists in Turkey, has become a matter of daily concern. Owing to the practices of invisibility, the ʿAlawi community in Germany has remained unnoticed for a long time among other ethno-religious communities from Turkey. Their existence was widely unknown outside the academic world until the Syrian civil war in 2011.

In 2010, the social anthropologist Laila Prager estimated the number of ʿAlawis who had immigrated to Germany from Turkey to be about 70.000 (p. 1). As a result of the Syrian civil war which started in 2011, the number of ʿAlawis living in Germany today must be greater, although there have been no trustworthy statistics until now. ʿAlawis' every day life in Germany may bear strong similarities to that of Turkish Sunni immigrants because of ʿAlawis' previous assimilation into Turkish culture. Many ʿAlawis from Germany have sustained their religious and social bonds with their community in Turkey by returning on an annual basis.

It has been commonplace for ʿAlawi parents in Germany to raise their children according to the pedagogy of secrecy. ʿAlawi children are often taught from early on how to be discreet when talking about their faith and religious affiliation. They practice secrecy under the veil of their kaleidoscopic identities. Practicing secrecy allows them to interact with others without drawing attention to their religious difference. For example, time and again, ʿAlawi youths may rely heavily on different strategies when responding to questions about their ethno-religious origins: They may avoid giving the precise designation of their origins to prevent others from guessing their religious affiliation with ʿAlawism.

However, it was not until I changed my perspective and the focus of my fieldwork that I started to recognise the pervasiveness of secrecy in the everyday life of ʿAlawi youths. Two ethnographic studies of secrecy, one conducted by Brink-Danan (2012) on the Turkish Jewish community, and the other by Mahmud (2014) on Freemasonry in Italy were highly influential for me in understanding and exploring what secrecy means for my research participants and how the practice of secrecy has an impact on their religious and social worlds. For example, I found that my research participants are often engaged in keeping a low profile when socially interacting with others. My study sets out to examine how ʿAlawi youths manage their difference. Here, I focus on the nuances of strategies employed by ʿAlawi youths to abstain from revealing their true religious identities.

The way the ʿAlawis of Germany were socialised in their homes and in their community is mostly at odds with that of Turkish Sunni Muslims and Alevis. ʿAlawis' adoption of Turkish culture and language while still preserving their religious difference, may have negative effects on their individual relationships with people of Sunni backgrounds. ʿAlawis relationships with Alevis can also be strained, when their (postulated) relative similarity turns out to be weaker than expected. The revelation of their religious difference can give rise to tension and conflict between them and their Turkish Sunni and Alevi counterparts. ʿAlawis' social interactions with the members of these groups can be beset with contradictory statements, opinions and claims. Another objective of this research is to investigate the complexity of personal relations between ʿAlawi youth and their Turkish Sunni and Alevi counterparts.

ʿAlawism has been protected for centuries by a secrecy which is built on the principles of inclusion and exclusion. The selection of members to be taught religious secrets and ultimately join the religious elites is a process based on gender difference. During their early socialisation, ʿAlawi women learn that access to the esoteric teachings of their religion are reserved only for their fathers, brothers, and all other male relatives. When they want to learn more about their religion, they are usually advised to resort to other sources of information such as the Qurʾan. Sooner or later, they comprehend the opaque nature of their religion.

ʿAlawi women's questions about the doctrines of ʿAlawism usually remain unanswered or are diverted to other themes. Their membership in their community means that they often shift between the positions of insiders and outsiders. During their subsequent socialisation, they better understand the established boundaries between men and women in their community, and they recognise that men have developed some esprit de corps through their initiation into the ʿAlawi religion. While in many of the previous studies on ʿAlawis it has been repeatedly mentioned that Arab ʿAlawi women are excluded from religious training and therefore active participation in religious rituals, no studies have hitherto attempted to understand thoroughly and explain how ʿAlawi women feel part of and integrated in their community of faith, or how they practice their religious faith. This book explores the religious world of ʿAlawi women by focusing on their personal accounts of their religious experiences and their own perspectives on their religion.

While young ʿAlawi women usually seek information about their religion of their own accord, every young ʿAlawi man is given the chance to discover the secrets of his religion by undergoing the tripartite initiation process. The tradition of initiation still serves as one of the central communal activities of ʿAlawis. It is an important moment, an important life cy-

cle event for a young man, for his family and close relatives. It marks his entrance into the group of initiated elites and is believed to signify his transition into manhood. By learning the secrets of his religion, an initiate also learns how to keep secrets from uninitiated women and non-ʿAlawis. In the context of migration the tradition of initiation has been maintained, even though the ways in which initiation rituals are performed have undergone changes. While some families arrange the rites of initiation in Germany, other families prefer to conduct the rituals in their home towns in Turkey. Although much has been discovered by the studies of Friedman (2010) and Tendler (2012) about the theoretical framework of ʿAlawi initiation rituals over the past 10 years, no single study exists which describes the ritual experiences of the initiated young men. My study will hopefully fill a gap in the literature by focusing on actual rites and by identifying the postulated efficacy of initiation.

A few empirical studies, which have focused on the details of ʿAlawis' everyday experiences—moving behind the community's religious idealisations (see, for example, Can, 2020; Prager, 2010; Sarsilmaz, 2017)—have unfortunately ignored the importance of secrecy as an organising principle in ʿAlawis' political, social, and religious life. I argue that ʿAlawis' commitment to secrecy represents one of the greatest components of ʿAlawi culture, and suggest that its impact on the community's everyday experiences should not be underestimated but rather should be incorporated into the analysis. The aim of my book is to make an original contribution to the research on the ʿAlawi community by demonstrating how the practice of secrecy pervades the daily lives of ʿAlawis. Furthermore, this study is intended to explore ʿAlawis' first-person experiences of their religious practices.

In this book, I consider the word *youth* not according to a strict chronological standard, like that offered by the United Nations. Much of the literature shows that the category of youth is not clearly defined. Sometimes, it may be explained in terms of "one's social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position" (Bucholtz, 2002, p. 526). The concept of youth represents a dynamic process. It is sometimes associated with the notion of adolescence which is experienced and interpreted in varied ways in different societies (Durham, 2010, p. 722). Societies may attribute different definitions to the period of youth. To be a youth can differ situationally and geographically and it is contested (p. 723). In this study, I employ the term youth to refer to people who are below the age of 30 and above the age of 18 and I understand the period of youth as Cole and Durham (2007) describe it:

> Essentially relational, and fundamentally tied to processes of social reproduction. One is a child with respect to parents or older people; one is old with respect to a retirement system, expectations of continuous lifetime labor, or a new generation of mature leaders; one is a youth with respect to children and adults, or to the future and past, or to chronological standards circulated by social scientists and the United Nations. (pp. 14–15)

1.1.Assessment of the research on the ʿAlawi community

There seem to be two fundamental events in the last half century that have attracted the interest of academic researchers to studying ʿAlawi community; they come from disciplines such as Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, history, political science, and cultural anthropology. ʿAlawis' political ascendancy to power in Syria in 1970 is the first event. The second is the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011 and caused dramatic social and political changes for the community. Interestingly, more studies have been conducted on ʿAlawis by Western scholars within the decade between 2011 and 2021 than the four-decade period between 1970 and 2011. This indicates that the Syrian civil war played a role in increasing scholarly interest in ʿAlawis. Also notable is that generally the same scholars have been publishing works on ʿAlawis since 2011. Now, there is a substantial body of research on ʿAlawis. The academic interest in the community will continue to grow because after the Syrian civil war ʿAlawis have chosen to engage in the politics of recognition and empowerment. Therefore, ʿAlawis are experiencing a shift in the community's politics of secrecy, without given up practicing secrecy. This section attempts to give an overview of these studies.

My analysis of the existing literature shows that the main focus of the majority of the published research before 2011 is on the ʿAlawis of Syria. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the ethnic conflicts in Syria in 2011, ʿAlawis of Turkey have started to receive the most academic interest. This is because of the life-threatening conditions in Syria (which make fieldwork impossible) and the influx of Syrian refugees to Hatay, the southernmost city on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, where many ʿAlawis live. The border city of Antakya (Antioch) in particular has become a playground for the Western scholars or native scholars who studied in Western universities. Antakya, as a multicultural city, offers a broad spectrum of research within different contexts. A clear link can be made between the changing political and social character of Syria and the shift in research focus from ʿAlawis of Syria to ʿAlawis of Turkey.

The academic sources on ʿAlawis can be grouped according to their main themes. The earliest studies generally address the textual sources concerning ʿAlawi community's belief system and liturgical practices (Bar-Asher & Kofsky, 1995, 2002, 2005; Halm, 1982; Moosa, 1988; Olsson, 1998; Strothmann, 1959). Their descriptions were, however, limited in scope and sources. Yaron Friedman's book published in 2010 marks a turning point in the study of ʿAlawi religion. He was the first author to survey unused manuscripts written about ʿAlawi religious doctrines. His research yielded a new understanding and a reinterpretation of the decades-old descriptions of ʿAlawism. Bella Tendler (2011, 2012), who was inspired by Friedman's analysis, contributed to the study of ʿAlawi faith with a more detailed examination of the ʿAlawi tradition of initiation. She notes in the introduction of her dissertation: "his [Friedman's] careful explanations and meticulous footnotes have opened the field to more in-depth studies, such as my own" (2012, p. 5). The new generation of scholars of Islamic studies who focus on the newly available sources on ʿAlawi religion should also provide a critical assessment of these materials. Their originality and validity must be thoroughly investigated by the scholars considering the fact that ʿAlawis can be easily subject to hostile accounts and polemical exaggeration of heresiographers. The data gained through empirical research on contemporary ʿAlawi' religious practices could clearly help scholars to better understand ʿAlawi faith and investigate the validity of the theoretical and abstracted descriptions of the ʿAlawism.

Reviewing the literature shows that in the last decade, a new field of study on the actual practice of ʿAlawi religious rituals has been taking form. This topic might be particularly challenging given the fact that ʿAlawi religion is practiced in secrecy and its practitioners have taken oaths to keep it secret. To my knowledge there are only three researchers who focused on analysing the actual practice and experience of ʿAlawi faith (Kreinath, 2014, 2019; Prager, 2010, 2013, 2016; Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010). In my analysis of various aspects concerning ʿAlawi religious life, I draw especially on Prager's and Procházkas' investigations in Turkey.

In her book, Prager (2010) attempted to portray the changing cultural features of ʿAlawism with focus on marriage arrangements, kinship, and cultural ceremonies in the context of migration, under the influence of ʿAlawis' transnational relations between Turkey and Germany. She conducted her research among ʿAlawi immigrants in Germany between 2002 and 2005 and among ʿAlawis in Turkey (with focus on Hatay and Çukurova regions) between 2006 and 2008. However, more than a decade has passed since her research, whereby the situation of ʿAlawis in Germany and Turkey has started posing new challenges as a result of Syrian civil war in 2011. Prager focused more on the cultural practices of

ʿAlawis of Turkey in traditional forms, rather than those subject to transformation in post-migration conditions in Germany. ʿAlawis' actual accounts of their cultural practices have unfortunately received little attention in Prager's study.

Based on an ethnographic study conducted in the Turkish province Cilicia/Adana, Procházka-Eisl and Procházka (2010) provided extensive general knowledge about the ʿAlawi community of Turkey. Procházkas described a variety of aspects about the communal life, though generally without delving into fine detail. While describing historical, religious, and sociopolitical features of the community, their main focus was on ʿAlawi sacred places and their sociological and religious relevance for ʿAlawis.

ʿAlawis' religious-political history has attracted considerable interest since the 1980s. The main topics covered include:

- ʿAlawi community's rise to power in Syria (Batatu, 1981);
- the presidency of Hafiz al-Asad in Syria (Seale, 1988);
- the historical events during the French mandate in Syria (Schatzmann, 1995);
- comparative analysis of the commonalities and distinctions between Turkish Alevis and Syrian ʿAlawis from historical, sociocultural and political perspectives (Aringberg-Laanatza, 1998);
- ʿAlawi identity politics in the 20th century of Syria (Firro, 2005);
- various fatwas (legal opinions) on ʿAlawi community (Talhamy, 2010);
- ʿAlawi community during the process of incorporation of Sanjak of Alexandretta/İskenderun to the newly established Turkish Republic during the late 1930s (Shields, 2011);
- ʿAlawi community in the late Ottoman era (Alkan, 2012);
- the history and the socio-political role of the ʿAlawi community in contemporary Syria (Kerr & Larkin, 2015); and
- the chronological analysis of ʿAlawi history from 10th century Syria to the 20th century Turkish Republic (Winter, 2016).

In the literature on ʿAlawi history, Stefan Winter's book is probably the most ambitious research project conducted in recent years. Based on an analysis of the administrative records, tax cadastres, and the materials from the military archives of Ankara, Winter's intention was to portray the historical development of ʿAlawis' intergroup relations with their neighbouring communities and the state authorities in the places which are known today as Syria, Lebanon and southern Turkey. Winter's book, which "aims to provide a less es-

sentializing, more material account of ‘Alawi history” is a chronological introduction to the ʿAlawi community’s past (p. 2).

Winter’s book on the history of the ʿAlawi community is not only important for contemporary scholarship but also for the community members, considering the fact that the majority of the ʿAlawis have only vague information about their origins. One of the important assertions put forward by the author is that the statement of “historical persecution” of the ʿAlawi community is not “borne out by the historical evidence,” as it claimed to be (p. 2). However, for the ʿAlawi community of Hatay, the narratives of the collective victimhood still remain as an important part of their religious and political identities.

In another noteworthy remark, Winter argues that the reason for the dissemination of ʿAlawism from Iraq toward Syria is not “some imagined flight from oppression but rather … a sustained missionary effort (*da’wa*)” (p. 7) until the early 11th century. This theory has been vigorously challenged by Friedman, an important scholar in the study of ʿAlawi religion and history. Friedman (2018) argues that the immigration of al-Khasibi (who lived in the 10th century and was the community leader) and his disciples from Iraq to Syria was the result of al-Khasibi’s “persecution and imprisonment in Baghdad” (p. 150). Friedman further criticises Winter for his “secular approach” as being inappropriate for an analysis of early Nusayrism—in Friedman’s terminology—given the fact that all medieval literature on ʿAlawis are religious sources (p. 149). He continues his criticism by questioning the reliability of the works to which Winter refers in the analysis of the medieval period of ʿAlawi history. Instead of focusing on recently published Arabic medieval sources, which Friedman considers to be reliable, Winter seems to rely on modern ʿAlawi sources, which are “printed in Syria under the Asad regime (or in Lebanon under Syrian occupation)” (p. 149).

As previously discussed at the outset of this section, the Syrian civil war since 2011 has turned the border city of Antakya, where ʿAlawis are the second-largest community, into a popular research field for many scholars. Native scholars especially seem to have rediscovered this city as an area of study interest. Antakya’s long history of multiculturalism is a well-known fact. Many ethno-religious communities such as Turkish Sunnis, Armenians, Jews, ʿAlawis, and Christians have lived together in this cosmopolitan city; Its nature is known as *Medeniyetler Şehri* (city of civilisations). The multiculturalism and the interethnic relations between the groups living in Antakya before the outburst of the Syrian civil war are topics that have been studied by Doğruel & Leman (2009).

Two recent studies conducted by Şule Can (2020) and Defne Sarsilmaz (2017) described the changing living conditions of the ʿAlawis of Antakya. Can, as a native ʿAlawi anthropologist, analysed the transformation of identity politics among ʿAlawis of Antakya af-

ter the outburst of the Syrian civil war and the forced migration of the Syrians to Antakya. She focused on the urban encounters between local ʿAlawis and Syrian refugees. She detailed the ongoing rise of Arab ʿAlawi identity and ʿAlawis' cultural awakening as a result of the war across the border.

Sarsilmaz's dissertation project described the various effects of the incorporation of Antakya to Turkey in 1939 on the Arab ʿAlawi community. She particularly examined the politicisation of the Arab ʿAlawi community of Antakya with a focus on ʿAlawi women's role. She described the Arab ʿAlawi women's increasing political consciousness. The sections explaining ʿAlawi women's negotiation of their cultural identities and religious experiences are especially relevant for my study. Previous studies on ʿAlawi religion have failed to take account of ʿAlawi women's opinions about their faith. Though limited, Sarsilmaz attempts to fill this gap with her study by focusing on ʿAlawi women's religious experiences. However, a major weakness of her study is that she failed to use four very important works on ʿAlawi community written by Winter (2016), Friedman (2010), Tendler (2012) and Shields (2011). The integration of these sources into her dissertation would have helped her to better understand ʿAlawi religious history and interpret the origins, as well as underlying rationale of specific religious practices.

One novel theme that has emerged as a new field of study in the last decade is the emergence of ʿAlawi diaspora. My own research on the emergence of ʿAlawi organisations in Germany is one of the first academic papers that has attempted to report on this process (Tümkaya, 2018). This paper is important, as it has recognised for the first time the importance of the Syrian civil war on the ʿAlawi communities living abroad. The main purpose of this paper was to show the developmental similarities between the ʿAlawi and Alevi organisations in Germany by focusing on the established rapport between the representatives of the both organisations.

Another paper that concentrates on the ʿAlawi community in diaspora has been published by Montenegro (2018). She sought to explain the development of ʿAlawi diaspora identity in Argentina. In this paper, Montenegro briefly explains the ʿAlawi migration that started in the 1900s from Syria to Argentina. Her main focus, however, was on the ways in which ʿAlawis maintain their differences. During my fieldwork among the ʿAlawi organisations in Germany, I observed that ʿAlawis of Germany and ʿAlawis of Argentina both strive for developing common social networks. I was informed many times by representatives of the ʿAlawi community in Germany that they want to improve their relationship with ʿAlawis of Argentina through various activities such as visiting each other.

The last subject that has been the major focus of some Western scholars is the use of Arabic language among the Arab ʿAlawi community of Turkey. Notable works concentrated on the local dialect of the ʿAlawi community of Hatay (Arnold, 2000), the linguistic developments among the ʿAlawi community of Çukurova (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2018), or oral poetry among the ʿAlawis of Antakya (Ağbaht, 2018). Given the fact that the use of the Arabic dialect, as it is spoken among the Arab ʿAlawi community in Turkey, tends toward the continuous loss of popularity, linguistic investigations bear an important role in the preservation of the community's cultural difference.

Taken together, all of the studies presented above, in my view, have failed to recognise the considerable effects of the theologically prescribed and well-established practice of secrecy on the religious and social organisation of the ʿAlawi community from historical times well into the modern. Even though most scholars acknowledge ʿAlawis' widespread concerns about keeping their secrets private, they opt not to investigate the ways secrecy is practiced, the ways secrecy has influenced ʿAlawis' culture and their relations with other ethno-religious communities, or the ways contemporary ʿAlawis think of secrecy. It is worth noting that studies on ʿAlawis represent the emergence of a dynamic research field, and that there are still a substantial body of research waiting to be conducted. The topics widely neglected by the previous researchers are, for example:

- present-day ʿAlawi women's religious practices
- ʿAlawi boys' experiences of their rites of passage
- the roles of the ʿAlawi shaykhs in the constructions of religious identities in Hatay and Adana regions
- the concealment strategies applied by contemporary ʿAlawis
- the relations between the ʿAlawis and Alevis in diaspora, only to list a few.

In this present book, I will attempt to cover some of these topics in detail by employing a combination of ethnographic research methods.

1.2.A brief outline of ʿAlawi marginalisation in history

Throughout the history of ʿAlawis, the ruling regimes in the regions of ʿAlawi settlements challenged the community's right to decide on its own fate. In this section, I focus on the historical development of ʿAlawi social and political marginalisation from the late Ottoman period to the contemporary Turkey. This section outlines the extent of nationalist and se-

paratist ideologies directed against ʿAlawis. Starting in the late 19th century, during the time of Sultan Abdülhamid II, Arabic-speaking ʿAlawis became subjected to the Ottoman policies of Sunnification. During the French mandate in Syria, in the first decades of the 20th century, they were subject to the politics of ethnic separatism that caused internal political divisions within the community. From the early years of the Turkish Republic onwards, they found themselves exposed to authoritarian modernisation projects that focused on creating cultural homogenisation through the imposition of the Turkish Sunni identity. The aim was to integrate Alawis into the Turkish nation. It was fortified over the decades that followed, and has continued in much the same vein until now.

Hamidian endeavours to convert ʿAlawis to Sunni Islam

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman policy of Sunnification of non-Sunni groups was intensified. ʿAlawis were one of the communities whose beliefs were viewed as misguided. Therefore, they "were never quite Ottoman enough until they converted to Sunni Islam" (Winter, 2016, p. 219). According to Alkan, Ottoman efforts to Sunnify ʿAlawis began around the time American and English missionaries were promoting Christianity in the places where ʿAlawis lived (2012, p. 25). Firro (2005) also points out that the increase of Ottoman Sunnification efforts coincided with the time when European missionaries were building schools in ʿAlawi villages (p. 13). The Ottoman policy of Sunnification in this respect appears to be a political backlash against Christian proselytisation. Abdülhamid II therefore multiplied the number of schools on the Mediterranean coasts of Syria and in southern Anatolia where ʿAlawis were living because public education was seen as an effective means of indoctrinating Sunni religious thought, strengthening social solidarity, and legitimising the Ottoman Empire (Winter, 2016, p. 220).

In his book *A History of ʿAlawis,* Stefan Winter draws attention to a campaign entitled "rectification of belief" (*tashih-i akaid*). This campaign became a central part of the Ottoman assimilation policy in the last decade of the 19th century (p. 221). Alkan (2012) explains that the tashih-i akaid campaign had already been implemented earlier in the Ottoman Empire, after the destruction of the rebellious Janissaries (an elect corps of Ottoman troops) in 1826 (p. 31).

As part of the tashih-i akaid*,* a wide range of projects such as the construction of schools and mosques were put into motion. The aim was to accelerate the conversion of the non-Sunni communities like Yezidi Kurds, Zaydis of Yemen and Alevis to Hanafi Sunnism. And, of course, ʿAlawis did not remain exempt from this campaign. The necessary

funds, as documented in the Ottoman archives, were sent to the provinces to introduce ʿAlawis to Hanafi Islam. During that time, the conversion of several thousand ʿAlawis to Islam was recorded. In order to support ʿAlawis in converting to Islam, the Interior Ministry of the time demanded the construction of more mosques and schools (Winter, 2016, pp. 221–222).

The opening of 25 primary schools in Antakya (Antioch) and five in İskenderun (Alexandretta) in 1893 (p. 225) is the hallmark of the efforts of the Hamidian government to bring ʿAlawis to Hanafi Islam. In order to impose Islam on non-Sunni communities, including ʿAlawis, the Ottomans did, on occasion, use force. The suppression of these communities was also seen as another way to correct their heretical views (Alkan, 2012, p. 43).

The Hamidian assimilationist campaigns, according to Winter (2016), mainly failed due to the constant lack of available pecuniary resources "and ongoing discrimination on the local level continued to militate against true 'Alawi integration." As reported by an historian from Latakia, many mosques and schools built for ʿAlawis, remained unused and became dilapidated (p. 226). However, there were some success stories in the ʿAlawi town of İskenderun. Winter notes that in 1900 a group of imams from İskenderun asked the court to authorise the construction of new mosques in the city because a larger number of ʿAlawis had converted to Islam and the capacity of the great mosque was therefore exceeded (p. 227). The mass conversion of ʿAlawis to Islam was recorded in the documents from that period, but the same documents also show that the converted ʿAlawis encountered opposition from Sunni residents who accused them of converting only nominally for financial gains or in order to enjoy enhanced legal rights (Alkan, 2012, p. 47).

Winter (2016) concludes that the ʿAlawis were not viewed as fully integrated equal citizens during the late Hamidian and the Young Turk eras. He adds that this was not solely due to their religious affiliation. Under the "rectification of belief" campaign, the Ottoman empire invested in education for the purposes of Sunnification of ʿAlawis. However, it was still an opportunity that ʿAlawis had not previously enjoyed and many of them took advantage of it (p. 236). Alkan (2012), for example, writes that during the reign of Abdülhamid, some ʿAlawi religious leaders expressed their contentment with being involved in the process of correcting their beliefs and at being incorporated into the empire. They embraced the educational campaigns carried out by the Sultan (p. 46).

Taken together, in the late Ottoman era, ʿAlawis struggled more with access to modern resources than with overcoming religious prejudices. Although the conflict with the Sunni population was communicated through religious parlance, it was in fact the result of

changing social and economic conditions caused by the ʿAlawi immigration to Tarsus, Mersin, and Alexandretta (Winter, 2016, p. 237).

ʿAlawis between French mandate and Arab unionists

With the beginning of the French mandate in Syria in 1920, the ʿAlawi community underwent far-reaching social, political and economic changes (p. 256), indeed, as Weiss writes, "It seems incontrovertible that the Mandate period was a turning point in the history of this community" (2015, p. 72). The French authorities viewed the ʿAlawi territory differently from the rest of Syria, "in fact as a small country in itself" (Schatzmann, 1995, p. 28).

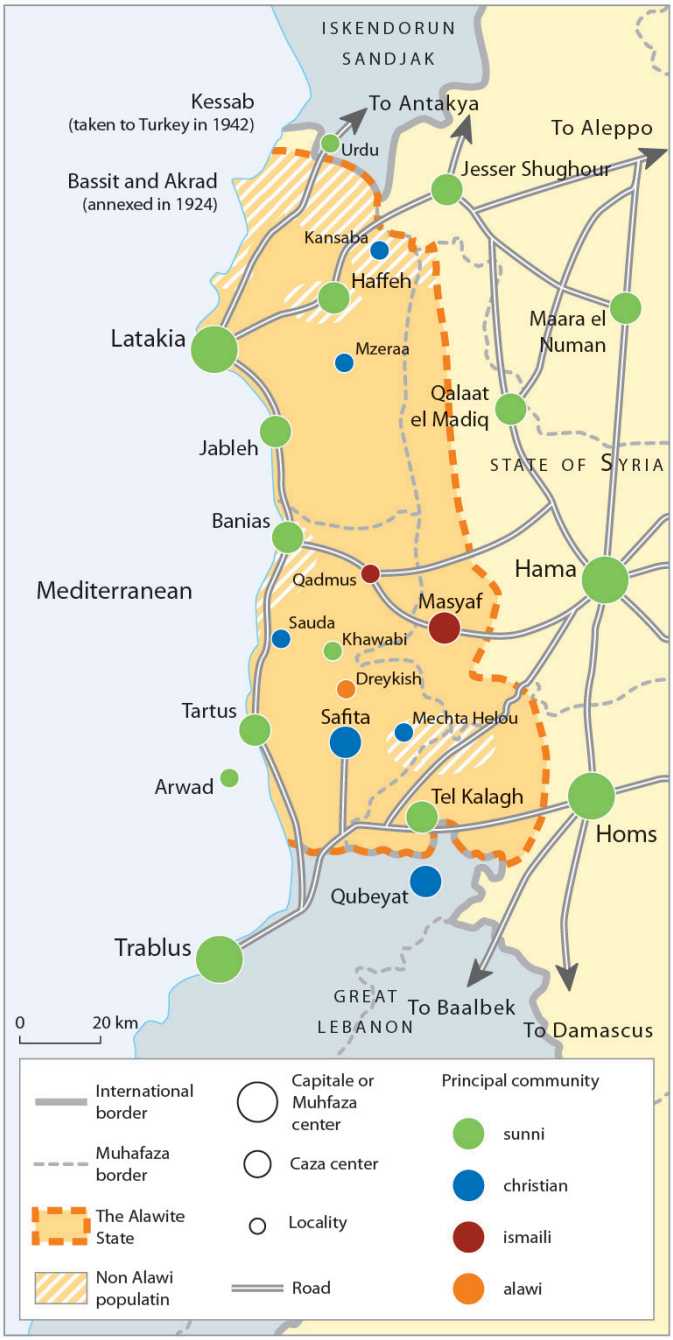
Motivated by the politics of ethnic separatism, the French facilitated ʿAlawis to gain political autonomy by building their own state in Syria, *Territoire des Alaouites* in 1920. The aim was to strengthen France's efforts to prevent the establishment of a unified and independent Syria. France also aimed to mitigate the cooperation of the local Alawis with Syrian nationalists in Damascus (Winter, 2016, pp. 218–219). Sarah Shields aptly outlines the French intention toward the minorities of Syria, "If the country could be divided and the populations separated and marked as different, unrelated, and mutually hostile, it would be more difficult for them to collaborate in their anti-imperial activism" (2011, p. 22).

ʿAlawi leaders were determined to reform the community's status quo by seizing on the new opportunities presented by the arrival of French rule. In 1922, the ʿAlawi state was renamed *État des Alaouites,* (the state of the ʿAlawis) and integrated to the Syrian federation. However, it appeared that ʿAlawis were not entirely content with the external influence of the Syrian federation and began to seek support for their demand for more authority and self-government. And finally, in 1924, they achieved their ambition to become detached from the Federation. The situation of the community during the mandate in Syria was repeatedly affected by volatile political circumstances. In 1930, the previous name of the state was replaced by "the Government of Latakia." It seems to be the result of a political strategy that later led to the reintegration of the state into Syria in 1936 (Winter, 2016, p. 257). Between 1920 and 1936 the territory of ʿAlawis encompassed the north of Syria (Figure 1.1).

The French policy of separating religious communities in Syria seems to have been most beneficial to the ʿAlawis (Weiss, 2015, p. 67). One of the important contributions of the French mandate to the ʿAlawi community was the enlistment of a great number of ʿAlawis in the colonial armed services. The dire economic conditions in the ʿAlawi-inhabited territories, the new opportunity of "social advancement," and the communal confrontati-

ons caused ʿAlawis to sign up for the army (Winter, 2016, p. 258). ʿAlawis' recruitment to the army later paved the way for the power change in Syria, because, as Goldsmith (2015) puts it, "The militarisation of the group was an activator of Alawi solidarity" (p. 154).

Figure 1.1



Note. The autonomous state of ʿAlawis between 1920 and 1936. From Balanche (2015, p. 85)

Despite the considerable support of the French mandate government, the leading notables of the ʿAlawi community could not fully agree on whether to favour the ʿAlawi autonomy supported by the French or to align with the Sunni nationalists to create an independent Syrian state (Winter, 2016, pp. 258–259). As a result:

> Alawis were divided between those fighting the French for autonomy under Salah al-Ali[2] and allied to Syrian nationalists, and those who sought French protection against the Sunni majority. Alawis were pulled between the security dilemma and the opportunities from integration into the wider society. (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 109)

In order to keep ʿAlawis separated from a united Syria, the French authorities saw it as important to assert the religious differences between the community and the rest of the country. The Sunni conviction of ʿAlawis for heresy was central to their propaganda in this regard. Similarly, in 1936 some separatist elites of the ʿAlawi community submitted four petitions opposing future plans to integrate the ʿAlawi territories into Syria. The radical opinions of ʿAlawi separatists expressed in these petitions caused fear among some other religious leaders in the community because they believed that such views "would deepen hostilities between Sunnīs and ʿAlawīs" (Firro, 2005, pp. 21–22).

With their increasing demands for the integration of ʿAlawi territories into the Arab Syrian nation, ʿAlawi nationalists challenged French politics. Previous to and during the Franco-Syrian Treaty negotiations, nationalists signed counter petitions, organised congresses and meetings. After the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936, the government of Latakia was ceded to Syria. The unfortunate consequences of this treaty were immediately predicted by some ʿAlawi separatists. These distraught ʿAlawi notables changed course and began to pursue the political goals of the ʿAlawi nationalists (pp. 23–25).

ʿAlawis as "Hittite Turks"

As has been shown above, during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, in the last decades of the 19th century, for the integrity of the empire, the focus of the Ottoman efforts was on maintaining solidarity and securing the loyalty of the non-Sunni communities—including ʿAlawis—by the imposition of Sunni Islam (Winter, 2016, pp. 220–222). Similar assimilation efforts were pursued by the Turkish government after its establishment in 1923. Much the same as the Hamidian government, the Turkish government focused on reinforcing the in-

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[2] Winter describes Salih al-ʿAli as "the famous 'Alawi resistance leader" (2016, p. 219).

tegration of its heterogeneous population into the Turkish state, but by following a partially different strategy: Domestic politics mainly aimed to Turkify non-Turkish and Sunnify non-Sunni communities (while Sunni Islam was to be controlled exclusively by the state). In its efforts to unify and incorporate the diverse ethnic and religious minorities in the Turkish nation, "during the 1920s … Kemalism had pushed Islam to the margins of society" (Cagaptay, 2004, pp. 89–90). The Kemalists' policies of westernisation and secularism brought along opportunities but also challenges for the ʿAlawi community, as Winter (2016) puts it:

> In many ways the Kemalist state continued in line with the policies of the Hamidian and Young Turk era, offering the 'Alawis unprecedented opportunities for social advancement (and ultimately more security than in Syria), at the price of forsaking the very religious or linguistic specificities that defined them as 'Alawis. (pp. 267–268)

In order to impose Turkishness on the members of the ʿAlawi community, the newly founded Republic pursued a myriad of strategies and politics. As part of nation-building projects, ʿAlawis were forced to abandon their Arab identity and to adapt to the newly formed Turkish identity.

From 1924 onwards, the ʿAlawis were subject to Turkification projects implemented by the Ankara government and different organisations. Arisen out of nationalist sentiments, according to Winter, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) played a more active role than the government itself in assuming the responsibility for assimilating ʿAlawis. In 1932, the CHP brought the People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) into being. These were cultural and social institutions in which the masses became indoctrinated with the party's nationalist ideologies. The teaching of Turkish took precedence over the various other areas of focus (p. 263).

In the provinces, where ʿAlawis lived, new Halkevleri were established. They began to campaign for the implementation of the Turkish state policies. The activities of Antakya Halkevleri were strategically assigned and controlled by the Republican People's Party which aimed to prove that the Sanjak of Alexandretta (İskenderun and Antakya) was Turkish. In accordance with the Turkish government's interest in the region, Halkevleri in Antakya made concerted efforts to demonstrate the Turkishness of the population living in the province (Shields, 2011, pp. 62–63).

ʿAlawis also became the target of other institutions such as the *Hars Komitesi* (culture committee) of Adana. It was an institution that actively organised cultural programs in the

Çukurova region. The following quote from the committee aptly reflects their point of view about the use of Arabic among ʿAlawis. It is, according to the committee, "a national crime for … [ʿAlawis] to speak any other language than Turkish" (Winter, 2016, p. 263). It seems that during that time the linguistic diversity of the minority communities living on Turkish soil was seen as a barrier against the national unity of Turkey.

Following Winter, it is possible to argue that the French mandate strongly highlighted the religious distinctiveness of the ʿAlawis in order to maintain their separation from Syrian society and the nation as a whole. Turkish authorities, in contrast, made great efforts to erase ʿAlawis' cultural identity for the purpose of integrating them into the Turkish Muslim nation. Indeed, it can be summarised that while the French over-communicated the cultural peculiarities of the ʿAlawi community in the process of ethnic separatism, the Turks under-communicated them in the process of cultural homogenisation and nation-building.

The 1936 Franco-Syrian treaty of independence stipulating the annexation of the Alexandretta district to Syria prompted the Turkish government to take immediate action. To accelerate the assimilation of the ʿAlawis into the Turkish nation and to legitimise its own claims to the region, the Kemalist government extended the "Turkish History Thesis" to the Arab ʿAlawi community. This thesis tracing the origins of the Turks back to the ancient civilisation of the Hittites was used to point to the Hittite origin of the ʿAlawis' and thus their lost Turkishness. The aim was to corroborate that the Alexandretta district was in fact an ancient Turkish settlement (p. 264). As Sarah Shields notes in her study of identity politics in the Sanjak of Alexandretta during the late 1930s, "Turkish historians in the 1930s insisted that Alawis were the original Turks, and had simply forgotten their language over the centuries" (Shields, 2011, p. 40).

Although Turkish academics and intellectuals mostly ignored these allegations, as a result of "the overriding political imperative of 'reclaiming' the Hatay," a whole pile of supposedly scientific publications were produced to support the government's strategic goals towards ʿAlawis. Both the Hars Komitesi as well as the CHP administration seized on this argument by referring to ʿAlawis living in Adana and Mersin no longer as "Nusayris" but instead as "Hittite Turks" (Winter, 2016, p. 264). Consistent with this ideology, the Turkish government went so far as to provide financial support for the intermarriage between ʿAlawis and Anatolian Turks (p. 265). Winter notes that the idea of being "Hittite Turks" was in truth not appropriated by the ʿAlawis (p. 266).

It is important to point out that while the Kemalist state's policy of homogenisation and modernisation contributed to the social advancement of the ʿAlawis by their integration in the modern education system and Turkish culture, the preservation of their cultural and

linguistic characteristics was jeopardised. With the integration of the Hatay region to Turkey in 1939, a new era began for the ʿAlawi community. With each generation, ʿAlawis have become more and more assimilated into the Turkish national identity. The forced adoption of Turkish culture has subsequently given rise to new articulations of identification among ʿAlawis. ʿAlawis used to practice their religious rituals, customs and life-cycle events in Arabic. However, the extensive cultural assimilation has caused some religious and cultural practices in Arabic to disappear. The lack of knowledge of Arabic language poses probably the greatest challenge that the ʿAlawi community is facing today because their traditional religious practices are still performed in Arabic. ʿAlawis' demand for linguistic rights and political equality have systematically been ignored by every Turkish government. Ignoring their cultural identities has only contributed more to their marginalisation in Turkish society.

1.3. ʿAlawis and their descendants in Germany

In Germany, ʿAlawis were categorised as Turkish migrants irrespective of their cultural and religious differences. They have been confronted with similar difficulties as other Muslim minorities; as part of the Turkish problem, the community has been subject to marginalisation by German politicians and society. The migration and post-migration experiences of the ʿAlawis in Germany are currently being written. Until recently, very little was known about the ʿAlawis in Germany, but Laila Prager's dissertation from 2010 changed this trajectory and opened a new field of research in the transnational migration context. Her study was the first to present information on the ʿAlawi community in Germany.

This section of my study briefly describes how the lives of ʿAlawi immigrants and their descendants have changed in the post-migration period. Here, the main interest will be in expanding our prior knowledge about the ʿAlawi youth. The information presented in this section is based on my own observations, field notes, questionnaire surveys, and interviews with a number of ʿAlawis living in Germany and should by no means be viewed as representative of the entire community. Above all, there is no homogenised picture of the community. It is, however, still possible to discern similar life trajectories and collective experiences among the ʿAlawis.

ʿAlawis from "Gastarbeiter" to transnational migrants

The first ʿAlawis came to Germany as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in the 1960s following bilateral labour agreements between Turkey and Germany. The analysis of the question-

naire surveys shows that the parents of my interviewees immigrated to Germany between the 1970s and 1990s. They primarily came from four cities in Turkey: Hatay, Adana, Mersin and Tarsus. Some came as young single women, some as young teenagers, and some as couples. It is difficult to make general statements about their educational levels. Today, they all work in very different sectors. Some are employed at jobs ranging from doctor, factory worker to mechanical engineer.

Like most of the Turkish immigrants, ʿAlawis had planned to stay in Germany until they reached the desired financial goals. While some ʿAlawis returned to Turkey, many stayed in Germany. Today, it appears to be very difficult for many ʿAlawis to return to Turkey because Germany has become a home for them and their children. I met some ʿAlawis who had the opportunity to leave Germany, however they decided to remain because they reported that Germany, compared to Turkey, offers better educational and occupational opportunities for their children.

Easy access to high quality health services is also an important factor for some in their decision to stay in Germany. A case to highlight this point is an elderly couple who lives in a small town in the southern Germany, whom I have known for many years. At the time they were thinking about returning permanently to Turkey (in Turkish *Kesin geri dönüş*) their daughter caught a serious illness. They said it was for the first time, that they appreciated how well established and effective the German medical care system is. The decision was clear to them that for the health of their daughter Germany was the better choice.

Those who decided to stay permanently in Germany have turned it into their second *Heimat* (home, home country). Such decision (forced or voluntary) has helped them adapt to a life "in between two cultures."[3] Living in a state of in-betweenness has created a variety of different familial relationships, experiences, memories, and identities. The families I met have built economic, social, and cultural ties between Germany and Turkey in diverse intensities and extents. Even though they have become partly different from those ʿAlawis in Turkey, they have still retained many aspects of Turkish ʿAlawi culture. By acquiring a German citizenship, many ʿAlawi migrants believe to have become members of the German civic society.

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[3] Over the past few decades, many scholars from different disciplines have attempted to explain the affiliation and connection of the first generation of migrants with their home country in different concepts. Thus, much more information has become available on terms and thoughts, which are conceptually not too dissimilar, such as *third space*, *cultural flows*, *hybridity*, *creolisation*, *syncretism*, *transculturation*, *third cultures*, *hybrid identities*, *patchwork-or mix identities*, and *cosmopolitanism*.

Compared to the first years of migration from 1970–1990, the extent of the interconnection between ʿAlawis in Germany and those in their homeland is very different today. This difference is in large part due to new technological developments in communication and global transport systems, which have enabled the ʿAlawi migrants to adapt well to a transnational way of life. Although the intensity and frequency of contemporary transnational relationships differs from individual to individual, the central component of these networks are constant: relatives and friends in the country of origin (Tümkaya, 2018, p. 203). Thanks to mobile phone applications like WhatsApp, today's ʿAlawi immigrants can communicate with their families, relatives and friends in Turkey whenever and wherever they want. The increasing frequency of communication between ʿAlawi immigrants and those ʿAlawis living in Turkey makes the spatial distance less of a barrier to maintaining relationships.

Thanks to low-budget airlines, the majority of the ʿAlawis I met informed me that they travel to Turkey several times a year. Many ʿAlawi pensioners, however, do not travel to Turkey as frequently because of their age and health status, but they stay for much longer during a visit. Buying property in Turkey has made it possible for many retirees to extend the length of their stay. For example, the aforementioned elderly couple lives from spring to autumn in Turkey and in Germany the rest of the year. This is not a problem as they own both a summer and winter house in their hometown of İskenderun. It is important to note that not every visit to one's hometown is for holiday purposes: Many ʿAlawis also travel to Turkey to fulfil their religious obligations such as arranging initiation rituals for their sons.

However, it is by no means my intention to give the impression that ʿAlawis travel only to Turkey when they travel. There are several ʿAlawi families, whom I personally know, that visit a European city at least once in a year. They often prefer to travel to the places on the Mediterranean coast and in general during their Whitsun holidays. This is simply because of the similarities between these regions and their hometowns in terms of landscape, vegetation, climate, dietary habits, and even some cultural values (openness, warmth, etc.).

ʿAlawi youths as highly qualified German citizens

In 1990, a new regulation facilitating the naturalisation of foreigners took effect in Germany (Bade & Oltmer, 2011, p. 81). It changed not only the political trajectory of the country but also the living conditions of Gastarbeiter families. Another important reform year was 2000, when a new citizenship law with the principle of *ius soli* (birthright citizenship) was enacted. This legislation grants German citizenship to all children born in Germany irre-

spective of their parents' nationalities, if the parents fulfil the necessary conditions (German Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2019). This law indeed communicates a very important message that membership in the Federal Republic of Germany is no longer conferred, as in the past, only by descent (Kymlicka, 1996/2003, p. 23).

It is worth noting that a new political way of thinking on the issue of immigration has emerged in Germany over the past 15 years, which focused on facilitating the integration of immigrants' descendants in the country. The change came as a result of the immigration law adopted in 2004, which started being enforced in 2005 (Bade & Oltmer, 2011, pp. 80–81). Prior to this, since the 1980s, German immigration policy was indeed not in accordance with the social reality of the country: Some politicians were adamant not to recognise Germany as an immigration country, and it took over 20 years to accept this reality.

It is true that "the immigration and citizenship laws of nation-states [can] typically reinforce the marginality of migrant groups and their families affecting the lives of the migrant generation and subsequent generations" (Fenton, 1999, p. 54). Yet in the case of Germany, the reform of immigration and citizenship policies has indeed made enormous contribution to the well-being of immigrant communities. Still, this is not to say daily discriminations on the basis of phenotypical characteristics, religious faiths, or ethnic origins does not occur.

The pages that follow detail how German migration policies of the last 30 years have contributed to the lives of ʿAlawi youth. Here, I present some general information about those youths who participated in my study, based on questionnaire surveys and field notes. The focus will primarily be laid on the following points:

- German proficiency
- education level
- political stance
- German citizenship

German proficiency: During my research, I spent a great amount of time with young ʿAlawis in different places and on various occasions, and I observed that they use German as their principal language in their everyday lives. Young ʿAlawis often switch the language from Turkish to German or vice versa in their daily conversations, but in most cases the dominant language of communication remains German. Some Arabic words are also used in particular situations, for example when referring to traditional food. Some youths also

speak Turkish, although to varying degrees; others speak it either as a second language, a foreign language, or not at all. The language of communication between youths and their parents can vary according to the latter's migrational biographies. The case of Ümit illustrates this point well. He generally speaks German with his mother, who was born and grew up in Germany, but Turkish with his father who immigrated to Germany at the age of 31, although he speaks very good German.

Education level: One common theme during conversations with ʿAlawi parents about their children was that their children's educational attainment is of great significance to them. A good level of education is deemed a prerequisite for social capital and appropriate employment opportunities. The analysis of my questionnaire surveys corroborates these statements. It reveals that the majority of my interviewees were university students at the time I interviewed them. Besides, several interviewees have already earned their university degrees and are employed in the appropriate fields, ranging from academia and software company to engineering firms.

What the migration researcher John W. Berry (1997) described over 20 years ago seems to apply for today's ʿAlawi immigrants and their descendants. In his study, Berry stresses the positive influence of education on acculturation. According to him, "higher education is predictive of lower stress" (p. 22). It confers various advantages in overcoming difficult problems that arise in the process of social and cultural adaptation into the new culture. Integration into the education system opens up access to new resources "such as income, occupational status, [and] support networks." What is more, education may help immigrants and their descendants to enhance their language proficiency, provide them with historical information about the host society, and inform them of its values and norms (p. 22).

Political stance: When I was conducting intermittent research between 2016 and 2018, I often had the opportunity to attend the meetings organised in ʿAlawi associations. During that time, I repeatedly noticed that debates were steeped in a rhetoric associated with the leftist and socialist ideology. Notions, such as "We should unite against oppression, create solidarity with Alevis," and "endorse equity between men and women," were only some among the many that seem to have been influenced by this political ideology. This form of political understanding has become an important medium to defend the interests of the community.

After having observed the widespread presence of socialist thoughts in ʿAlawi associations in Germany, I became curious about whether a similar tendency also exits among young ʿAlawis. When asked about their political stance, several interviewees informed me

of their disinterests in politics and that they do not have any political ideology in Germany. One interviewee admitted that he is more interested in politics in Turkey and not familiar with the political parties in Germany. Among my interviewees, about half stated that they have leftist leanings and half stated that they have social-democratic leanings. Some also remarked that they have been previously politically active but their interest in the political activities of ʿAlawi associations is particularly low.

German citizenship: The analysis of the questionnaires reveals that all of my interviewees were born in Germany and a vast majority of them are German citizens. A very small minority hold dual citizenships (Turkish and German). Many believe that obtaining German citizenship makes them part of Germany, just as Kymlicka notes, "citizenship is not just a legal status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities, but also an identity, an expression of one's membership in a political community" (1996/2003, p. 192). According to my questionnaires, the sense of belonging to Germany is partly linked to the acquisition of citizenship. It is also worth mentioning that some interviewees that only have Turkish citizenships stated that they have strong feelings of belonging to Germany.

Many youths talked about political and social inequalities and discriminations arising out of holding Turkish citizenship. They insisted on the idea that German citizenship offers more advantages than Turkish citizenship. Their views neatly coincide with what Brubaker (2015) says about citizenship, that "it profoundly shapes life chances on a global scale, structuring access to vastly different rewards and opportunities" (p. 12). It is possible to argue that ʿAlawi youths have grown up in an environment in which they enjoy the advantages of their German citizenships. Today, a broad range of social and economic resources are available to them. It appears that these resources, along with political rights, have helped them to mitigate the social and cultural distance between them and the majority in Germany. The issue of citizenship is complex and multidimensional and is therefore beyond the scope of this chapter. With its different facets, it requires an analysis in its own right, but some citizenship themes presented here will be touched upon in Chapter 3, albeit in different contexts.

Taken together, this study, based on empirical ethnographic data, tends to argue that there is a great tendency among most youths toward adaptation to German society because of the integration strategy that they pursue. Once, during a casual conversation with a group of ʿAlawi youths, to show the extent of their cultural adaption to the German way of life, they half-jokingly said that "we don't meet to have a cup of tea but to have a beer." A young ʿAlawi woman provided another example, having grown up in a small town where she went to a Catholic school. Attending church, praying with schoolmates every

morning, and participating in Christian traditions and festivals had led her to develop, as she stated, a harmonious relationship with German culture. She went so far as to assert to be, “a well-adjusted Christian,” yet, adding that in the first place she was still an ʿAlawi.

Many of the interviewees remarked that they in fact do not differ much from their German peers. According to them, they have a similar social life as Germans: They also drink alcohol, go to nightclubs, bars or cafés, attend traditional German festivals, celebrate Christmas, travel abroad, and watch popular German television programs. Nevertheless, adopting this way of life does not necessarily mean that youths are fully assimilated. On the contrary, the cultural and religious boundaries become visible repeatedly. Sometimes, especially when interacting with their German contemporaries, some ʿAlawi youths reported to have felt the necessity to identify themselves ethnically different. In the next pages, I present how young ʿAlawis living in Germany have established a kaleidoscopic identity that involves various ethnic ascriptions.

ʿAlawi youth and five ways of self-identification

The self and group identifications of ʿAlawi youth are formed within an ongoing process in which the notions of various ethnic ascriptions become visible. These ascriptions arise from individual experiences, different social contexts and environments where ʿAlawi youth’s shared similarities and differences to others serve as unifying and separating forces (Barth, 1969; Jenkins, 2008b). In analysing identification, particular attention has been paid to ʿAlawis’ self-identification and experiences of their external identification by others (Barth ,1969, p. 13; Jenkins, 2008a, p. 40). In the narrations of my interviewees, some of the “cultural stuff” such as language and religion are taken into account to define their sense of belonging and to mark their group boundaries (Barth 1969; Jenkins, 2008b, p. 111).

The ways ʿAlawi youths identify themselves are multidimensional. During my research, it became obvious to me that my interviewees do not consider it necessary to idealise only one specific self-ascription as most appropriate or important. Their preference for choosing a particular identity is situationally variable. It is important to note that a range of factors, such as social experiences, family relations, biographical backgrounds, religious beliefs, personal motives, cultural narratives, and political discourses are related to the construction of ʿAlawi youth identities. However, various types of self-identifications offered here should not be seen as a complete model. The (ethnic/religious/political) categorisations proposed below only indicate the different aspects of a continuous identification as:

- German
- Turkish
- Arab ʿAlawi
- *Ausländer* (Foreigner)
- Turkish with Arabic roots

First, self-identification as German: The formation of this type of identity is emphasised through participation in the German culture (celebration of Christmas with family and gift exchange); through involvement in the German education system; through having a circle of German friends; through the adoption of a German lifestyle; through birth and childhood in Germany; and through acquisition of German citizenship. Having one or more of these aspects is sometimes enough for a youth to feel a sense of belonging to Germany. The following anecdote shared by Çiğdem during our interview illustrates this point well. Çiğdem, born, raised, and schooled in Germany, holds a German passport. At the time I interviewed her, she was a university student. Here, Çiğdem speaks about her Germanness:

> Well, I feel both, 50 percent German and 50 percent Turkish, I would almost say 60-40, maybe a bit more Turkish but I also do not understand why people always regard that as negative, "Do you feel like a German or Turk? Is it not stupid for you?" No, I think that's very nice, I'm both German and Turkish. Many from the school back then, also the people I get to know new,"you are actually Turkish, but you live in Germany, how are you feeling?" Because many people always say, "in Germany one feels foreign as a Turk, in Turkey one feels foreign as Almancı [German-like]," we are stamped as German in Turkey. I don't think so, I see everything positive actually, I'm glad that I live as who I am, I have both the Turkish culture in me, as well as the German.

As we can see in the quote above, Çiğdem strongly disagrees with those who believe that living between two cultures must be difficult or disadvantageous. For her, being neither fully German nor Turkish is not something negative or strange. She seems to consider it unnecessary to assert either of these two cultures as her primary identity. Instead, as she says, she feels that she belongs to both communities: She is a blend of both of her cultures. Adopting the culture of the host country while retaining the original culture is seen as an advantage. As Berry and Hou (2016) state, this has a positive effect on the

well-being of immigrants. The authors suggest that this is the integration strategy that serves as an effective tool for achieving “life satisfaction” (p. 260).

Today, it is not uncommon for immigrants to use certain verbs, such as “being,” “feeling,” and “doing” to describe their belonging to a specific culture, ethnic minority, or nation (Verkuyten & De-Wolf, 2002). In the aforementioned excerpt, Çiğdem used the verb “feeling” when referring to her sense of identity and emotional attachment to Germany and Turkey. By using the verb “feeling,” she even gave a specific amount of her identity, saying “Well, I feel both, 50 percent German and 50 percent Turkish.”

In the next narrative, one of my interviewees, Emre, talks about his attachment to Germany. He clearly states that he belongs to Germany by virtue of birthplace and state citizenship. But he also adds that he sees his roots connected to Turkey because this is the place whence his parents emigrated.

> Well, … where I belong to, I was born here [in Germany] and I also have a German passport: In any case, I, of course, belong to Germany. But my origins are, I still see, from Turkey. The country where my parents come from.

Unlike Çiğdem, Emre links his belonging to Germany not in terms of “feeling” German. But still, it seems that he has developed a sentimental attachment to Germany, as it is his place of birth. It would not be wrong to say that German citizenship that was acquired by Emre at birth (through the principle of *ius soli*) has a positive bearing on his belonging to Germany. This belonging has been bestowed by the German state and refers to what Brubaker (2004) calls a “categorical identification” (p. 42). As he argues, “One may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)” (p.42). Emre is a German citizen in different ways since he experiences different forms of belonging. His ties to the country of immigration—by dint of his citizenship—do not prevent him from maintaining his ties to the country of emigration of his parents, as Frederick Cooper notes, “Citizenship does not and cannot preclude other forms of association” (2018, p. 19).

Second, self-identification as Turkish: Such internal identification is closely related to having a Turkish passport and speaking the Turkish language, as Hasan expresses it in the next narrative:

> I feel more like a Turk, but my grandparents and parents rather say Arab, but I don't feel that way because I don't speak Arabic, I also have a Turkish passport, but part of me is also German, because I was born and raised here.

Here, the role of language in marking identity boundaries becomes apparent. Hasan rejects being described as Arab by his parents and grandparents because, as he notes above, he cannot speak that language. The Arabic language is a major cultural difference between Hasan and his family, whereas the Turkish language is an important part of his cultural identity. Following Brubaker's arguments about identification, it is possible to say that Hasan categorises himself based on a "*logic of significant similarity and difference*" (2015, p. 10). As Brubaker explains: "[People] identify with others whom they see as similar in some meaningful way, and they distinguish themselves from others whom they see as significantly different—in ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, language, religion, gender, sexuality, taste, temperament, or the like" (p. 10).

Hasan is among very few youths I met who has Turkish citizenship. The fact that he has not applied for German citizenship is a clear signal of the identity choice that he has made later or his parents made at his birth. The attribution (or acquisition) of citizenship at birth, according to Brubaker (1992), presumes the individual's membership. He argues that those ascribed citizenships at birth "have a high probability of developing the close attachments and loyalties to a particular society and state" (p. 32). Hasan speaking fluent German, born and raised in Germany maintains his affiliation with Turkey by holding Turkish citizenship. It seems to be true that his language skills along with his national membership give him a sense of belonging to Turkey.

Third, self-identification as Arab ʿAlawi: The third identity type is primarily constituted through kinship ties and friendship relations. As Jenkins points out, "The kin group is one source of enduring individual primary identification. … Kin-group membership epitomises the collectivity of identity" (2008a, p. 86). Those youths, who identify themselves as Arab ʿAlawis, are strongly inclined toward developing and keeping close relations with their relatives from Turkey. The fact that they regularly visit their relatives in Turkey is not a coincidence in this regard. The ways they spend their time with their kin during their holidays in Turkey contribute to strengthening their self- and group identification as ʿAlawi. The case of Ümit illustrates this point well.

In a casual conversation, he told me that he goes to Turkey every summer and spends several days at his aunt's house. His aunt lives with her mother, who only speaks Arabic, her husband and her two children in a village where solely ʿAlawis live. He explained that it

was his father's idea for him to stay in an ʿAlawi village in order to learn the traditional ʿAlawi way of life. His father, he notes, conceives of the way of life in the village as a bit more bound up with the tradition, in fact, simply as more ʿAlawi. He adds that his father, therefore, considers this place to offer the best opportunity for him to experience ʿAlawiness. The fact that at his aunt's house Arabic is mostly spoken makes him feel more ʿAlawi.

Familial relations produce emotional bonds between youths and their parents' cultural background. Similarly, some youths, who have developed strong affiliations with other ʿAlawis, link it to their shared cultural background. What is common here is that their friendship circles are primarily formed along their ethno-religious ʿAlawi identity. This is what Ipek mentioned during our interview. In the next excerpt, we can see how she talks about her feelings of being bound up with other ʿAlawis:

> So, I already realise that I'm different from others. When I'm with our people (friends of ʿAlawi background), then I feel *Geborgenheit* (the feeling of security) because I just know that I can talk about everything with them, that's why I feel secure. I know that they share with me the same culture. Our religious perspectives don't always have to be the same, but knowing that we are all familiar with ʿAlawiness or that we all know how we do things, it gives me a feeling of security. It isn't so that I have no other friends, I also feel well with my German friends. It's just something different, when I meet the people of my own religion.

For Ipek, her relation to her ʿAlawi friends is one of the many resources that she draws upon in the process of her self-identification as ʿAlawi, as Jenkins suggests, "Who I have relationships with, and the nature of those relationships – who I identify with – contributes to who I am, and says something to others about me" (p. 71). It seems that Ipek's ʿAlawi identity has been emotionally charged. She therefore describes her interaction with others with intense, emotional terms.

Fourth, self-identification as Ausländer (foreigner): This way of portraying a self-image draws upon one's phenotypical attributes. It is sometimes true that people categorise others according to their physical appearance. Visible phenotypical features such as hair and skin colour can be relevant in ethnic identification of others, as Eriksen puts it, "The physical appearance of a person … serve[s] as a convenient shorthand way of telling other members of the society what 'kind of person' he or she is" (Eriksen, 2010, pp. 99–100). What is important here is that youths' external categorisation as foreigners based on their observable physical characteristics becomes part of their internal definition of them-

selves (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 47). The assignment evokes assertion, this is most clear in the case of Sercan who says:

> I see myself as part of Germany, German society and so, but one is never really … one is already part of it, I just feel well and so forth, but one is still a foreigner, I don't mean it negative or something else, anyway foreigner, you just do not look like the people here.

Even though Sercan, who is a native German speaker holding a German citizenship, feels part of German society, he complains about not being recognised as such by the majority of ethnic Germans. It is surprising to note that today's criteria for Germanness do not seem to have changed dramatically compared to those of over 30 years ago. As Diana Forsythe found in her 1989 study of German identity, the boundary between German and non-German (*Ausländer*) is built on "a mixture compounded of appearance, family background, country of residence, and country of origin" (1989, p. 143).

Fifth, self-identification as Turkish with Arabic roots (Türke mit arabischen Wurzeln): This final mode of identification is developed through reference to ethnic origins of parents. For Cornell and Hartman (2007), "that identity is often claimed to have some set of primordial moorings—an anchor in blood ties, common provenance, or the physical links of race" (p. 93). The following quote from an interview with Ibrahim indicates the way he positions himself along the lines of descent and geographical origins:

> I am a Turk with Arabic roots who was born and raised in Berlin. (I am) an ʿAlawi, this is my religion, this is also about increasingly Hatay, too, where my parents, my ancestors come from, but I was born in Berlin, there is always this but as well.

In this quote, Ibrahim focuses his attention on "a wide palette of accessories" (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 71) that provide him with a basis for the explanation and presentation of his self-identity. He deliberately and neatly incorporates the notions of ethnicity, ancestry, birthplace, religion, and place of origin, into his self-identification.

Taken together, the narratives presented above demonstrate that ʿAlawi youths draw upon a myriad of identificatory resources and strategies in self-identification. In negotiating volatile circumstances and discourses in Germany, it seems to be advantageous to keep identities flexible. To deal adequately with different situations and to enhance the personal well-being, shifting between various identities seems to be essentially important.

It is worth noting that with the increasing racist and discriminatory practices toward foreigners in daily life in Germany, amplified by the rise of right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD), for some young people self-identification as Turkish and Arab ʿAlawi has gained more relevance and become remarkably thicker,[4] and started to play a more influential role in their social lives.

1.4.Towards mobilisation: “We can no longer hide ourselves”

Alawis in Germany initially established local associations to practice and maintain their culture. The rise of identity politics within the community is a recent development. From 2011 onwards, the Syrian civil war has gradually turned these associations into the sites of resistance to marginalisation, inequality and political exclusion, and the number of new associations has been increasing since then. In 2014 with the establishment of an umbrella organisation, called the European Federation of Arab ʿAlawis (*Avrupa Arap Alevileri Federasyonu* or AAAF), the attention has been focused on the politics of recognition and empowerment. ʿAlawi associations in general claim to be non-religious but tend to be closed to outsiders. Being myself an ʿAlawi facilitated me to have easy access to their meetings. I had the chance to talk with a number of ordinary members and leaders of ʿAlawi mobilisation.

ʿAlawi associations share the goals of unifying their dispersed co-religionists, demanding political rights, preserving and promoting Arab ʿAlawi religious identity. It is important to note that emerging political activism has been driven by identity-based claims. ʿAlawism has become central to the formation of identity politics in this regard. During my fieldwork with the associations, I observed that a broad range of cultural, social and religious activities are organised for the purposes of fostering and strengthening the patterns of ethno-religious identification. In the pages that follow I will first outline the motivating factors for the rise of ʿAlawi cultural politics and then move on to portray a myriad of activities and attempts that focus on creating the ʿAlawi group identity.

The rise of politicised ʿAlawiness

Three factors contribute to the explanation of the rapid growth of the politics of identity among the ʿAlawis in Germany. The first two are directly linked to the Syrian civil war. The

[4] A “thick” identity is a term coined by Cornell and Hartmann (2007) who suggest that “[a] … “thick” ethnic or racial tie is one that organizes a great deal of social life and both individual and collective action” (p. 76).

last factor is related to the development of the neo-Ottomanist policies in Turkey (Yavuz, 2020). As I have shown in an article on the emergence of ʿAlawi associations in Germany (Tümkaya, 2018), brutal and bloody conflicts between different religious groups in Syria since 2011 have incited the feelings of fear and insecurity among ʿAlawis (p. 204); I observed that ʿAlawis are spurred on by the threat of an Islamist Sunni takeover of the Syrian state.

Most of them believe that this would result in the persecution of all ʿAlawis in the region by radical Islamist groups such as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham). According to them, the overthrow of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad would simply put an end to the existence of their community in Syria. These fears intensified the formation of in-group favouritism. I met many ʿAlawis in associations who explicitly expressed their support for the continuity of Bashar al-Asad in power in Syria. ʿAlawis' concern over their community's fate seems to be based in part on the historical narratives of oppression that have created a sense of collective victimhood over the years.

Another factor is Turkey's Syrian policy that nurtured preexisting ethno-religious divisions in Syria. The Turkish government openly proclaimed its Sunni stance in the Syrian war by supporting Syrian rebel groups against the authoritarian rule of Bashar al-Asad, and the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; Justice and Development Party) government's foreign policies in Syria weakened the influence of the Syrian regime in this region. This, in turn, facilitated jihadist militants to become more involved in the armed conflicts (Yavuz, 2020, p. 232).

The Turkish intervention in Syria also jeopardised the security of the multireligious city Antakya (at the Turkish-Syrian border), where a great number of ʿAlawis live. The ʿAlawis I talked to in Germany and Turkey justifiably stated that Ankara would most likely welcome the collapse of the Asad regime. Many ʿAlawis believe that such an intervention across the border could have fatal consequences for their community in Turkey and Syria. They therefore overtly opposed Ankara's involvement in the war in Syria. Just like ʿAlawis in Germany, ʿAlawis in Turkey "saw the Syrian crisis and the Turkish government's support for the Syrian opposition as a direct threat to their survival" (Can, 2020, p. 44).

The last factor is the rise of Erdoğan's and AKP's neo-Ottomanist ambitions. Neo-Ottomanism, "rooting present notions of Turkish national identity within … Ottoman Islamic heritage" (Yavuz, 2020, p. xii), refers to a nostalgia for the Ottoman social, cultural and political life. It has been actively and powerfully promoted by AKP since the *Gezi Park* protests in 2013, but particularly by the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who sees Abdülhamid II as a role model (pp. 144–146, 196), and who is, as Hakan Yavuz sug-

gests, “every bit the autocrat that Abdulhamid II was” (p. 144). This ideology has considerably fostered Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islamism in Turkey.

In recent years, there has been proliferation in the number of newly built mosques and a growing interest in expanding religious education in public schools in Turkey. Indeed, as Yavuz reports, the public schools are being closed or converted to Imam Hatip schools, (education Institutions for Sunni Muslims clergy), (p. 158). All of these attempts have been made by the government to fulfil Erdoğan’s wish of “raising a devout youth” (Cumhuriyet, 2012). In this regard, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (known as Diyanet, DIB) has emerged as an effective instrument in politics under the AKP government. In order to promote the Sunni Islamic identity in everyday life in Turkey, its budget has been increased significantly every year. Consequently, political Islam has gained a dominant role in the public life in Turkey with the aim of reIslamising the population.

To resurrect the traces of the Ottoman legacy in Turkey, mosques, houses and hotels were recently built in the Ottoman architectural style. The newly built roads, bridges and universities have also become part of the Ottomanisation project, as they are named after Ottoman Sultans. There are even restaurants that set out to revive old Ottoman cuisine by offering Ottoman food to their guests. Inspired by prominent Ottoman leaders, films, TV series, and documentaries are being produced as well (Yavuz, 2020, pp. 167–172). In his book *Nostalgia for the Empire*, Hakan Yavuz concludes from the massive popularisation of the Ottoman iconography that “Erdoğan’s dream of bringing Ottoman ideas, tastes, and practices back in order to restore Great Turkey exudes Abdulhamid II’s ideas of control, conformity, and the lack of freedom” (p. 178).

The neo-Ottomanist policies augmenting Turkish Sunni collective identity gradually lead to a further marginalisation of the religious minorities in Turkey. For the ʿAlawis, who have mostly supported the efforts for the westernisation of the Republic, retrieving the remnants of the Ottoman Islamic past appears to be a threat because:

> Alawite populations in Turkey see the Ottoman past and Ottomanism as the ultimate “nightmare” that targets their existence and freedoms. They fear that the secular and modern state established by Atatürk might be undermined by a discourse that harks back to the Ottoman world. (Can, 2020, p. 129)

It is important to point out that ʿAlawis’ identity-based rights claims in Germany became more visible after the political activism of the ʿAlawis in Antakya had grown stronger. Şule Can’s study of the emergence of ʿAlawi political and cultural revival in Antakya posits that

the Syrian civil war across the border was the main catalyst for their political organising. She notes that ʿAlawis established political organisations in Antakya subsequent to the outbreak of the ethno-religious conflicts in Syria (pp. 127–138).

It is no coincidence that ʿAlawis' political activism in Turkey and Germany grew at the same time. One reason for this is that ʿAlawis from both countries have always been in close contact. Over the years, they have built a transnational network, engaged in mutual exchange of knowledge, ideas, experiences and interests. Another reason is that ʿAlawi groups in Germany and Turkey are equally concerned over the negative influences of the violent conflicts in Syria, the political upheavals in Turkey, and Turkey's intervention in Syria. It is also not surprising to note that what ʿAlawis in Germany demand from the Turkish government is exactly what their coreligionists in Turkey require:

> own bilingual schools, education in Arabic (their first language), religious freedom such as legal recognition of Alawite sacred places, abolition of mandatory religion classes at schools, and an end to the financial and military support for the jihadist groups in Syria. (Can, 2020, p. 137)

Furthermore, ʿAlawi political activism in Germany is still growing. Their struggle in retrieving community's religious identity will require a more extensive analysis in future years.

On the way to ʿAlawi cultural awakening

The Syrian civil war and the Turkish government's transition from democracy to an autocratic regime seem to have reminded ʿAlawis of the importance of maintaining their community. Since the incorporation of Hatay to Turkey in 1939, the necessity of constructing a collective identity has likely never been so urgent. Establishing identity politics is an important step for empowering ʿAlawis to defend their social, cultural and political rights in Germany and Turkey, and in this regard, resurrecting their cultural heritage has been at the centre of ʿAlawi organisations' political interest.

Though obviously belated, there are currently intense efforts of associations to assert the cultural distinctiveness of the ʿAlawi community. Common group characteristics of ʿAlawis have been gradually reproduced and made visible in the private and public spheres. These intra-group similarities are related to (constructed) commonalities such as language, culture, ancestry and origin (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 93). These are used

as powerful instruments to augment the sense of belonging to the Arab ʿAlawi religious community. Many different attempts have been made to promote a group identity among ʿAlawis for the purposes of social organisation and political recognition. This is a group identity that is both "the product of *collective internal definition,*" and "the identification of others" (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 105).

Since the outbreak of Syria's civil war, ʿAlawi associations in Germany have started to offer a broad range of educational programmes that include Arabic courses, seminars on ʿAlawi culture and belief system and symposia about various themes concerning ʿAlawi history. ʿAlawi youths often have the opportunities to learn some Arab traditional art forms. In Berlin's ʿAlawi association, for example, youths were learning *dabke*—a sort of dance originating from the Middle East. Courses on traditional cuisine are also offered by some associations. At the time when I was conducting my research, I had the chance to participate in a unique lecture session called *Erst Lernen, dann Spaß haben* (learn first, then have fun), organised by the ʿAlawi association in Cologne. This course was designed to teach youth the basic doctrines and cultural traits of ʿAlawism and Islam in general.

Social activities are also organised by these associations. Sunday breakfasts, for example, are popular events that are regularly offered by many associations. I once attended a Sunday breakfast in Berlin's ʿAlawi association where a great number of members and some non-members came together, which provided an opportunity to socialise in a relaxed atmosphere. Such a gathering is particularly valued by association members, as they enjoy traditional dishes while drinking Turkish tea.

As part of cultural revival, some ʿAlawi intellectuals from Turkey have made various attempts to restore the lost traditions of their culture. For instance, they made semi-professional documentaries focusing on ʿAlawi history and poetry. In Germany, some ʿAlawi associations organise events to show these films to their members and their families. In addition to documentaries, there are periodicals, books, and articles published by ʿAlawi academics and by those ʿAlawis who are generally known as *araştırmacı-yazar* (researcher-writer). Some are even made available in digital form. During my visits in the associations, I noticed that a popular ʿAlawi periodical called *Ehlen* (Welcome) was also sold by the representatives of associations, who had brought copies back from their recent visits to their Turkish hometowns.

Social-media platforms in particular, such as Facebook or YouTube, have become places where a great deal of information has been made available to ʿAlawis. As I did my research on ʿAlawi associations in Germany, I observed ʿAlawis of all ages who had a growing interest in learning more about their culture and origins. Together, these attempts

have been made to reconnect the ʿAlawis by helping them to recognise their divided, collective past, and the ʿAlawi cultural awakening has opened up new avenues for expressing Arab ʿAlawi identity.

Previous efforts to revive ʿAlawi culture and group identity were also made in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire by ʿAlawi intellectuals. During this time, ʿAlawis began writing the particularities of their religious identity and history. This process was called ʿAlawi "awakening" (*yaqza*). According to historian Stefan Winter, several factors contributed to the rise of earlier ʿAlawi revival. First, at the time when Ottoman, Egyptian and European imposition of modernity on ʿAlawi communities became a real threat, the ʿAlawi shaykhs considered the revitalisation of their faith necessary for reasserting their authority as clerics within their community. Second, during the Tanzimat era (literally meaning reforms), new opportunities emerged in the areas of education and administration from which ʿAlawi shaykhs wished to benefit. Winter writes that there were ʿAlawis who became Ottoman functionaries under Ottoman administration. Third, ʿAlawi religious scholars deemed a rapprochement with Imami Shiʿism as an important step towards the modernisation of their community. For this reason, redefining their community's religious identity became of practical importance. Finally, instigating ʿAlawi *yaqza* was linked to the political interests of the community, as Winter points out that "from the very start, reformist 'Alawi shaykhs had seen education, religious modernism, and ecumenism as a way of overcoming sectarian and tribal divisions" (2016, pp. 238–244).

Here we can see that the ʿAlawi community is actually experiencing a second revitalisation of its culture and history today. Overall, even though ʿAlawi cultural politics is still in the process of being formed, some of its emerging characteristics can still be discerned. Drawing upon the list outlining the features of politicised Hindu-ness (*hindutva*) offered by anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, I have identified five aspects of emerging ʿAlawiness relevant to the process of ʿAlawi cultural awakening:

- under-communication of internal differences
- historical victimisation of the community
- overcommunication of cultural features
- under-communication of the cultural influence of the dominant society
- portraying the members of opposite groups as a threat for in-group unification (Eriksen, 1995/2015, p. 364)

However, it is still early to assess how ʿAlawi organisations have affected the lives of their coreligionists in Germany. The question of whether an ʿAlawi political identity can ever be consolidated in order to gain political recognition is still to be decided. Public recognition will likely be a central discussion theme among ʿAlawis in the coming years. In order to better understand the process of ʿAlawi social and political mobilisation in Germany, it is necessary to conduct a multi-site ethnographic study. It may also be interesting to investigate how the ʿAlawi religious subdivisions and ʿAlawi clerics would influence the ʿAlawi identity politics.

1.5.The practice of taqiya and initiation

My book talks about the ways ʿAlawis practice secrecy, not about the secrets themselves. It is not my intention to investigate the strictly protected religious doctrines of the community. This book also examines the ʿAlawi practice of initiation, which serves as a mechanism for controlling boys' entry into community membership. However, before exploring in detail the practical experience of secrecy and initiation rituals in Chapter 3, it is necessary here to explain their doctrinal significance in the ʿAlawi society. Following Johnson (2003), I want to make my point more clearly that my research does not focus on "what," but primarily on "how" (p. 7).

1.5.1.ʿAlawi practice of Taqiya

One of the distinctive features that is central to ʿAlawism and has been perpetuated since its creation is the commitment of the community's members to secrecy. This widely followed custom is called taqiya in Islamic parlance and is mainly attributed to Shiʿism (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 395; Moosa, 1988, p. 410). In Imami Shiʿism, secrecy is seen a basic principle of the religion throughout history. It is permitted to employ taqiya, in order to avoid conflicts, to escape discriminatory treatments, and to protect oneself or one's community, especially in hostile environments (Kohlberg, 1995, pp. 345–380). For ʿAlawis, practicing secrecy has been an effective means of defending themselves against authoritarian regimes and radical Islamist groups. The ʿAlawi use of secrecy, akin to the Shiʿi practice of secrecy, serves "as a strategy of survival and self-perpetuation" (Dakake, 2006, p. 326).

In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* Strothmann and Djebli (2012) describe the term taqiya as "prudence, fear." It also means exactly the same as the word *kitman,* "action of covering, dissimulation." The term taqiya technically refers to "self-protection" by the act of dissimulation and "safeguarding of secrets." In the defence of secret information two strategies

of taqiya are used: *suppressio veri* (concealment) and *suggestio falsi* (dissimulation/fabrication). The terms taqiya and *kitman* are used synonymously. Following Kohlberg, the practice of taqiya can be divided into two broad types: a "prudential *taqiyya*" against the hostile outer world and a "non-prudential *taqiyya*" against those community members who are uninitiated (Kohlberg, 1995, pp. 345–346). That being the case, all initiated members of the ʿAlawi community take an oath to maintain the secrecy of everything which has to do with the esoteric tenets of their religious belief.

These two types of taqiya have become a key component of ʿAlawi socio-religious life, as Friedman (2010) writes: "for the Nusayrīs, the two types of taqiya cannot be divided." Revealing this knowledge is a reason for excommunication (p. 143). More than 150 years ago, as Friedman (p. 272) suggests, such a digression could even be punished with death, like in the case of Sulayman al-Adani. He was an ʿAlawi proselyte who was reported to be murdered by ʿAlawi adherents as a punishment for publishing the secrets of ʿAlawism in his 1864 book entitled *Al-Bakura al-Sulaymaniyya,* a claim that apparently remains unproven to date (Winter, 2016, pp. 204–205).

Friedman (2010) argues that in the course of the ʿAlawi community's development, the degree of attachment to the observance of taqiya became intensified, as the danger in which ʿAlawis found themselves increased. The end result of the increasing rigorous implementation of taqiya is that the community was divided into two groups which we can refer to as the "ignorant mass (*ʿāmma,* sing. *ʿāmm*) and a minority, made up of initiated elites (*khāṣṣa*, sing. *khāṣṣ*)." It seems that this division took place after the creation of the ʿAlawi community, most probably in the 11th century. The first ʿAlawi manuscript that refers to this division, according to Friedman, is "*Munāẓarat al-Nashshābī*," which dates from the 12th century. Even though these two opposing groups "masses" and "initiates" were mentioned in this document, the division between both groups seems to be incomplete as is the case today, and the "masses" played a part in religious life during this period (pp. 144–145).

It is important to note that taqiya was not always practiced by ʿAlawis. From the beginning of the dissemination of ʿAlawism (the process called *daʿwa,* missionary efforts) until the early 11th century, ʿAlawi religious leaders revealed their knowledge openly (Friedman, 2010, pp. 13, 22, 145; Winter, 2016, pp. 7–8, 17–42). From the end of that period to the present day, taqiya has been practiced extensively. Al-Khasibi, the founder of the ʿAlawi religion, was among the first leaders who adopted this Shiʿi tradition (Friedman, 2010, pp. 26–28). Resorting to taqiya was and is still for ʿAlawis inescapable in times of insecurity. Considering their notorious position as *ghulat* (exaggerators) among their rivals who con-

demn them as infidels (Moosa, 1988, pp. 410, 412), the observation of taqiya serves as a survival strategy and is a guarantee for preserving the continuity of their faith.

The ʿAlawi practice of taqiya had a notable effect on the relationship with the members of other religious communities. Being familiar with this practice has led these other communities to regard much of what ʿAlawis do and say as an expression of taqiya. For example, in the late Ottoman period, ʿAlawis' conversion to orthodox Islam or the performance of their prayers in mosques were only seen as tactical by the local Sunnis. This accusation has persisted, both in the literature about ʿAlawis (Winter, 2016, pp. 225, 244) and in the eyes of their adversaries until today.

For ʿAlawis, employing taqiya is also a way of responding to the discrediting categorisations imposed on them by others. For example, Talhamy (2010) notes that throughout history Sunni religious leaders wrote fatwas (legal opinions) that targeted ʿAlawis, condemning them as heretics and enemies of Islam. Even today, adversaries of the community make use of some of these fatwas to legitimise their actions against ʿAlawis.[5] For example, in 2013 during the Syrian civil war, the prominent Sunni shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, citing former fatwas, accused ʿAlawis of being infidels and due to their religious association with the ruling Asad family labelled them as murderers (Farouk-Alli, 2015, p. 27). Such fatwas and proclamations put the whole ʿAlawi community members at risk. As a result, ʿAlawis living both in and outside of Syria may feel obliged to provide others with false information about themselves and to conceal their true religious identities.

The impact of taqiya on everyday life varies from region to region, from country to country and depending on the era. In general, at present, compared to previous centuries, for ʿAlawis, the danger of being physically attacked by others is probably reduced (except, perhaps in Syria), while to be subject to verbal assaults may be more common. Today, ʿAlawis may have more cause to observe taqiya in certain districts of Syria because of the religious conflicts that have been exacerbated by the actions of Sunni Islamic radicals.

In contrast, ʿAlawis living in democratic countries such as Germany may decide to reveal their religious identities to others without much concern because of the relative security of minority religious communities. For example, the majority of my interviewees agreed with the statement that in Germany they are free of the anxieties of revealing their religious identities to strangers, especially to Sunni Muslims. In addition, during my fieldwork, I came to learn that the Syrian civil war (which began in 2011) was one of the causes for increased unification and mobilisation of the ʿAlawi community. In order to bring the perse-

[5] The fatwas issued as regards the ʿAlawis have been the focus of investigation in Yvette Talhamy's article entitled *The Fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawis of Syria* (2010, pp. 175–194).

cution and discrimination of ʿAlawis to an end, going public is seen by the majority of ʿAlawi elites living in Germany as a necessary step. As a result, the number of ʿAlawi cultural organisations has proliferated over the last decade. However, it is not to say that ʿAlawis have abolished taqiya completely.

It is important to note that non-prudential taqiya has become subject to criticisms within community, particularly from ʿAlawi women in Germany because they are not allowed to be initiates. Such criticism has also been handed out by ʿAlawi women living in Turkey (Sarsilmaz, 2017, pp. 87–93). I would like to add a quick note here (further detailed discussion will be presented in Chapter 3); the reason the secret tenets are concealed from ʿAlawi women is mostly connected to the notion that it is for their own protection, if and when they are confronted and treated with hostility. But many of my female and some male interviewees are unanimous that this strict custom seems to have become somewhat unnecessary in the 21st century. To conclude, the further integration of ʿAlawi women into the religious community appears to be less likely even today, as it will be probably not supported by the traditional elites due to the anti-feminine theological aspects embedded in ʿAlawism (Friedman, 2010, p. 166). The extent to which ʿAlawi youth in Germany deal with the dissimulation and concealment of their religious faith and identity is a further topic that will be studied in Chapter 3.

1.5.2.The start of a new life: ʿAlawi initiation

ʿAlawi religion possesses a great deal of sacred texts which are not accessible to all and which can be revealed only to those community members who are successfully initiated. The tradition of initiation dates back to the period of the first leaders of the ʿAlawi religion. Initiation concerns the admission of young ʿAlawi boys into their community of faith and generally consists of three rituals that take place over a long period of time. The completion of all rites is a necessary step for being admitted into full-fledged membership. The initiation rites are among the most important social, cultural and religious events of the ʿAlawi community. By this process, a novice can experience a spiritual transformation and rebirth. The full accomplishment of the initiation results in novice's union with the spiritually enlightened elite of his community.

To date, there are only a limited number of studies on the issue of ʿAlawi initiation due to strictly practiced taqiya and a lack of religious texts. The previous studies focusing on initiation rites were generally based on two sources. The first is "*Sharḥ al-Imām wa-mā yūjabu ʿalayhi wa-mā yulzimuhū* (an explanation of the duty of the Imām and his responsi-

bility)" (Friedman, 2010, p. 210). It is an anonymous document offering guidance to ʿAlawi shaykhs on the issue of initiation proceedings—written in the 18th century. And the second is a document called *Al-Bakura al-Sulaymaniyya* written by ʿAlawi apostate Sulayman al-Adani in the 19th century. It details the process of his own initiation (Salisbury, 1864; Friedman, 2010, p. 210; Tendler, 2012, p. 9).

However, the recent studies of Friedman (2010) and Tendler (2012) have been carried out using new documents. The book of al-Tabarani entitled *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwā* (the book of collections regarding the science of fatwas) has been at the centre of much attention of both authors in this regard. Al-Tabarani was a religious scholar and the leader of the ʿAlawi community who lived in 11th century. The information provided in his book stems from the times of the community's founders, in the ninth and the tenth centuries.[6] This book gives new details of the process of initiation. Fortunately, there are also two liturgical manuscripts that were personally discovered and used by Tendler in her dissertation relating to ʿAlawi initiation. A manuscript entitled *Kitāb al-Mashyakha,* a manual for shaykhs, which had long been considered to be lost, is her first discovery. Her second discovery is the book called *MS Taymūr ʿAqāʾid 564,* a manual for ʿAlawi novices.

Based on the theoretical framework of initiation put forward in Friedman's and Tendler's studies, in this section the main storylines of the initiation process will be split into its clear periods and then will be analysed synoptically. The discussion provided here will be supplemented by my own observations about initiation rites in İskenderun and the findings gathered by Prager (2010) in Hatay as well as by Procházka-Eisl & Procházka (2010) in Cilicia. With a combination of the theoretical and practical dimensions of the initiation, I will attempt to give a general outline of this tradition while referring to the detailed accounts of specific situations.

The initiation rites

Initiation refers to the transmission of mystical knowledge to the next generation, and therefore it serves as an essential tool for the continuation of ʿAlawism. Before proceeding further, it is worth bearing in mind that to delve into a full discussion of this complex and long-term process lies beyond the scope and the interest of this study. Additionally, out of respect for the ʿAlawi community's sensibilities regarding the secrecy of religion, any kind of information about religious doctrines submitted in the course of initiation rituals and afterwards cannot be presented and discussed here.

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[6] For a detailed description concerning ʿAlawi initiation in medieval times, see Friedman (2010, pp. 212–216) and the dissertation of Tendler (2012, pp. 56–86).

ʿAlawi initiation rests on an analogy: In order to maintain the secrecy of religious beliefs, "an extended sexual metaphor" was developed over time (Tendler, 2012, p. iii). Within this framework, the transmission of esoteric knowledge is akin to sexual intercourse. Along this metaphor, early ʿAlawi leaders used one of the important life cycle transitions, marriage, as a principal model for the structure of initiation. This is a marriage in spirituality that signifies the union of the teacher and his student. Comparable to a physical marriage, this spiritually conducted marriage can symbolically result in "gestation, birth, and breastfeeding stages." Interestingly, all of the established rules that govern the process and formalities of initiation are exactly identical to Islamic family law. This parallelism indicates the special significance of the Qurʾan and the incorporation of the Islamic jurisprudence into the ʿAlawi belief system (pp. iii–iv). Besides, the assembling of the religious instructor with his novice bears resemblance to "the soul entering a woman's womb" (Friedman, 2010, p. 212).

The initiation practice is not identical everywhere and seems to be governed differently, for example, by the ʿAlawis of Turkey and those of Syria. While in Turkey every ʿAlawi boy born to ʿAlawi parents can pass through initiation into the community of faith, the initiation among the ʿAlawis of Syria is regulated according to the division between the elite (khāṣṣa*)* and the commonalty (ʿāmma) (Procházka, 2015, p. 11). That is to say, not every man among Syrian ʿAlawis can be initiated (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 91).

In its ideal form, according to the aforementioned documents, initiation rituals are performed at certain sequences in a tripartite structure that are known as *sharb al-sār* (drinking the remnant)*, taʿlīq* (attachment)*,* and *samāʿ* (listening)*.*[7] In the course of initiation, as explained in al-Tabarani's *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī,* the teacher stands in the position of male spouse and his student stands in the position of woman. One important characteristic of this symbolic representation, which becomes apparent throughout the initiation process, is that both teacher and his student bound through marriage shift either from one position to another or from one gender to another within the familial terminology (Tendler, 2012, pp. 56–83), as illustrated on the following pages.

In general, initiates are in their teenage years. A suitable age for initiation varies from thirteen to eighteen. In accordance with the endogamous character of the ʿAlawi community, only boys born of ʿAlawi parents are permitted to be initiated (Olsson, 1998, p. 216; Moosa, 1988, p. 373; Procházka, 2015, p. 11). The young ʿAlawi boys are expected by their families and relatives to join the religious community by undergoing successfully in-

[7] These rituals may also be called in different names in different studies. For a more detailed examination of the rites of initiation, see Chapter 4 in Tendler's dissertation (pp. 123–203).

itiation rituals. Both during the preparation and aftermath of these events, in which different tasks are assigned to different persons, the whole family of the initiate is involved.

The three-stage initiation is a necessary process by which the initiates gain access into the secret doctrines of ʿAlawism. Each stage is usually an individual event in which only one young man is entitled to the ritual treatment. After the completion of these stages one can be recognised as a full-fledged member of the community, or in other words, as "one of the *muwaḥḥidūn* [monotheists]" (Friedman, 2010, p. 210). ʿAlawi women are not allowed to go through the same process as males. The perception of ʿAlawi women not being initiated is one of the subjects which will be analysed in Chapter 3.

As I observed in İskenderun, the process of a young man's initiation starts with his parents' searching for a respected man who will be his religious teacher, which in Turkish is called *din amcası*[8] and in Arabic *amm sayyid.* Prager (2010) suggests that the religious teacher, or sayyid*,* should be married because his wife will take care of the student during the learning period in his house (p. 91), however, this is not always the case. An unmarried man can also accept a student to teach the esoteric knowledge, when he, for example, still lives with his mother in the same house, who will then take care of the student.

The parent's suggestion for a particular person as sayyid can become a source of worry for the initiate, if he thinks that his potential spiritual uncle is an unsympathetic or a strict person. It is common that the initiate disagrees with his parent's choice of a particular sayyid*,* especially when he wishes to have somebody else who is close to him or whom he personally knows better*.*

The choice of an appropriate religious mentor is an important matter because in the course of this long process, the families of the novice and his mentor usually come closer and establish a spiritual bond and fellowship that should be maintained also after the initiation. The connection between both families tends to grow into a new relationship by mutual visits to one another's homes and by exchanging gifts. From that moment on, the novice takes on new moral responsibilities for his actions. Among the most important values in this regard are the respect for and subservience to his sayyid and his wife*.* As I have observed among initiates in İskenderun, for example, whenever and wherever a novice encounters his sayyid or his wife, he is expected to greet him or her by kissing his hand or her hand. Also, one of the tasks, which the initiate is supposed to fulfil, is to display at any time a great readiness to offer help to his sayyid or his sayyid's wife, if re-

[8] *Amca* in Turkish literally also refers to a paternal uncle.

quested. One such task can even involve fulfilling daily duties such as carrying heavy grocery bags for his sayyid or his wife.

Upon the arrangement of an appropriate sayyid, the novice's father organises the initial ritual of the initiation process after consultation with a shaykh, who will preside over the ritual. Subsequently, the initiate's family invites relatives, neighbours and close acquaintances (who were already initiated) to take part in the ritual. In this religious gathering, called *khuṭba* (literally meaning sermon, but here representing the betrothal before marriage), the initiate learns some exoteric knowledge (*ẓāhir)* of ʿAlawism (Friedman, 2010, pp. 212–213). In Tendler's study of initiation, this ritual is defined as *sharb al-sār,*[9] "drinking the remnant (suʾr)" (2012, pp. 62, 123). During the ritual, the initiate becomes the centre of his community's attention. Gradually, by passing through initiatory rituals that will follow, the initiate comes to realise that he is about to pass over into a new status and role in his community.

It has been previously observed by Prager that among Kalaziyya faction (one of the sub-units of the Alawi community) an initiate progresses only through two stages of initiation (2010, p. 90), as opposed to the three stages required among *Haydariyya* faction.[10] She has not discussed the reasons for this difference and not suggested which rituals these are. To clarify, I presume that these two stages are taʿlīq and samāʿ rituals. An explanation for this can be gleaned from Tendler's following statements. She notes that sharb al-sār ritual is not seen as a crucial part of the initiation and therefore can be omitted in advancing directly first to stage taʿlīq and then to the last stage samāʿ. She further explains that sharb al-sār is conducted to make a test period possible "before the teacher and student make a more committed attachment" (2012, pp. 123–124).

In the second stage, which takes place after thirty days according to al-Tabarani's *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* (p. 63), the initiate is presented with esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*). This phase is likened to marriage and named after taʿlīq (attachment). It is also based on the model of pregnancy, because it takes between seven and nine months until the final ritual (samāʿ) of the initiation is performed (Friedman, 2010, pp. 213–214).

In the taʿlīq ritual, the teacher is imagined to be a husband and the student to be his pregnant wife who is giving birth to himself (Tendler, 2012, pp. 57, 61). Since this attachment between both is modelled after a husband-wife relationship, they are both required

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[9] See Friedman (2010, pp. 212–213) and Tendler (2012, p. 62) for a detailed explanation of what the term *sharb al-sār* means.

[10] As to an explanation of initiation ritual in *Haydariyya* faction, see the empirical findings of Prager 2010, pp. 90–94.

to observe the esoteric equivalents of the obligations and constraints imposed by Islamic law relating to exoteric marriage. These restrictions involve their biological families as well because they also become a part of this relationship. For instance, a marriage (taʿlīq) between a teacher and his biological son's student is forbidden because in Islamic law a man cannot marry his daughter-in-law (pp. 75–76). With these metaphorical interpretations, a religious community has been constituted in which co-religionists in allegorical terms share familial bonds and kinship ties. From this point of view, it could be said that it is through initiation that the social relationships between the members of ʿAlawi religion are constructed and strengthened.

Among ʿAlawis of Hatay, the second stage of initiation is called *jamʿīyyat al-malīk (*the king's assembly)—and it is performed forty days from the date of the first ritual khuṭba (Prager, 2010, p. 92). During this ceremony, the initiate is also introduced to some personal obligations (which are listed by the imam) towards his sayyid (Tendler, 2012, p. 159) requiring him to display obedience to his master. This requirement is probably best described in the *Sharḥ al-Imām* which addresses novices with the following words:

> show him [sayyid] love; if you conceal his errors, have compassion for his tears, cover his nakedness, forgive his mistakes, accept his apology, visit him in his illness, restore his absence, follow his advice, ease his difficulties … answer his call, accept his gift … find his support pleasing, satisfy his needs, mediate his affairs, improve his words, convey his gift, uphold his oaths, befriend him and do not show him enmity, then your reward will increase and only your misfortunes will decrease. (as cited in Tendler, 2012, p. 161)

Tendler further adds how al-Tabarani in his *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* prescribed the extent of the initiate's submission to his sayyid "such as consulting him before marrying, traveling, borrowing money, or opening a business" (p. 161). However, this kind of relationship or attachment between the initiate and his sayyid today tends to occur less frequently among initiated laymen from İskenderun.

The next sequence of rites, described as samāʿ (listening), is the last step for the initiate before being allowed to gain access to the esoteric teachings. By going through the first and second stages of the initiation, the candidate has demonstrated his appropriateness and his capability to be presented with esoteric doctrines (p. 182). During this ritual, the initiand is required to take solemn religious oaths or formulae not to disclose any of esoteric exegesis of the ʿAlawi faith. Taking the oath is considered the highest point of this ritual

phase and appears to be the most essential part (p. 179). As stated earlier, this ritual is in general performed nine months after the second ritual. Achieving samāʿ marks the rebirth of the student as a man and ʿAlawi believer. At that point, the teacher's position changes from husband to a father and his student's position from wife to a son (p. 76).

After this ritual is completed, the young man is farewelled by his family and then sent to his sayyid's house to spend the next few weeks learning the esoteric knowledge of his religion. This process is also compared to "breast-feeding (*riḍāʿa*)" (Friedman, 2010, p. 214) because this is the beginning of the religious education that leads the initiate to the path to becoming a full member of his community. During the breastfeeding stage, the teacher again goes through a shift in his position and gender. The teacher revealing the esoteric knowledge to his student is equated to a mother who breastfeeds her male infant (Tendler, 2012, pp. 78–79). This aspect of the initiation can be interpreted, though allegorically, as female participation in the ʿAlawi religious faith and practice.

This is a very important stage of the initiation in which the initiate comes in sudden isolation from his family, relatives and friends. With completing the memorisation of the secret prayers revealed by his sayyid, the last task of the initiate is successfully accomplished, and the breastfeeding period can come to an end. From then on, he is allowed to attend the secret rituals with his co-religionists. As we have seen, the initiation involving different moments is a very complex and a long process in which an initiate can be beset with an intricate mixture of feelings before, during and after his own initiation. In Chapter 3, I will discuss at length youths' experiences and narratives about their initiations.

It is worth underscoring that initiation only establishes the esoteric net of kinship relationships between the male coreligionists in a religious sense. These are not applied to the exoteric world. The Qurʾanic marriage regulations are allegorically reinterpreted to govern the attachment of the teacher to his novice. What this means is that a believer's choice of a woman in the real world is not influenced by these metaphorical kinship regulations, because women "do not become relatives as a result of the initiation of their fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons" in the biological reality (pp. 83–84). Based on the analysis of the theoretical schema of the initiation, an ʿAlawi believer is not made by biological gestation alone, but rather only once he has undergone the initiation rituals, a full membership can be conferred to an ʿAlawi male.

The books which have been discovered by Tendler are important and rich sources in the field of ʿAlawi studies. Tendler's study of these books provides new insights into the complex structure and web of esoteric meanings contained in ʿAlawi religion. These ma-

nuscripts can help scholars better understand the community's religious history and the development of initiation rites and other rituals.

1.6. Some remarks on the genealogy of the word *ʿAlawi/Alevi*

The fact that ʿAlawis living in Turkey identify themselves in Turkish as *Arap Alevileri* (Arab Alevis) often causes them to be confused with the Anatolian Alevis. Not only the media or academic researchers, even the members of ʿAlawi and Alevi communities sometimes lapse into thinking that they belong to the same religious group (a topic that will be discussed in Chapter 3), despite the fact that the religious and historical backgrounds of both communities differ from each other to a great extent. As such, it seems to be important to examine what the term *Alevi* stands for in an Islamic and historical context and how both the ʿAlawi and Alevi communities from Turkey, who previously used different self-ascriptions, have adopted the name Alevi as their collective self-identifications in modern times.

First of all, the term Alevi is a polysemous word. There are several definitions attributed to the term in the Islamic context. This term, by definition, designates those who adhere to imam ʿAli and those who trace their ancestry to imam ʿAli. Equally important is to note that the term is employed in a discrediting way to refer to a heretic who is affiliated with Shiʿism (Dressler, 2008). The following analysis shows that the use of the term Alevi (in Ottoman scripture ʿAlawi) to self-identify by the communities formerly known as Kızılbaş (Kizilbash) or Bektaşi (Bektashi) from Anatolia, and Nusayris from Syria, started to appear in the late ottoman period. ʿAlawis have used the term since the end of the 19th century whereas some Kızılbaş groups have done so since the second half of the 19th century. In the following paragraphs, I will first describe the process by which Nusayris became known as ʿAlawis, and then I will focus on how the Kızılbaş or Bektaşi groups both started to be called Alevis.

Today, in different languages, the ʿAlawi community is widely known by its very closely spelled names, for example, in Arabic as *ʿAlawiyyūn,* in English as ʿAlawis/Alawites*,* in German as *Alawiten,* and in Turkish as *Aleviler.* Similarly, the religion itself is named in Arabic as *ʿAlawiyya,* in English as ʿAlawism*,* in German as *Alawitentum/Alawismus,* and in Turkish as *Alevilik.*

There are various labels that have been ascribed to ʿAlawis throughout history. Some of these labels such as *fellahin* (peasantry, *fallāḥ* singular, as written in standard Arabic) was, according to some authors, previously used both as an internal identification and external identification of the community (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 22; Winter, 2016,

pp. 5, 146). The term *fellah* (as it is uttered by ʿAlawis in Turkey) is today resisted and regarded by the majority of the new generations of ʿAlawis living in Turkey as derogatory. Although the Turkish Sunni majority may still prefer to use the term fellah when talking about ʿAlawis, during my fieldwork in İskenderun I did not hear ʿAlawis referring to themselves by this name. The designation fellah was first used as a general term for poorly educated peasants in Syria and also in Egypt. It was not a specific word that only referred to the adherents of ʿAlawism. ʿAlawis also became known by the term because nearly all farmers living in *Sahel* (Syrian coast)[11], outside of the larger towns, were ʿAlawis. The pejorative meanings "ignorant rustic" and "heretic Alawi" were apparently applied to the term because of its association with ʿAlawis/ʿAlawism (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 23).

The ʿAlawis of Hatay may also define themselves in Turkish as *Hasibiler* (the adherents of al-Khasibi, who is considered the founder of the community). The terms *muwaḥḥidūn* or *ahl al-tawḥīd* (monotheists) are further self-identifications that can be found in ʿAlawi religious books (Bar-Asher & Kofsky, 2002, p. 2; Friedman & Frieman, 2001, p. 93; 2010, p. 11). Besides, it is not uncommon that the ʿAlawis of Turkey identify themselves as *Arap kökenli* (someone with Arabic origin). Some ʿAlawis also prefer to call themselves *Güney Alevileri* (southern ʿAlawis) because of their hometowns, which are located in the southern coastal area of Turkey. Also, when referring to those who belong to the community, ʿAlawis use the Arabic word *Minnina.* This vernacular expression consists of the preposition *min* (from) and the personal pronoun in the Syrian pronunciation, *nihna* (us), and simply means one of/from us. This term is sometimes also applied by ʿAlawis to allude to those who are not necessarily part of the community but act in solidarity with the community.

ʿAlawis of Turkey most often use the Turkish wording Arap Alevileri (Arab ʿAlawis) for their collective self-identification when introducing the community in the media or during interactions with strangers. It is partially because of the fact that they are followers of the imam ʿAli who is Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law, the first imam of the Shiʿa, and belongs to *ahl al-bayt* (the Family of the Prophet). It is important to note that by calling themselves Alevis, the aim is to demonstrate the Shiʿi character of their belief and thereby their belonging to Muslim *umma*. As will be shown in detail in Chapter 3, ʿAlawis made great efforts to show their attachment to Shiʿi Islam, especially during the rise of Arab nationalism in the period of the French Mandate in Syria (Firro, 2005, pp. 18–19) and during the first

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[11] For a detailed analysis of the ʿAlawi community from *Sahel* (the coast) region and of that from *Dakhel* (the interior) in Syria, see Leon T. Goldsmith's work (2015) on *Alawi diversity and solidarity from the coast to the interior*

years of the presidency of Hafiz al-Asad in Syria (Talhamy, 2010, pp. 188–191). There is no doubt that these efforts can be understood in terms of political aspirations.

Most of the scientific papers suggest that ʿAlawis adopted the term ʿAlawi (Turkish, Alevi) after WWI and the end of the Ottoman Empire. It can be argued that ʿAlawi writer Muhammad Amin Ghalib al-Tawil contributed to the widespread use of the term with his publication of *Tarikh al-ʻAlawiyyin* (the history of the ʿAlawis) in 1924 (Alkan, 2012 p. 49; Winter, 2016, p. 5). However, according to Necati Alkan the appearance of the term could be traced back to the 11th century. The author has also shown that the term ʿAlawi had already been used by ʿAlawi shaykhs in the late Ottoman period in two petitions sent to Istanbul. In these petitions, written in 1892 and 1909, the ʿAlawi shaykhs identified their religious community as "Arab ʿAlawī people (*ʿArab ʿAlevī ṭāʾifesi*), our ʿAlawī Nuṣayrī people (*ṭāʾifatunā al-Nuṣayriyya al-ʿAlawiyya*)" and "signed with ʿAlawī people (*ʿAlevī ṭāʾifesi imżāsıyla*)" (2012, p. 49*).* Most probably, the use of the name ʿAlawi in Syria gained in popularity with the creation of the state of ʿAlawis (*Dawlat al-ʿAlawiyyīn*), which only lasted a short time (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 20).

ʿAlawis also have some external definitions, especially in religious studies the term *Nusayri* is common place*.* It was first used in "Muslim heresiographies" during the Middle Ages. Nonetheless the term has never been used by ʿAlawi scholars in their own literature, but by others, and sometimes in discrediting terms (Winter, 2016, pp. 4–5). However, it is noteworthy that the community members often used the term *Nusayri* for their internal self-identification (p. 4). The negatively charged Turkish word *Arap Uşağı*, which can be translated into English as Arab servant, is another example of external identification of the community by others (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 23).

Let us now examine the appropriation of the term *Alevi* among the communities from Anatolia, which were formerly known as Kızılbaş (the followers of the Safavi Sufi order, Dressler, 2013, p. 6) or Bektaşi (the adherents of the saint Hacı Bektaş Veli). Today, the number of people affiliated with Alevism in Turkey is estimated to be 15 million. According to some scholars, two-thirds of them are Turkish speaking and the rest speak the Kurdish languages Kurmanci or Zazaki (Dressler, 2008; Procházka-Eisl, 2016). Shankland (2003) notes that Turkish Alevis are more liable to feel associated with Bektaşis. During his fieldwork in the 1980s, he reported to have learned that Turkish Alevis may also occasionally prefer the term "village Bektashis" for their self-ascription (pp. 18–19). The various regional communities in Turkey which are today ascribed to Alevism, before the 1950s were respectively known as: *Tahtacı, Çepni, Amucalı, Koçgirili, Zaza, Abdal, Bedreddinī,* and

Bābāʾī. These ascriptions are mainly based on “tribal, ethnolingual, regional and/or professional backgrounds” (Dressler, 2008).

Kehl-Bodrogi (1988) has pointed out that the terms, such as *caferi*, *Hüseyni* and *Gürüh-i Naci* were frequently referred to as self-identification in Alevi poems for the groups called Kızılbaş in Anatolia (p. 52). However, there are some historical sources from the sixteenth century in which the term Alevi is used as a self-designation among Kızılbaş groups (Dressler, 2008). But the vernacular use of the term among Kızılbaş in the modern era can be traced back to the 1880s. The use of the term probably gained currency in the Young Turk period (Dressler, 2013, p. 1).

It is also worth noting that in a text from the early 19th century Mehmed Esad Efendi, an Ottoman historian, already ascribed the term Alevi to Bektaşis (p. 2). However, it was not until the first half of the 20th century that the term Alevi—positively charged—took the place of the term Kızılbaş—negatively assessed—in Turkish public and academic discourse (p. 4). Yet, the use of the term became especially widespread in the 1920s and 1930s, during the modern Turkish nation-building period (p. 5).

By renaming the Kızılbaş and Bektaşi groups as Alevis, the idea was to make their characteristic differences less visible so as to accelerate their assimilation into the Turkish-Muslim nation. (Dressler, 2013, p. 5). In a similar vein, the redefinition of Nusayris as ʿAlawis aimed to integrate the community into Islam (Alkan, 2012, p. 49; Firro, 2005, pp. 9–11; Friedman, 2010, p. 235). However different the history of appropriating the term in each community, the adoption of the new name Alevi by communities such as the Nusayris, Kızılbaş and Bektaşis gave them the possibility of gaining access to political or economic resources that might otherwise have been unavailable. We have seen that some group definitions of ʿAlawis and Alevis, which were first used as external identifications, later became internal self-identifications.

Depending on the context, ʿAlawis living in Germany may choose to identify themselves by using one of their self-ascriptions either in Turkish, German, or the Arabic language. In some situations, they identify themselves by their Turkish and German names, or by their Turkish and Arabic names, in other situations by all three languages at the same time. For example, ʿAlawis in Hannover identify their association by using both Turkish and German descriptions. The nameplate bearing their association’s name, which hung on the wall of the association building is written in both languages (Figure 1.2).

In a similar vein, on one particular occasion, ʿAlawis in Berlin preferred their Turkish name to introduce their association. In 2018, I attended the celebration of the International Women’s Day in the Berlin *cemevi* (the place for ritual, worship and cultural gatherings).

The representatives of the different Alevi associations and those of Berlin ʿAlawi association were present in this event.

What I found interesting during this event was that while the names of participating associations were written in Turkish on the flyer publicising the event, the name of the occasion, the International Women's Day, was written in five different languages, including Arabic (Figure 1.3). By using the Turkish designation of their association, *Berlin Arap Alevileri Birliği* (The union of Berlin Arab Alevis), the ʿAlawis show their solidarity with other Alevi associations. It is probably because ʿAlawis wanted to see their community as part of the wider Alevi community during this event. On the other side, the fact that the name of the occasion was also written in Arabic underlines their association's difference, in other words, their ethno-religious identity. Indeed, the Turkish word Alevi seems to provide a vehicle for constituting a collectivity among the people of different ethno-religious backgrounds. This collectivity refers to "having something in common, whether 'real' or imagined, trivial or important, strong or weak" (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 132).

Figure 1.2

Note. The poster of Hannover ʿAlawi association that was hung in the meeting room. *Source*. Author

Figure 1.3

Note. Flyer of the International Women's Day organised by the Alevi community in Berlin. *Source*. Author

It is important to note that this introductory message on the flyer may evoke an erroneous assumption that ʿAlawis are a subdivision of the Alevi religious community, or that they are Arabic speaking adherents of Alevism. In this context, the integration of ʿAlawis into the wider category of Alevis without further information about the community can cause confusion for someone who lacks the appropriate background knowledge about ʿAlawis and Alevis.

On another occasion, the ʿAlawis in Berlin wrote the name of their association on the flyer of a cultural event in Turkish, Arabic, and German (Figure 1.4). The use of the word ʿAlawi in three different languages indeed encapsulates the historical transformation of the community's linguistic identification. At the same time, it shows the community's attachment to each culture. Today, the community members bear a kaleidoscopic identity which involves different linguistic practices.

Figure 1.4

Note. The invitation flyer of the event in which the word *ʿAlawi* written in Turkish, Arabic and German. *Source*. Author

Taken together, we can see that the word Alevi may have different connotations which are subject to change over time. Building on Bodenhorn's and vom Bruck's (2006, pp. 3–4) argument on names, it is possible to offer further perspective on the term Alevi. The name Alevi provides information about various groups, which use it as their collective identifications. These groups might be, in general, aware of their different geographical and religious origins from each other. The common use of the name Alevi helps these groups to cross the boundaries between these differences.

1.7.Outline of the book

This book is organised into four chapters and begins with this first chapter, which provides preliminary background information about ʿAlawis in Germany and explains the research focus, aims and objectives of the study. This introductory chapter situates ʿAlawis in the German migration history. Before introducing further chapters, I would like to state that my book is neither an apology for ʿAlawism nor serves as a guidebook that is designed to reveal community's religious practices.

Chapter 2 is concerned with theoretical positions and methodological approaches employed for this study and consists of two main sections. In the first section, I introduce the theoretical framework I used for this research. This section offers three main theoretical underpinnings by discussing their appropriateness for analysing the empirical data gained through various data-gathering techniques. The second section describes my personal experiences and my different positionalities that emerged in the course of my fieldwork among ʿAlawis. Here, I delve into a set of aspects that arise out of my positionality as a native researcher. By engaging in critical reflexivity, I examine my shifting statuses as insider and outsider. This section then continues by summarising the anthropological methods that were used to gather data. It provides a detailed account of participants profiles and field sites.

Chapter 3 is the longest chapter where the most substantial discussions based on ethnographic fieldwork are addressed. This chapter is divided into four sections. The aim of the chapter is to show the contemporary effects of the practice of secrecy on ʿAlawi youths' lives in Germany. I ask how the tradition of secrecy help them construct their religious identifications and their relationships with others. The chapter begins with the section entitled *The management of secrecy*. One of the main topics covered in this section is to examine the ways in which secrecy has been strategically used by ʿAlawi youths and their community. I focus on my interlocutors experiences of secrecy. Particular interest is

to explore how ʿAlawi youths interpret their community's tenacity in keeping secrets. This section also explores the ubiquity of secrecy.

The second section, *ʿAlawi youth's relations to Turkish Sunni Muslims and Alevis*, demonstrates how ʿAlawis difference may give rise to conflictual situations between them and their Turkish Sunni counterparts during social interactions. The strategies of secrecy help ʿAlawis on one hand to pass as Turkish—though not always enough Turkish—and on the other hand to conceal their true identities—though not always enough successfully. This sections shows how, when Turkish Sunnis are unable to tolerate ʿAlawis' cultural differences, the mutual communication between both communities might come to deadlock. This section further analyses how the practice of secrecy causes ʿAlawis' differences from their Alevi counterparts to be seen as nebulous. By discussing youths' experiences of encounters with Alevis, this section points to a further impact of secrecy on negotiating social identities.

The third section, *ʿAlawism through women's eyes,* seeks to assess how ʿAlawi women's religious life has been influenced by the practice of secrecy. Women are not permitted to learn esoteric teachings of ʿAlawism, which prevents them from participating in communal prayers. This section first explores the reasons behind the refusal of ʿAlawi men to grant women access to religious training. I next discuss what women think of their exclusion from religious training. Some ʿAlawi women who feel the need to seek spirituality are forced to find other ways of practicing their religion. In this section, I explore contemporary ʿAlawi women's religious experiences and their complex relations to their community of faith.

The final section, *ʿAlawi youth's initiation from first-person perspectives*, aims to shed light on ʿAlawi men's complex experiences that emerge before, during and after their initiation rituals. In so doing, it describes initiates' anecdotes of their rites of passage. By focusing on actual initiations, this section pushes the textual explanations about the initiation rituals into the background so as to give initiated youths a voice to express their initiation experiences. This section also examines how the adoption of modern Turkish as their first language has impacted the contemporary ʿAlawi tradition of initiation.

The last chapter provides a summary of the main findings of this book, explaining what my research has shown and achieved. Resulting conclusions will be reinterpreted in relation to the research objectives that have been put forward in the introductory chapter. By connecting up the key messages across the sections in Chapter 3, I broaden my discussion to a wider discussion of findings. I end this chapter by offering some methodological and theoretical recommendations for future studies on ʿAlawi youth and their community

of faith. In summary, this chapter presents a detailed assessment of how my research has contributed to the existing knowledge on ʿAlawis.

2. On researching Arab ʿAlawi secret community

This chapter explains the theories and research methods that were used to investigate the different facets of ʿAlawi life in present-day Germany. The first section of this chapter focuses on the theoretical approaches that help provide a deeper understanding of research findings. In the second part of the chapter I present the methodological strategies that I utilised to gather empirical data in the field. To study Arab ʿAlawi youth I mainly concentrated on methods which are traditionally used in social anthropology. In this section, I will describe my fieldwork, including my experiences with respect to doing anthropology at home. Following this, I will introduce the specific research techniques that were adopted for this study, information will be given on my research participants and field sites too. In this chapter I will also present a reflection on ideas regarding some epistemological and ethical issues.

2.1.Theoretical framework

In the analysis of the empirical data gained through my fieldwork, this book builds on three primary theoretical approaches of secrecy, initiation, and identification. When I began my fieldwork researching Arab ʿAlawi youth in Germany, I hoped to gain a deeper insight into their experiences of being ʿAlawi. What at first sight became apparent to me were the dynamics of secrecy, which revolve around the strategies of concealment and revelation of Arab ʿAlawi identity. The practice of secrecy controls de facto the different dimensions of ʿAlawi religious and social life. In other words, secrecy plays an important role in "constituting self, society, and perhaps most importantly, culture" (Jones, 2014, p. 54).

I argue that ʿAlawis' commitment to secrecy represents one of the greatest components of the ʿAlawi way of life, and its impacts on community's everyday experiences have largely been neglected by the previous empirical studies on ʿAlawi communities (see, for example, Prager, 2010; Sarsilmaz, 2017). The present study, drawing on the anthropological theories of secrecy (Bellman, 1984; Brink-Danan, 2012; Johnson, 2002; Jones, 2014; Simmel, 1950; Urban, 1998), attempts to explain how the idealisation of secrecy shapes the everyday lives of ʿAlawis and their religious identities. The theoretical formulations of secrecy provide a basis for arguments raised in the main chapters of this book. Indeed, the concept of secrecy, as an essential feature of the ʿAlawi culture, is extremely valuable and beneficial for any kind of study that aims at understanding ʿAlawis' religion, or their social and political attitudes. In the following sub-chapters, I will present the aforementio-

ned theoretical approaches. Parallel to the theoretical discussion, I first embed glimpses of my empirical findings and demonstrate where and how the selected theoretical approaches converge with these findings.

2.1.1.Understanding secrecy

Simmel (1950), in his pioneering work on secrecy, defines the concept of secrecy as "purposive hiding and masking … [or] aggressive defensive … against the third person" (p. 330). In the later parts of my thesis, I will show that for ʿAlawis, secrecy means being discreet. And discretion means being involved in a constant struggle to avoid revealing confidential knowledge to outsiders. In this struggle, behaving and speaking tactically is a constant theme in ʿAlawis' interactions with others in everyday contexts. The collective struggle to keep secrets hidden has intensified at times when the community has been threatened by the danger of intentional or unintentional revelation of secrets. As Simmel notes, "The intention of hiding … takes on a much greater intensity when it clashes with the intention of revealing" (p. 330).

Following Simmel's insights on secret societies, this study asserts that since the ʿAlawi community practices secrecy "as its form of existence," secrets govern the mutual relations among its initiated members, and their relations with the uninitiated (p. 345). In his analysis, Simmel describes some basic features that constitute the relationships among the members of secret societies. These features—among others—can be observed among ʿAlawis. One such important characteristic of a secret society is the commitment of its members to the protection of the society's secrets. Therefore, group members' emphasis on "reciprocal *confidence*" is seen as essential in the practice of secrecy (p. 345).

Besides, to protect against the revelation of its secrets, a secret community might require its members to take an oath of silence and strongly deter them from violating the oath with the threat of punishment (p. 349). In accordance with Simmel's investigations, it can be suggested that one distinctive feature of a secret society is its arrangement in a strong hierarchal structure. Simmel underlines the fact that "secret societies … carry through the division of labor and the gradation of their members with great finesse and thoroughness" (pp. 356–357). Similar processes can be found within the ʿAlawi community in which secrecy has served to legitimatise the authority of ʿAlawi religious leaders, who are entitled to control the flow of secret information on ʿAlawism. It is the secrecy that has reified the socio-religious hierarchies in the ʿAlawi community.

In secret societies, the transmission of secret knowledge can often be ensured through the performance of initiation rituals. Secrecy and ritual are deeply interrelated practices, as Bellman argues, “Secrecy is the substance of ritual” (1984, p. 79). In a similar vein, Fernandez (1984) implies that the secrets are an intrinsic part of the rituals (p. viii). Ritual serves as a means of integrating new members into the secret community. One obvious distinction between the secret society and the open society is probably the former’s performance of initiation ceremonies (Simmel, 1950, p. 358).

Maria Dakake (2006) notes that there are various reasons to keep secrets for religious groups, ranging “from the need for survival, to the need to deflect social criticism, to the desire to attract new members, drawn by the allure of access to secret knowledge and experience and membership in an exclusive society” (p. 325). All these aspects accord with the ʿAlawi practice of secrecy.

ʿAlawis are accustomed to managing their appearance through the strategies of invisibility and visibility. Some of the strategies of secrecy used by the ʿAlawis are remarkably similar to those used by the Turkish Jews in Istanbul. Both groups apparently share similar rules of self-censorship and self-representation in the public sphere. In her study of the everyday experiences of the Jewish community living in contemporary Turkey, Brink-Danan (2012) notes that “many Jews still believe that their acceptance as a minority in Turkish society is conditional upon their keeping a low profile” (p. 108). Much the same can be said about the experiences of the ʿAlawis living in Turkey: ʿAlawis are aware of the fact that they have to make their cultural difference a secret in order to be tolerated in Turkish society.

In repeated informal conversations and interviews during my fieldwork, some of my interlocutors described the difficulties arising from obeying the imperative of secrecy in their interactions with outsiders. One major problem they identified was that they sometimes have to feign ignorance about certain themes and questions while interacting with others. They believe that such ignorance makes them more vulnerable to insults. Some ʿAlawi youths I talked to also told me that ʿAlawism makes them feel exotically different, a kind of superior being. It seems to be true that keeping secrets can “produce value through both the exclusion of outsiders and the inclusion of insiders” (Jones, 2014, p. 54). The feeling of superiority appears to be a common feature of secret communities, as Kenneth M. George (1993) made a similar observation while studying a religious minority practicing secrecy in the highlands of Sulawesi in Indonesia (p. 235).

In the analysis of secret communities, the focus can be directed towards the content of the secrecy. However, an ethical-epistemological problem that scholars can encounter

when examining the content of secrecy is, what Hugh Urban (1998) calls, the "double bind" of secrecy (p. 209). As he explains, the true essence of concealed information cannot be known with certainty, even if it somehow becomes known to scholars, it is usually not permitted to disclose it to outsiders (p. 214). As a solution to this problem, he suggests a shift in the methodological and theoretical approach (p. 218).

Urban indicates that it is more important to study secrecy "in terms of its *forms* or *strategies*—the tactics by which social agents conceal or reveal, hoard or exchange, certain valued information" (p. 210). Such a methodological approach certainly helps us better understand how a secret forms the relationships between people who know it and those who do not. Fernandez (1984) following Bellman (1984) already recognised the critical role of "doing of secrets," as he argues, "It is in the activity of the making and conveying of secrets that the various orders and domains of social reality are defined and established" (p. viii). Much of the recent ethnographic work on secrecy appears to have recognised these points by focusing on the strategies, social practices, and rhetoric of secrecy in everyday life, instead of focusing on the content of the secrets (see, e.g., Brink-Danan, 2012; Johnson, 2002; Mahmud, 2014). This study follows a similar path. In Chapter 3, I explore the various strategies and techniques that have been used by today's ʿAlawis to maintain their invisibility. It is important to bear in mind that the central focus of this part of the study is not to explore how ʿAlawis conceal, reveal or communicate the esoteric religious knowledge but rather their affiliation with ʿAlawism.

2.1.2. Understanding patterns of initiation

The ʿAlawi initiation is a tradition that moulds the religious values and social norms of the community. La Fontaine notes that there are two types of initiation rituals: initiation into adulthood and initiation into a secret society. They both "concern admissions to a new social standing: as an adult and as a member of a group" (2018, p. 1). La Fontaine further asserts (1985) that both types show similarities because they fall into the category of rites of passage (pp. 15, 24), a term first identified by van Gennep in his 1909 book *Les rites de passage* (1909/1960). Although Grimes (2000)—a prominent scholar in the field of ritual studies—argues that initiation into a secret society is "not rooted in the life cycle" (p. 102), I consider ʿAlawi initiation practice as a rite of passage because it can be categorised as both types of initiations simultaneously: it not only facilitates a boy's entry into community membership but also his transition into adulthood.

Rites of passage pertain to status change within a person's life cycle. The category both covers coming-of-age initiations for boys and girls and also rituals that happen on the occasions of birth, marriage and death (Bell, 1997, p. 94; Forth, 2018, p. 1). These moments are also described as "life-crisis" or "life-cycle" rituals (Bell, 1997, p. 94) or as "transition rituals" (Forth, 2018, p. 1).

As already stated in the analysis of the theoretical framework of the ʿAlawi initiation rituals in Chapter 1, the essential function of the ʿAlawi initiation is admitting a boy, by disclosing him the sacred teachings, to the community of faith (or to the community of the spiritually elite men). Another function of the ʿAlawi initiation is to admit suitable individuals to religious vocations like shaykh. Arnold van Gennep considers the rituals conducted for the inauguration of new clergymen also as part of rites of passage (1960, p. 65).

When we look at an actual ʿAlawi initiation, we find that it is also intended to transform a boy into a man. It seems to be a secondary consequence, but still an explicit, purpose of the initiation. Equally, many adult males who went through the rites of initiation believe to have experienced a social maturation afterwards. This narrative has become a common way of describing the transformative power of initiation and is one of the subjects in Chapter 3. In this respect, following La Fontaine (1985), it could be argued that in the ʿAlawi community, manhood is regarded as "a social status" that is gained through initiation, and it is "not merely a matter of physical growth" (p. 104).

The phased process of ʿAlawi initiation is expected to bring about a promotion as well as a change in the social and religious life of an initiate. In the following excerpt, Grimes (2000) describes exactly such a transformation:

> The effect of ritual passage is to transform both the individuals who undergo them and the communities that design and perpetuate them. Rites of passage change single people into mates, children into adults, childless individuals into parents, living people into ancestors. Rites of passage are stylized and condensed actions intended to acknowledge or effect a transformation. A transformation is not just any sort of change but a momentous metamorphosis, a moment after which one is never again the same. (p. 6)

To date, the influence of van Gennep and others who follow him (most notably Turner (1969, 1974), is still prevalent on the study of life cycle rituals. Van Gennep explained the rites of passage in tripartite pattern that contains the stages of *separation, transition* and *incorporation* (1960, pp. 11, 21). His theory of rites of passage refers to spatial metaphors in which a rite is defined as "a domestic threshold or a frontier between two nations," this

sort of place corresponding to “neither here nor there” but instead “betwixt and between” (Grimes, 2000, p. 6).

Male initiations are classic examples where initiates proceed through these three phases. The stage of separation, pertains to the initiates’ change of the location and original status, in van Gennep’s words, “a separation from the previous environment, the world of women and children” (1960, p. 74). According to Grimes, the separation of the novice from his original environment need not to be a geographical isolation, it may be entirely symbolic as well. The second stage, known as transitional stage, refers to a state of uncertainty. The initiate stays isolated in a closed-off place where he must go through ordeals and is instructed into secret knowledge. In the final or incorporation stage, the initiate returns to his place of origin, to his community, as a new person, more precisely as an adult, as a man (2000, p. 104). Van Gennep argued that each rite of passage goes through these three stages, but he also noted that different stages are emphasised by different sorts of rites—that is to say, for example, separation is noticeable in funeral rituals; incorporation in births and weddings; transition in initiation or pregnancy (Grimes, 2000, p. 104; Van Gennep, 1960, p. 11).

The classic van Gennepian theory that contains the phases of separation, transition and incorporation can also be applied to ʿAlawi initiation, just like Tendler[12] attempted to demonstrate in her study of theoretical structure of ʿAlawi initiation. In her analysis, she considers the period of marriage, taʿlīq (attachment) ritual, between the novice and his teacher as a stage of separation, because it marks the removal of the novice from his parents’ house; the period of the novice’s pregnancy is a transitional stage; the novice’s birth and breastfeeding period as incorporation into the community where the novice’s life begins as a new member possessing a new status. Tendler also acknowledges that there are several sub-phases and some other special enactments transpiring within the initiation process (2012, pp. 218–219).

A closer examination indicates that when we apply van Gennep’s threefold pattern of passage to the actual rites of ʿAlawi initiation as conducted in İskenderun, the three moments that actual rites emphasise seem to be not quite identical with those illustrated by Tendler. I consider the first two initiation rituals, sharb al-sār and taʿlīq, which a novice undergoes in a linear sequence, to serve as preparatory steps leading to the moment of separation that takes place subsequent to the third and last ritual samāʿ.

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[12] See Chapter 1 for the detailed description of the rites of ʿAlawi initiation.

As I previously mentioned, in the course of all three rituals, the initiate is transposed from the spatial domain of women and children to that of initiated men, to the ritual room to perform some ritual actions. But he is not allowed to stay for the entire rituals with the congregation because he is not regarded yet as fully initiated. After the first and second ritual events, the novice is sent back to his family, but after samāʿ ritual—this is the moment of separation—he is taken from his family and brought to his teacher's house to study the esoteric wisdom. This separation here refers to a spatial isolation.

Another moment of separation, yet expressed in symbolic forms, is also to be found in the theoretical version of the initiation, (although different from the one described by Tendler above). As already stated in Chapter 1, the initiate is considered to be a woman and a wife in the first two rituals. Yet, the subsequent ritual *samāʿ* represents his death as a woman and his rebirth as a man. It therefore connotes the symbolic separation from the initiate's old identity, it means the loss of his status as a woman.

The education period that comes after the samāʿ ritual can also be described as the transition stage. During this time the novice lives in his teacher's house and receives a set of secret teachings about ʿAlawism. In this period of transition, the novice is also subjected to taboos that aim to prevent him from practicing quotidian activities (such as watching tv, listening radio or music, making sport, or spending time with friends etc.). In addition, he is not supposed to see his parents during that time. But as I was told by some initiates and observed myself, this obligation is not always practiced. During this stage, the teacher also examines whether his novice can successfully memorise the sacred prayers.

The successful completion of the education period culminates in the novice's integration into the community. This is the last moment of the initiation that in my view represents the stage of incorporation. The novice finally returns to his parents' home. His new status as a full-fledged member of the community is now celebrated. There are also some symbolic acts of celebrating his incorporation. For example, a communal meal is organised in which the teacher's and the novice's families come together. During this gathering, the novice receives a gift from his teacher (for example, a necklace), just as the teacher but sometimes also his wife from the novice's parents. As a token of the gratitude for taking care of their son, a novice's father from İskenderun once told me that he presented a watch to the teacher and a dinner set to his wife.

It should be noted that van Gennep's threefold model of passage has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of writers. Grimes (2000, 2014) is probably one of the best known critics of van Gennep's theory. He highlights a number of problems in van

Gennep's tripartite classification of rituals. One particular problem with the theory of passage is that the ritual stages are not often constructed so precisely as van Gennep suggested. Grimes goes on to argue that van Gennep seems to have overlooked in his threefold scheme that there can be "phases within phases" (2014, p. 267).

Grimes, in his book *Deeply into the Bone,* also refers to other critics who regard van Gennep's pattern of passage as "imposed rather than discovered in the texts … [he] studied" (2000, p. 107). In her book, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Catherine Bell (1997) also notes how van Gennep's theory of rites of passage has been strongly contested by several scholars. The contradictory work of Vincent Crapanzano was especially outlined in detail (pp. 56–58). Crapanzano (1981) sheds light on one specific problem of the theories on initiation rites: He questions the efficacy of the circumcision ritual on the transition into manhood. Based on his analysis of the perspectives of the circumcised boys in Morocco, he points out that the circumcision ritual does not transform a boy into adulthood, although rites of passage theory assumes that to be the case:

> The circumcision rite is disjunctive. It declares passage where there is in both ritual and everyday life no passage whatsoever—only the *mark* of passage … It is a precocious rite. The boy is declared a man before he is (emically as well as etically) physically a man—or is treated as a man. (p. 32)

The first-person accounts of some ʿAlawi youths about their initiatory rites exemplify the above-stated disconnect between the postulated and demonstrable effects of initiation. In their descriptions of personal experiences, it seems clear that after completing initiations, they have not returned as men or with a sense of being a member of the ʿAlawi secret society. Their experience appears to coincide neatly with what Grimes suggests, "What rites *really do* may differ from what they *are said to do"* (2000, p. 98).

Unfortunately, individuals' perspectives on undergoing initiation rituals have hitherto received scant attention by ritual studies scholars. Grimes relates this lack of scholarly interest in ritual narratives to the fact that some scholars conceive of personal experiences as "irrelevant to ritual" (p. 10). Grimes writes that those scholars hold the view that others set forth the purposes of a ritual, "so personal intentions do not matter" (p. 10). But according to Grimes, the personal descriptions of passages are part of what rites mean, in his words, "Sometimes the telling and retelling become extensions of the rite itself" (p. 10).

"Ritual criticism"

Examples of ritual criticism can be found in past academic publications. In 1957, anthropologist Clifford Geertz published an article entitled *Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example* in which he wrote about a funerary rite held in Central Java for a young Javanese boy at the age of ten. In the analysis, Geertz focused on how the "ritual … failed to function properly" (p. 34). He pointed to a conflict that emerged during the ritual. He gave changing social circumstances to be the reason for the emergence of conflict, which according to him were challenging the traditional form of living in the local community. It is an important study concerning ritual criticism. In judging the Javanese ritual as a failure, he seems to have opened up a new, critical approach to understanding in the analysis of rituals.

Catherine Bell also touched upon the aspect of a dysfunctional ritual in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) by focusing on the example of the Javanese funeral in the aforementioned article written by Geertz. Ronald L. Grimes (1990/2010) has developed the study of ritual criticism by offering a scheme of classifying the different ways in which rituals can fail. Another book with the title *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual* serves as an entry into the field of ritual criticism. The book, edited by Ute Hüsken (2007), contains the studies of different scholars from various academic disciplines that present a broad range of perspectives on ritual failure. In the introduction to this book, Schieffelin describes the contributions of the various scholars as "the first attempt … to address the issue of 'ritual failure' as a topic in its own right" (2007, p. 1).

The concept of "ritual criticism" as outlined by Grimes (2010) in his book of the same title provides a useful lens through which to observe the internal dynamics of the ʿAlawi initiation. Grimes (2010) explicitly states that what he proposes "is not a model, much less the model for doing ritual criticism" (p. 1). Ritual criticism, as Grimes suggests, "is the documentation and analysis of negative and positive evaluative claims about a ritual" (Grimes, 2014, pp. 71–72).

The idea of ritual criticism enables us to recognise that "rites—however noble in intention or sacred in origin—are imperfect" (Grimes, 2000, p. 293), and it is therefore possible to assess them. Grimes' study raises a number of important aspects concerning the assessment of ritual. Notably, he expresses in his analysis that the practice of ritual criticism is not necessarily restricted to any select group such as scholars (2010, p. 15). The passage narratives discussed in Chapter 3 support this: by evaluating critically the ways their

initiations were conducted, the four interviewees have themselves become the critics of their own rituals.

2.1.3.Understanding identification

One of the key terms of my thesis is *identification*, based on Richard Jenkins' model of the interplay between identification and identity. Jenkins (2008a), probably one of the most frequently cited anthropologists on the issue of identity, explains the evolving character of identity by noting that "identity is a matter of processes of identification" (p. 9). In this sense, we can conceive of a particular identity as a consequence of an ongoing act of identifying, or identification. As Jenkins points out, "It isn't 'just there', it's not a 'thing', it must *always* be established" (p. 17). While I use identification in this specific way, I refrain at the same time from attributing any kind of an essentialist conceived identity to the ʿAlawi youths in Germany. That is to say, this is not a study on ʿAlawi identity.

It is important to note that similarity and difference are two mutually dependent aspects of identification. They need to be considered as equally important for the process of identification (p. 21). Jenkins suggests we should not privilege one over the other in attempting to understand identification. Jenkins notes that in a number of contributions on the issue of identity difference seems to be the primary interest, while the importance of similarity has been largely neglected (pp.18–21). In this respect, when talking about identification Jenkins encourages us to put equal emphasis on the concepts of similarity and difference (p. 21). The following excerpt summarises his main point on the issues of similarity and difference:

> To identify something as an A is to assert that it has certain properties in common with all other As, and that it differs from Bs, Cs and so on. To say who I am is to say who or what I am not, but it is also to say with whom I have things in common. (p. 21)

According to Jenkins, in asserting an identity, a sole emphasis on difference could be problematic because people who emphasise only their differences from others without referring to their similarities can only communicate "who or what … [they are] not" (pp. 21–22). Appealing to similarity evokes the idea of difference in the mind: "One of the things that people have in common in any group is precisely the recognition of other groups or categories from whom they differ" (p. 23).

Individual and collective identifications, which are two interconnected processes and show similarities in important ways, are established over the course of interaction. Their respective formation hinges on "the interplay of similarity and difference." Given these points, the individual and collective should be equally important in the conceptualisation of identification (pp. 37–38).

As individuals, we all differ from each other in accordance with our distinctive collective identities. Similarities among the members of a community imply their differences from the members of other groups. It is for this reason that Jenkins aptly claims: "The interplay of similarity and difference is the logic of *all* identification, whether 'individual' or 'collective' " (p. 73). This book, drawing on Jenkins' insights on collective identification, indicates that Alawi youths recognise their similarities when confronted with their differences to Turkish Sunnis and Alevis (p. 102). In the construction of individual and collective identifications Jenkins writes, "Similarity and difference reflect each other across a shared boundary. At the boundary, we discover what we are in what we are not, and *vice versa*" (p. 103)

Jenkins understands identification as an ongoing process, in which individual und collective identity is constructed through "(internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (p. 40). This is what he calls "*internal–external dialectic of identification*" (p. 40). Internal identification refers to the ways in which the members of a community identify themselves, while their external definition refers to the ways in which they are defined by others. The external definition might verify or refute the internal identification of other(s) (2008b, p. 55). When a group's internal definition does not coincide with its external definition during a social interaction, a conflictual situation may emerge. The experiences of ʿAlawi youths demonstrated in Chapter 3 are cases in point. Chapter 3 will show how the youths found themselves in conflictual and confrontational situations vis-à-vis Turkish Sunni Muslims who refuted the ʿAlawi youths' self-definition as Muslims, and vis-à-vis Anatolian Alevis who refuted the ʿAlawi youths' self-definition as (Arab) Alevis.

2.2. On fieldwork with ʿAlawis

> Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position. (Smith, 2012, p. 140)

In the excerpt above, Smith points out a set of responsibilities that pose challenges for native researchers in many ways during their fieldwork. Because of my ethno-religious affiliation with ʿAlawis, it was inevitable that I would have to negotiate my multiple positionalities and reinterpret my responsibilities towards my community while conducting fieldwork within it. In this part of the book, I first delve into my personal experiences that I have had in the course of doing research at home, as a native ethnographer. Then I discuss some ethical issues I faced when conducting research among ʿAlawis' secret community. The last part of this section presents an overview of methods applied to collect data, which matched the demands of my research.

2.2.1.Fieldwork experiences as a native ethnographer

Throughout my fieldwork among ʿAlawis, my different positionalities generated different experiences. My positionality as an Arab ʿAlawi man has a direct impact on my positionality as a scholar. While the former helped me to gain easy access to ʿAlawi immigrants, the latter enabled me to gain the respect of my research participants. Thanks to these positionalities, I could quickly develop my new role as a native researcher and succeed in gaining trust and acceptance among my research participants. Here, the notion of reflexivity appears to be central in negotiating my positionality within my own community. Reflexivity, meaning "a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference" (Davies, 2002, p. 4), needs to be incorporated into this study because of my religious affiliation to my research participants and the fact that ʿAlawi community practices secrecy.

The concept of reflexivity, which enables ethnographers to describe and question their positionalities before or after their fieldwork, has not escaped criticism from some anthropologists (Robertson, 2002; Salzman, 2002). While Salzman contrasts with the proposed contributions of reflexivity to research findings (p. 808–810), Robertson argues that identificatory categorisations used by ethnographers to position themselves, "are the 'ready' to wear" products of an identity politics that has been especially endemic to American universities. Wearing these categories as if self-evident does not reveal but can instead actually obscure one's unique personal history" (p. 788).

However, critical reflexivity is of crucial importance for researchers who study their own people because, as native anthropologist Jacobs-Huey (2002) notes, "[It] may act to resist charges of having played the "native card" via a noncritical privileging of one's insider status" (p. 799). In her book entitled *Decolonizing Methodologies,* the native scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes about the persistent necessity for applying reflexivity in insider

research. She emphasises the great value of critical thinking for insider researchers about their own research processes, "their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis" (p. 138).

It is well known that social anthropologists used to make the unknown exotic *others* known to the Western world. These others were usually non-European, indigenous and native communities (Hannoum, 2011, p. 424), especially those living in remote regions around the globe. However, the defining characteristics of social anthropology as a discipline studying others have been reformulated and reshaped in the face of rapidly changing social, political, economic, cultural, and demographic conditions in the world. Tsuda (2015), who is a Japanese American anthropologist who conducted fieldwork among his own people, has already recognised the rise of native anthropology within the discipline in his paper he called *Is native anthropology really possible?* (p. 14).

In a discussion of native ethnography, another anthropologist, Hannoum (2011), says that "indeed, anthropology can no longer define itself, as it was once did—'the Western study of the non Western World' " (p. 426). The change is easy to perceive in present day: The persons considered as natives have become anthropologists themselves. The present-day native anthropologists have started studying the native cultures (p. 426) that were before only studied by Western scholars. From this perspective, I belong to the category of native anthropologists whose ancestors or fellow community members were and are studied by Western anthropologists (or the scholars of other disciplines). My training as a cultural anthropologist in a German university also makes me a westernised scholar who "is not only the subject one writes about, but can write about 'himself' as well" (p. 427).

My extensive analysis of the previous studies about the ʿAlawi community revealed a number of novel aspects, which were widely unknown to me about my own community. These studies predominantly deliver a theoretical understanding of ʿAlawi cultural system. Unfortunately, much of the information given by previous scholars about ʿAlawis' socio-religious practices in everyday life is very limited in its scope, probably owing to the practice of ʿAlawis' taqiya. Before proceeding to the discussion of native ethnography, I believe it is important to talk about two reasons why I wanted to conduct research among my own people who are living in Germany.

The first is personal: My lack of information about my own religion, history, and culture could not be ameliorated through the religious education I received from other male community members. Books written by ʿAlawi *araştırmacı-yazarlar* (researcher-writers) and religious leaders serve often as an apology for ʿAlawism, involve one-sided perspectives or

provide very limited information about community's obscure history. The consequences of growing up in an environment of secrecy and ignorance have accompanied me throughout my life. An academic study on ʿAlawis was an opportunity for me to deepen my knowledge about my cultural and ethnic roots while shedding light on the hitherto neglected and obscure aspects of ʿAlawi religion and identity.

The second reason I chose to conduct this research is related to the scarcity of the academic research about ʿAlawis and the inadequacies of previous research with respect to explaining the consequences of the ʿAlawi culture of secrecy on present-day ʿAlawis. It is the often neglected fact that the socio-cultural and religious world of the Arab ʿAlawi community is built upon the pillars of secrecy. My position as an Arab ʿAlawi man is advantageous, and given that I grew up in an environment laced with secrecy, I have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to live with the imperatives of secrecy.

Drawing on other scholars, Tsuda (2015) aptly summarises some postulated advantages of being a native anthropologist when compared with non-native anthropologists. Accordingly, it is argued that because of native anthropologists' "immediate cultural and linguistic familiarity with the people … [they] are studying," they are able to gain easier access to their circles, establish closer relationship and empathy with their informants. This is believed to cause their ethnographic studies to represent "more emic, sensitive, and authentic" descriptions. However, as might be expected, native anthropologists have not escaped criticism from other scholars. It is claimed that as a result of their insider positionality within the communities they study, native anthropologists "may take certain observations for granted" and fail to sustain their objectivity (p. 14).

Native and non-native anthropologists are often differentiated from each other by their positions as either insider or outsider. However, being a native anthropologist does not exclude the possibility of feeling or being seen as outsider because native anthropologists can be confronted with "educational, social class, gender, generational, urban/rural, or cultural differences with the peoples they study" (p. 15). The anthropologist, Kırın Narayan, (1993) disagrees with the native/non-native dichotomy and instead suggests to "view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (p. 671).

Reflecting on his own experiences during his fieldwork in Morocco in 2001, Hannoum (2011) describes how he, as a native ethnographer, encountered problems in gaining access to ethnic Berbers in his own country, and ultimately was considered as an outsider:

> I was first asked: “Are you an Arab or a *Shelh*?”. … I responded to my would-be informants, saying: “I am Moroccan”. The answer seemed to anger them: “Well, we know. But are you Arab or *Shelh*?”. I sought to clarify myself: “When I said I was Moroccan, I meant I am both”. But, clearly this did not address their original question. I was then asked, by way of further specification: “But are your ancestors Arabs or *Shluh*?”. Evidently, I had became the interviewee and responded as simply and honestly as I could: “I don’t know”. This did not appease my interrogators. “That’s all together another issue if you don’t know who your ancestors are”. And that was the end of the discussion. (p. 430)

I had similar experiences during my own research among ʿAlawis in Germany. It was sometimes difficult or impossible, even as a native, to win the full trust of some ʿAlawis I sought to interview. During the first days of my fieldwork, I often had a feeling that the ʿAlawis—mostly, of older generations—were hesitant and discreet in considering to talk about themselves and their community in Germany. Their lack of trust towards me was sometimes generated by reasons of physical security, nonetheless this situation made me often feel like an outsider within my own community. What Brink-Danan (2012) says in the next quotation accords with my own fieldwork experience:

> Gaining access to community secrets [any information about a secret community can be seen as a secret] is a two-way negotiation: on one hand, you have to be familiar enough with the community to know what kinds of questions to ask; on the other, they have to be familiar enough with you to answer. (p. 152)

Once, for example, for my research about the development of ʿAlawi associations in Germany, I created a questionnaire to get an overview about the number of registered members, the activities conducted in associations, the motives and aspirations for establishing associations, and ideological convictions of associations. After I had sent the questionnaire to the chairmen of the ʿAlawi associations, some of whom I knew personally, the chairman of the ʿAlawi federation responded on behalf of others and asked me to first describe my tribal affiliation. Following my response to him, in which I explained my genealogy in detail, he replied by saying that I had to draw up a document acknowledged by a notary, in which my research intentions were described. This document would explicitly state that the information collected about the associations will only be used for scientific

purposes. In the end, they refused to answer my questions and this project was postponed.

Retrospectively, I believe one of the main reasons for this difficulty was that I had only been conducting fieldwork for two to three months, and the chairmen of the ʿAlawi associations were not yet familiar enough with me to feel comfortable responding to my questions about their associations. Based on my insider positionality, I prematurely lapsed into thinking that I could already ask sensitive questions to my research participants before sufficiently getting to know each other.

Despite sharing the same ancestral origin with my interlocutors, on some occasions and in some ways I remained as an outsider (see Hannoum, 2011, p. 431). This is a common experience among the native anthropologists, that they can be perceived both as outsiders and insiders in their own communities (Can, 2020; Tsuda, 2015). In order to establish "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld, 2005) with my interlocutors, I had to answer their questions about my origins. These questions were primarily related to my grandfather, my father, and my tribal affiliations. My surname always provided the initial information about me in this regard. My last name signifies my kin-group membership. Before starting my interviews, I was sometimes the one who was the first to be interviewed. I was often asked where I am from in İskenderun and who my ancestors are. I believe in this way my would-be interlocutors tried to verify my true belonging to their community and to find out to which ʿAlawi faction I belong.

ʿAlawi native anthropologist Şule Can (2020), who studied her community in Hatay, reports that she too had to win the trust of her own people during her research. By posing different questions to her, her research participants apparently wanted to learn more about her insider similarities to themselves (pp. 20–21). Another native ethnographer, Boureima T. Diamitani, had difficulties conducting research even among his family, friends and relatives (2011). In his study of the secret Komo society of the Tagwa people of Burkina Faso, Diamitani notes that winning the trust of elder community members was sometimes challenging (p. 69). The most difficult part of his fieldwork was, according to him:

> The difficulty as a [native] researcher working on a sensitive topic is to be able to express one's self without the emotions that link one to his or her people's traditions and to western [*sic*] culture. The most difficult part is for the [native] researcher to be able at once to protect the traditions of his people and to be able to inform and be understood by other people. (p. 70)

So, with my ʿAlawi background I was definitely an insider, but it did not prevent me from being seen as an outsider in several situations. I continuously shifted my positionality during the course of my fieldwork. I often found myself as an insider, especially when I attended informal meetings, but at the times when I took out my recorder from my rucksack and started asking specific questions, I turned into an outsider. These and similar events enabled me to reflect on my own position in the field. ʿAlawis were even an exotic *other* to me, to a certain point, because of the influences of Arab, Turkish, and German cultures in their everyday lives.

Although in different contexts native anthropologists can feel culturally and socially close to their informants, there are also occasions in which our (internal) differences from our research participants become apparent. “Indeed, regardless of what type of anthropologist we are (native, non-native, semi-native), the distance and differences between researcher and researched always persist and can never be completely eliminated,” Tsuda (2015) notes. However, these cultural differences should not be interpreted as disadvantageous, as they can have constructive effects on fieldwork (p. 15).

The main difference between my research participants and myself is the fact that they were either born in Germany or immigrated to Germany as guest workers. In contrast, I was born in Turkey and my primary cultural socialisations took place in Turkey. I came to Germany for purposes of studying about 15 years ago. To be frank, I have not experienced the difficulties and discriminatory problems that my interlocutors reported to have experienced after their arrivals to Germany.

My post-migration story is almost devoid of any discriminatory treatments on the part of the majority community. It is perhaps because of the fact that immediately upon my arrival in Germany I found myself in a cosmopolitan milieu surrounded by students at the university where I studied. I never felt like a German Turk or a German ʿAlawi, although I often even felt like a cultural outsider when I started meeting with ʿAlawis born and grew up in Germany. We have different historical experiences and socialisations, but we share same ancestral origin and speak the same language. As Narayan (1993) puts it: “Given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference” (p. 680).

In fact, it was this cultural difference that enhanced and coloured my fieldwork experience and helped me to reframe my positionality as an ʿAlawi and researcher and to maintain objective detachment from my interlocutors. Cultural difference is important for the fieldwork, as Tsuda notes:

> Cultural difference is the foundation of knowledge for both 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists alike. If our fieldwork and research simply elicits information about people with whom we are already completely familiar, it is not new knowledge, but simply confirmation of what we already know. (p. 16)

In short, my religious affiliation with ʿAlawi community gave me access to the research field. I was also able to quickly build up a close relationship, empathy, and rapport with the ʿAlawis. It was also my ethno-religious affiliation with ʿAlawis that likely made them more willing to meet me for an interview and speak freely about their experiences. I have become aware of what it is like to be a native researcher in the course of my fieldwork. During the process of analysing my fieldwork data, I had additional time to reflect on my positionalities, which helped me to stay close to my personal experiences, my research participants, and to my study.

Ethical considerations

Studying the Arab ʿAlawi secret community as a native researcher makes it necessary to consider certain ethical issues (Jones, 2014, p. 61). When I began writing this book, I better appreciated what the anthropologist Bellman meant in his book from 1984 when he wrote: "A major concern when writing about secret societies is how to avoid being accused of unnecessarily exposing secrets. It is crucial, therefore, to understand precisely what members mean when they refer to their secrets" (p. 43). One difficulty, which emerged repeatedly in my fieldwork, was that my participants do not know exactly which practices or customs are part of secrecy or, borrowing Bellman's words, "what must not be talked" (p. 17).

However, one point is very clear, that the esoteric teachings transmitted to initiates are supposed to remain secret. All of my interlocutors were informed about my research intentions beforehand and knew about my intention to publish my research findings in a book. Further, I did not begin my interviews without their informed consent. It was this, and the fact that the Arab ʿAlawi community has started to negotiate its commitment of secrecy in the past 10 years, that encouraged me to write more openly about the sensitive themes in this book. It was the openness of my young interlocutors in particular, who spoke about their religious experiences, that was very inspiring for me. The emerging politics of visibility launched by ʿAlawi associations in Germany have begun changing the traditional picture

of the community (for more on this issue, see the section entitled *Towards mobilisation* in Chapter 1). This shift will probably encourage more scholars to write about the community.

Given the lack of certain regulations of secrecy, I decided to write only about the religious aspects of the community which have been already published in scholarly books and journals. Instead of talking about the content of secrecy, I turned my focus on what Bellman defines as "the *doing* of secrecy" (p. 17). To able to avoid causing any dangerous situations for my interlocutors, all of the names appeared in this book are pseudonyms.

My research participants repeatedly implied during my fieldwork that I should not write or say something about them which could bring them in a dangerous situation. The message is clear: I should not reveal any information about their secret religious teachings, nor should I disclose the real names of those participated in my research. As a native ethnographer, the dangers of revealing sensitive information (Jacobs-Huey, 2002, p. 792) about my interlocutors' culture and themselves are well-known to me. In numerous personal and group meetings, I tirelessly tried to make clear that I would never reveal the esoteric teachings conveyed to initiates during their religious trainings. To enhance their trust towards me, I also explained them the research techniques I used and the main interests of the discipline of anthropology.

Given my ethno-religious affiliation with my research participants and the fact that socio-cultural and religious life within the ʿAlawi community is based on the pledge of secrecy, the ethical considerations revolve around questions such as: How can I represent my research findings without violating community's rules of secrecy? How can I talk about my research participants' subjective experiences and critical expressions about their religion without throwing them into conflictual situations within their community? In writing this book, I tried to adopt a rhetoric that considers these questions.

2.2.2.Research methodology

Before I started my fieldwork, I already knew a number of ʿAlawis in the region where I live. Yet, in order to have a comparative perspective on ʿAlawi youths' everyday lives, it was important to meet other ʿAlawis from different cities in Germany. Despite being a native researcher, it was sometimes hard to find Arab ʿAlawi youths living in other cities in Germany. This is because ʿAlawis are scattered over the country, their population is small, and they practice secrecy. At this point, the snowball method was an effective way to reach more Arab ʿAlawi youths. With the help of a friend, I first started with contacting the representatives of Arab ʿAlawi association in Berlin where I asked them if they could help

me to get in touch with other ʿAlawis. Every time when I met new ʿAlawis, I asked them to bring me into contact with more ʿAlawis. Soon I realised that ʿAlawis living in Germany are indeed well connected with each other. In a short period of time, I became acquainted with a number of young ʿAlawis from different cities where I could participate in their lives in different social contexts, activities, places, and times (I followed the multi-sited ethnographic research method; Marcus, 1995).

At the beginning of my research, my main concern was about whether ʿAlawis would answer my questions about sensitive topics related to the issues of religious practice. The fact that they live within a culture of secrecy makes it difficult to guess beforehand how openly they would react in the face of my curiosity. For this reason, I wanted to meet my research participants for interviews in the places they feel safe and comfortable. So, I asked them to decide where to meet.

The methods, which were pursued in gathering data throughout my fieldwork, are eclectic and endemic to most anthropological studies. These include participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, informal conversations and questionnaire surveys. The more I built trust and rapport with my research participants, the more I knew how to ask my questions. By doing so, the process was iterative; I would change the way I asked questions or would omit asking some questions which had not worked with previous participants.

My fieldwork took place between April 2016 and April 2018 in Berlin, Aalen, Freiburg, Köln, Kempten, Hannover, Bielefeld, and (Bühl) Baden. I conducted my fieldwork intermittently. Since I live in Germany, I visited my research participants several times during this two-year period. While I stayed for long periods of time in some cities such as Berlin, Freiburg, and Bühl, I stayed for short periods of time in other cities. Additionally, between 2016 and 2019 I visited İskenderun (Turkey) several times, and stayed there for a total of around 10 weeks. It is important to mention that because of my Arab ʿAlawi background, I am constantly in contact with many ʿAlawis.

I started my fieldwork by conducting a preliminary research on Arab ʿAlawi community in Berlin between April and May 2016. The preliminary research was helpful to get to know the people I wanted to study before asking any questions. During the first two weeks I only attended their meetings in their associations and talked to youth during informal meetings. I engaged with numerous people and explained about my research. During that time, I only tried to blend in comfortably with as many people as possible. I did not ask questions with respect to my study.

Interviews, informal conversations, participants profiles, and fieldnotes

I met my research participants on various occasions and places, sometimes individually or sometimes in groups of two and more. We met in cafés, bars, parks, seminar rooms of ʿAlawi associations, universities, libraries, or in their homes. I conducted semi-structured, unstructured (Bernard, 2011 pp. 156–159), and focus group interviews with my informants. In total, I interviewed 15 ʿAlawi men and 13 ʿAlawi women between the ages of 18 and 30. All of them were born and raised in Germany whose parents came from Turkish metropolitan cities, such as Hatay, Adana, Mersin and Tarsus between the 1970s and 1990s. These participants were all unmarried at the time I met them. A majority, 16 in total, were students, and 12 of them worked at the time I conducted my fieldwork research. They are all German native speakers. Speaking Arabic among themselves is a rare occasion, where Turkish is used as a second language in conversations. On some occasions, I also had long and in-depth informal conversations with their parents. Indeed, I engaged in repeated conversations with a great number of ʿAlawis of all ages.

I also conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with five representatives from different ʿAlawi associations. After I achieved a rapport with these functionaries, we were in constant contact with each other. They informed me many times about their forthcoming meetings and activities, in which I participated several times. Apart from our numerous face-to-face conversations, we talked many times via telephone, email and WhatsApp.

On average, the interviews took one hour, and sometimes as long as one and a half hours. Many of the participants were interviewed several times but I did not always record the conversations with a tape recorder but rather I used my field notebook. I wrote information from these conversations in my notebook sometimes in the form of jottings and sometimes full notes. Writing fieldnotes and memos during some meetings where many ʿAlawis were present was not always comfortable. To be candid, it even made me uncomfortable to take out my notebook and write notes, because it almost always attracted the attention of others towards me. On some occasions, it did not feel right to use my notebook, and I had to find creative solutions. Once, for example, during my participation in a meeting of Arab ʿAlawi associations, I repeatedly had to leave the session and go to the toilet to write my jottings on my notebook.

To understand my research informants' everyday experiences, which arise out of their ʿAlawiness, I used the method of participant observation through which my goal was "to enter as deeply as possibly into the social and cultural field" (Eriksen, 2015, p. 34) where

my research took place. In the course of my fieldwork among ʿAlawis in Germany and Turkey, I attended many formal and informal meetings held in homes or in associations. I also participated in some rites of passage events: such as weddings, funerals, or initiations into the community. During these events, I was not always only a passive but also active participant. I also joined my family members and friends during their saint veneration rituals in ʿAlawi pilgrimage sites in İskenderun and Arsuz.

My presence as a researcher was always known to those ʿAlawis I met during my fieldwork. Even though I was usually met with positive reactions, there were some moments where some ʿAlawis were not content with my presence as a researcher. Once, for example, an middle-aged ʿAlawi man approached to me and started testing my knowledge by asking various questions about the history, values and beliefs, practices and traditions of ʿAlawis. It was less like a conversation but more a test to ensure that I possessed true knowledge about this community.

Young ʿAlawis, however, were very interested in talking to me and often expressed their willingness to be part of my research. I often received questions from them about the history of ʿAlawis. Since many young ʿAlawis wanted to know more about their own culture and history, I was invited twice to give a talk on ʿAlawi history. Some were also curious about my own educational background and me as a scholar, asking me diverse questions in this respect. My research participants repeatedly interrupted our interviews because they wanted to know more about me. Sometimes I met ʿAlawi youths together with their parents, when we had dinner or breakfast together in their homes. I have long-term relationships with some of my interlocutors, which were established either before or during my fieldwork.

3. The multifaceted experiences of youth's ʿAlawiness

This book is the first to offer a comprehensive account of Arab ʿAlawi youth life in Germany. It details ʿAlawi youth's everyday experiences that arise from their Arab ʿAlawi backgrounds. The following analysis, which consists of four sections, aims to demonstrate, among others things, how the decades-long encouragement of ʿAlawi children to substitute their parents' first language, Arabic, for Turkish, and the Arab ʿAlawi community's uncontrolled and historically established practice of secrecy have affected the identification practices, social experiences, and religious lives of present-day ʿAlawi youth. Each section touches on different aspects that show how ʿAlawi religion and ʿAlawi identity are practiced and experienced by the ʿAlawi youth of Germany. In doing so, the chapter draws on youths' critical and reflective thoughts vis-à-vis the ways in which their religion is structured and practiced today. The chapter begins with a section that relates to the various techniques used to maintain the Arab ʿAlawi identity secret. It continues with a focus on the intergroup relations between ʿAlawi youth and Turkish Sunni Muslims, as well as Alevis, and then turns its focus onto young ʿAlawi women's religious lives. The chapter ends by discussing the initiation experiences of young ʿAlawi men.

3.1. The management of secrecy

In the spring of 2016, I went to Berlin to conduct my fieldwork research. I decided to start my research in this city because an ʿAlawi friend who lived there during that time told me he could put me into contact with a number of ʿAlawis living in Berlin, which was a great opportunity. One of the first ʿAlawis I met there was the chairwoman of ʿAlawi association in Berlin. I met her several times on different occasions. During our first meeting, the conversation started out very informative, as she talked about the history of the association, the activities organised by the association, and ʿAlawis in Berlin. After some time, she asked me about my research goals, my education background, and where I come from in Turkey. However, our conversation mainly revolved around my project and the ʿAlawi community in general as she was very interested in learning more about these topics. Towards the end of our conversation, she asked me if I could give the young members of the association a talk on the history of the ʿAlawis. Without thinking about it for very long, I politely said that I would gladly do it.

A few weeks later, on a Sunday afternoon, I went to the place where the association was located. I entered through a long hallway into the meeting room where the chairwo-

man was siting and chatting with other members in Arabic. We made some small talk and then she introduced me to others in the room. Shortly after this get-to-know phase, she led me to another room where I could set up my slide presentation. When I was arranging some chairs to angle the projector to face towards the projection screen, a young man (whom I believed to be in his late twenties at the time I met him) came into the room and said, “Hi, I am the chairman of the youth section, could you please show me the script that you wrote out for your presentation today?”

Upon these words, I was struck with astonishment because I had never been confronted with such a request before, not once in such a manner. As he became more insistent about it, I could only stare at him speechlessly. After a few seconds of hesitation, I told him that I had already sent the summary of my presentation to the chairwoman. Following this, he said, “I know, she forwarded it to me.” But apparently, the summary was not enough for him to understand exactly what my talk was about. He was adamant that I show him the script. He seemed very concerned about something.

However, it did not take long for me to realise what it was all about: He was worried about whether I would reveal any information during my talk that was supposed to be concealed from an uninitiated audience. As a result of culture of secrecy surrounding the community, ʿAlawis have adopted a way of life that requires constant vigilance in deciding which secrets to conceal and which to reveal: “To hide and to unveil, to contain and release—this is the rhythm of secrets” (Johnson, 2002, p. 3). I noticed that this young man was indeed obeying the imperative of secrecy. As he was taught, he had to be wary and vigilant of anyone who could reveal the secrets of his religion. He had to safeguard the information that was to be kept in secret. With hindsight, this incident is actually a relevant reminder to me of the fears and concerns the community members have. It was a forewarning to me that by studying ʿAlawis I am not supposed to betray the community’s boundaries of secrecy.

Through the centuries, impending dangers have forced generations of ʿAlawis to conceal their true identity in social interactions with strangers or in public spaces (as already mentioned, this is called taqiya in Islamic parlance). Given the marginalised status of ʿAlawis as *ghulat* (exaggerators) and as infidels within Islam, and the fatwas (legal opinions) issued by the Muslim Sunni shaykhs condemning ʿAlawis as enemies, the strategies of concealing ʿAlawi identity has by necessity infiltrated almost every aspect of ʿAlawis’ life. ʿAlawis have been subject to social exclusion, discrimination, and defamation in Turkey for years. They were and are still viewed by many Sunnis as infidels, “culturally inferior, second class people,” even as “dirty Arabs” (Turkish*, pis Araplar*), as Procházka-Eisl and

Procházka (2010) observed during their fieldwork in Cilicia, Turkey (p. 71). ʿAlawis are therefore accustomed to maintaining a low profile in public spaces to eschew confrontations or discriminations, and my intent is to examine the ways in which they do so.

The practice of secrecy, as it can be expected, made it difficult for ʿAlawis to recognise their co-believers in public. In different historical periods, ʿAlawis developed some strategies by which they concealed and disclosed valued information regarding their true identity. Some historical texts written on ʿAlawis more than 170 years ago show that ʿAlawis employed a coded language so as to recognise each other: It was a secret language that could only be deciphered by those belonging to the community, indeed, by those who were initiated. During his time among ʿAlawis in Syria, British naval officer Frederick Walpole observed that ʿAlawis used "signs and questions," by which they interacted in public without drawing attention to their religious difference. Though without exemplifying these signs and questions, Walpole says, "By the one they salute each other, by the other they commence an examination as to whether a man whom they do not know personally, is one of them, or not" (1851, Vol. 3, p. 354).

However, Sulayman al-Adani (ʿAlawi proselyte) offered in his book from 1864 the examples of such questionaries that were used by the ʿAlawis to examine the membership of a stranger within their community (Salisbury, 1864, pp. 296–297). Matti Moosa, analysing al-Adani's examples of questions, delivers an explanation of their content. To give an example of such a question, I quote the first question that Moosa analyses:

> When a stranger (looking for a relative) comes among his fellow believers, the Nusayris, he inquires, "I have a relative; do you know him?" They ask, "What is his name?" He says, "al-Husayn." They follow up, saying, "Ibn Hamdan." He answers, "al-Khasibi." Thus, through question and answer, the stranger is recognized as a Nusayri by the naming of al-Husayn Ibn Hamdan al-Khasibi, the great apostle of Nusayrism. (1988, p. 413)

Moosa continues by explaining several more questions and the answers given to these questions (see pages 413–414). It is important to know that all these questions were intended to examine a stranger's theological knowledge of ʿAlawism.[13] Which strategies were used in later decades, for example, during the first half of the 20th century, is unfortunately unknown. From the time of al-Adani until now, we do not have exact information

[13] Under the rubric *Secret Questions for Mutual Identification*, Bella Tendler (2012) gives a more extensive analysis of these questions, see pages 208–211.

about the strategies that ʿAlawis used for maintaining their invisibility. Such information could have enabled us to make a valuable comparison between the strategies of secrecy used in the past and those today. However, this is not possible; instead, in this section, I first describe a set of strategies that have been used by the contemporary ʿAlawis to conceal their religious identity. Following this, I present some particular strategies through which ʿAlawi religious identity has been obliquely communicated in the public sphere. I then concentrate on ʿAlawi youth's criticism of the practice of secrecy, and finally, on anecdotes in which some youth describe the moments of discovering their religious affiliation with ʿAlawism.

3.1.1. The strategies of invisibility

> Of all protective measures, the most radical is to make oneself invisible. (Simmel, 1950, p. 345)

During my fieldwork in Germany and Turkey, I observed that the revelation of ʿAlawis' religious difference in public is tightly connected to the question of security. ʿAlawis' decision of whether to conceal or reveal their identity depends on detecting the auguries of danger. Their practice of secrecy creates, following George Simmel's description of secrecy's role in everyday life, "the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former" (1950, p. 330). More concretely, as I argue, ʿAlawi religious identity can only be experienced fully in private world (which considered to be safe), whereas the markings of this identity should be vigilantly erased in public world by means of tactics of secrecy.

It became clear that various strategies through which ʿAlawis abstained from revealing their religious identity in public spaces, or during social interactions with non-ʿAlawis, are a means of avoiding conflicts. It is not wrong to say that the practice of secrecy pervaded ʿAlawis' relationships to the societies in which they live. The strategies of secrecy presented in the next pages highlight how they are in constant flux. Depending on political and social circumstances, and by the influx of newcomers, strategies can be recreated or old ones reformulated. It is also worth mentioning that in some social settings, where for example Sunni Muslims are predominantly present, the commitment to secrecy can be more powerful.

ʿAlawis living in Germany have deliberately adjusted their practice of secrecy to their newly emerging social environment. They understood that in the contexts of migration, ur-

banisation, and globalisation, the strategies they use to remain invisible must be variable in order to function properly. There are probably a number of strategies that ʿAlawis employ to disguise their difference and maintain a low profile. However, in my time among ʿAlawis I identified five strategies that were frequently used in everyday social practices. I consider these strategies by drawing on Eviatar Zerubavel's notions of "discretion," "concealment" and "fabrication" (1982, pp. 105–106).

Quieting down

All of the interviews I conducted with the ʿAlawi youth took place either at their homes or in various public places. During our conversations, irrespective of where we were, I realised that they were very open to talking with me about any topic I wanted to touch upon. What I also realised during our interviews in public places was that every time when they begun to talk about the initiation into the ʿAlawi religion, they all changed into a softened tone. It was clear to me that in this way, they avoided drawing unwanted attention to themselves and to us. At the moment of talking in a quiet tone of voice I often had the feeling that we were hiding something very secret from others. However, I always recognised this game and played along by lowering my voice as well when asking further questions about initiation. This way of managing invisibility refers to what I call (borrowing anthropologist Brink-Danan's phrase) "quieting down" (2012, p. 91).

Quieting down is a frequently used and effective method of maintaining invisibility in the public sphere that can facilitate communicating sensitive information without drawing the attention of others. Through the practice of quieting down, my interlocutors aimed at establishing "some actual *informational barriers* between" themselves and others (Zerubavel, 1982, p. 105). Once when I was in Berlin, I met Sercan at the university where he studied. We sat on a bench in the main hall of the university where lots of students passed by us. At the time we talked about being ʿAlawi, he said in a normal tone of voice that he never identified himself too much with ʿAlawism, but then, after looking around first, he lowered his voice for once and stated "but of course I was initiated and learned ʿAlawi religious teachings." After saying this, he continued to talk in a normal voice again.

During my time among ʿAlawis in Turkey, I also observed several times some ʿAlawi youths quieting down. One anecdote in which I was personally involved is worth telling here. I once met two ʿAlawi friends at a seaside café in İskenderun during a hot summer day. We sat in the front room of the café, looking toward the Mediterranean Sea through a pane of glass, and enjoying the beautiful view. The room was half filled with other custom-

ers. Our conversation quickly turned to the ʿAlawi practice of initiation. Even though there were people sitting at tables near us at that moment, we continued to talk in a casual tone of voice. The focus of our discussion was the question when young men should be initiated into the religion. One of the friends, after first looking around, lowered his voice and asked another friend, "*Sen ne zaman Amcaya gittin*?" This question literally means "When did you go to uncle?" but in this context it can be translated as follows: "When did you learn ʿAlawi religious teachings?" Here, *Amca* refers to religious teacher. The one who was asked responded back by lowering his voice. Whenever we uttered certain phrases or words about initiation, we carefully lowered our voices.

However, we were aware of the fact that if we would overuse this strategy, we could attract more attention to ourselves. Therefore, we stopped whispering the already uttered phrases and words related to the religious practices when we wanted to repeat them. Instead, we omitted these words within the sentence and continued to speak only with the most essential words that were necessary to maintain the meaning of sentence. With this way of communicating, we could talk about sensitive themes in public without expressing secretive information related to the ʿAlawi religion.

The denial of existence

Next is an anecdote in which I describe a conversation I had with a young ʿAlawi man who advocated the strategy of denying the existence of ʿAlawism so as to preserve its secrecy. During my PhD study at the University of Cologne, I took Arabic courses to improve my Arabic skills. In the course, I met someone of Arab ʿAlawi descent, a man in his early twenties, who was studying philosophy at the same university. It did not take long before I discovered his ethno-religious identity. One day in the classroom, we started chatting about what we studied. I explained him about my dissertation project on the Arab ʿAlawi youth in Germany. As I was talking about my intention to study ʿAlawi way of life in Germany ranging from cultural topics to socio-religious identification, I realised how he suddenly lost the smile on his face, and I felt his eyes looking at me with a critical glare. I thought at the moment that he was not content with what he was hearing. As I continued to explain, he repeatedly interrupted me to ask questions about my project because he wanted to understand exactly what the content of my study was. After I had finished my explanation, in a clear manner, he advised me to reconsider my position as a native researcher:

> You know, when you write about us, it means, you, as an ʿAlawi person, confirm that our secret religion exists, but we have to keep it a secret from outsiders. We should refuse to accept what has been written about us, in order to protect our religious teachings and our community. When you, for example, write about our tradition of initiation, you would increase the belief in its existence.

These words really surprised me at the moment because I never thought that I would meet an ʿAlawi person who would try to hide his religious faith by denying its very existence. I believe I was particularly astonished to hear such an expression from a young ʿAlawi person who studies at a university and who indeed enjoys a considerable amount of freedom in Germany. This young man apparently found it necessary to deny the existence of ʿAlawism in order to maintain its invisibility. The practice of denying is a strategy of fabrication, which, according to Zerubavel, "involves a deliberate attempt to provide others with false information about oneself" (p. 106). In many other conversations, I tried to reassure him that it is not my intention to disclose anything related to the religious secrets of the ʿAlawis. However, all my efforts were in vain. He went so far as to tell me that it was not a good idea to write about ʿAlawism at all. In fact, he kindly advised me to consider writing about another subject.

The avoidance of using signs disclosing ʿAlawi affiliation

Even though ʿAlawis living in Germany know that they have a significant degree of freedom in communicating their difference publicly, they prefer not to cross the limits of acceptance and tolerance that the society (especially Turkish and Arab minorities) offers. It is for that reason that ʿAlawi associations act strategically when it comes to display the markings of ʿAlawi religious identity in public. During my fieldwork among the ʿAlawi associations in Germany, for example, it was sometimes difficult to find the exact locations of associations because they were ensconced in buildings without any signs reading *ʿAlawi* outside. Through abstaining from using nameplates, these ʿAlawi associations remain hidden from view. For Zerubavel, this is the practice of discretion that serves as a means of refraining:

> from disclosing any personal information to which one does not want others to have access. This essentially passive strategy, to which we usually refer when we say that

someone is being “discreet,” generally consists of a wide variety of refrainment and avoidance practices. (p. 105)

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in late February 2018, I was invited to attend the meeting of the ʿAlawi Federation, which took place in the house of an ʿAlawi association. Because of the poor transportation facilities in the district where the meeting took place, a Federation member (who was also a member of the association above) offered to drive me from the railway station to the meeting. When I met him there, he was with another guest who came to give a talk about the Syrian war and the situation of ʿAlawis living there. After a 15-minute drive, we arrived at a neighbourhood where the car stopped in front of a one-story house with frosted glass windows (which are used to provide privacy). By staring at this house, the Federation member said, “Welcome to our association.” We were apparently there, but when I turned my head to take a closer look at the building, I saw a large sign over the entrance door saying “*Tante Irma*” (lit., Aunt Irma). As I learned later, the building used to be a grocery store. I was curious to hear why this sign was still there. The Federation member later explained to me that the sign does not bother them (him and the other members of the association) because this place is only a temporary solution, and then told me about the difficulties of buying or renting a proper place:

When we go to property owners and tell that we are Arab ʿAlawis, they think we are Anatolian Alevis. And then we have to explain them who we really are, and that we’re from Syria and so on and so forth. At this moment, they fear that we have some association with terrorists groups like ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham].

It is a paradox that ʿAlawis can be associated with the very groups that they fear most. It is easy to understand, however, the reason why this association exercises self-censorship by not affixing a nameplate outside their building. Another interesting feature of the building that the entrance door could only be opened from the inside. Obviously, it was necessary to prevent outsiders from entering the building without permission. After we got out of the car, the Federation member parked the car in another place. It would have been impossible for me to find this place without help. I do not think that I would ever have guessed, without any foreknowledge about the location, whether such place is in use or that belongs to an ʿAlawi association.

I had similar experiences during my time among ʿAlawis in Berlin. Once during a conversation with the chairwoman of the ʿAlawi association in Berlin, I asked her why there

was not any signage outside the association building. She pointed out that a sign reading *Arabische Alawiten* in German or *Arap Alevileri* in Turkish (Arab ʿAlawis) might evoke negative connotations. She further explained that they preferred not to write the word *ʿAlawi* outside the building so as not to endanger their community's safety. She feared that the word may arouse the feelings of hostility among the Islamist radicals or the Syrian refugees who are against the ʿAlawis. These places I visited during my fieldwork were intended to be unmarked ʿAlawi spaces as it pertained to outsiders, so they could provide safe places for ʿAlawis to perform their ʿAlawi identities. Not marking association buildings with signs reading *ʿAlawi* is another strategy through which secrecy is constructed.

The hiding of ʿAlawi religious symbols

By spending time among the ʿAlawi youth in Germany, I observed how they perform Arab ʿAlawi religious identity in the public and private spheres. The wearing of religious symbols such as *zülfikar* (in Arabic: *Dhu l-Faqar*) is a popular way of displaying differences and similarities. On numerous occasions, I noticed several young ʿAlawis wearing zülfikar*,* a necklace in the shape of imam ʿAli's sword.[14] *Zülfikar* is also highly popular amongst the Alid communities, indexing Shiʿi belief. The fear that Sunni Muslims or radical Islamists might identify zülfikar as a distinctly ʿAlawi (Alevi or Shiʿi) symbol led some youth to wear it underneath their garments. This is another way of performing concealment that "involve[s] barring *visual* information" (p. 105). When I asked them if wearing this adornment in public ever caused them problems, they provided me with several anecdotes. Deniz was one of the young ʿAlawis who normally wears her zülfikar above her garments. Before she begun to tell me her story about zülfikar, she wanted me to know that she indeed proudly displays it, and with no fear, but under certain circumstances she must be discreet.

One day, Deniz said, she was invited to a betrothal ceremony of a Turkish Sunni friend whose parents she regarded as devout Muslims, because "they practice their religion by praying five times a day." The ceremony took place at her friend's home where most of the guests were Sunni Muslims. She admitted that in the presence of so many Sunnis, she felt she had to hide the zülfikar underneath her garment, saying, "I simply placed the zülfikar under my dress so that nobody could see it." She remarked that it was necessary to do so because she wanted to blend in comfortably with Sunni guests in the room and avoid the

[14] This sword with a bifurcated blade was first in the Prophet Muhammad's possession. It is reported that imam ʿAli received it from Muhammad on the day of the battle of *Uhud*. In order to highlight the connection of the sword *Dhu l-Faqar* to imam ʿAli, for example, the legend illustrates him performing heroic deeds with the sword on the battlefield (Bellino, 2012).

prospect of any provocation. At the end of her anecdote, Deniz added that whenever she went into a mosque, she always placed her zülfikar automatically underneath her garment because, as she said, “I didn’t want to provoke anyone.” Brink-Danan (2012) describes this way of wearing religious symbols as “under-sweater fashion,” as she observed it among the Turkish Jews in Istanbul who wear “Judaica (six-pointed stars of David or other symbols)” under their garments (p. 90).

Passing as Turkish

The ʿAlawi practice of secrecy refers to “the compulsory withholding of knowledge” about the ethno-religious identity and religious beliefs and is “reinforced by the prospect of sanctions for disclosure” (Shils, 1956, p. 26). These sanctions can be distinguished between those imposed by the ʿAlawi community and those by the outsiders. In my time among ʿAlawis in Germany and Turkey, I met some ʿAlawis who disagreed with the rule of secrecy but still performed secrecy, only out of fear of facing negative reactions from their co-believers if they did so. It is well known among ʿAlawis that displaying their difference in public may invite danger and unwanted attention. Therefore, it was and is common among ʿAlawis to employ various forms of passing in everyday life.

Following Renfrow’s description, I understand the term *passing* here as “replacing discreditable identities with less threatening ones.” Renfrow, referencing Goffman (1963), adds that passing “allows individuals to avoid detection and the negative treatment associated with … [their] hated positions” (2004, p. 491). It is for this reason that ʿAlawis who worked and shared flats with Sunni Turkish immigrants during their first years in Germany went praying with their colleagues and flatmates in the mosques (Prager, 2010, p. 119). Passing as a Turkish Sunni Muslim was probably considered to be the safest way of allaying suspicions about the Arab ʿAlawi identity.

For older generations of ʿAlawi immigrants, passing as Turks was a means of creating an acceptable impression of themselves for others. It is also a way of performing secrecy that Zerubavel would describe in terms of fabrication. Lying is, as Zerubavel states, “the prototypical example of fabricated information” (1982, p. 106). It is important to bear in mind that lying, here, should be not interpreted from an ethical viewpoint but rather a sociological one. Zerubavel additionally notes that “when one lies to others, not only are they barred from having access to genuine information about one; they sometimes may not even be aware of the fact that they have been lied to” (p. 106). However, Zerubavel’s notion of fabrication and the strategy of passing as Turks through an act of lying cannot be

applied to the new generations of those ʿAlawis living in Germany who indeed feel both as ʿAlawi and Turkish, on grounds of their successful assimilation into the Turkish society. The fact that new generations of ʿAlawis in Germany do not always tell others they are also ʿAlawis can be interpreted, as my interlocutors explained to me, as being discreet.

Mahmud (2014), studying the practices of discretion among the Italian Freemasons, offers a definition of the term *discretion* that aptly corresponds to my interlocutors behaving and speaking discreetly in social spaces shared with non-ʿAlawis:

> As I have seen it enacted by Freemasons, discretion can be defined as a set of embodied practices that simultaneously conceal and reveal valued knowledge. Being discreet was essential to my informants' way of being in the world, and it was an attempt to reconcile the different pulls between secrecy and having "nothing to hide." (p. 28)

The use of discretion can be best exemplified in the case of my interlocutor, Defne, who seems to have learnt how to be discreet in certain situations. For her, Germany is a place where she can safely reveal her cultural identity, whereas Turkey is a place where she has to be more prudent when expressing her cultural difference:

> I think keeping your true identity depends on where you are. I understand that it had to be kept secret for a long time, out of fear of persecution. I think, if I now say that here [in Germany], then nobody cares, nobody says anything or something. But, depending on where you are, for example, when I'm in Turkey, I have no problem with saying it. … I'm often in Istanbul, I'm not making a secret out of it now, but my cousins living there, they still conceal their true identities. … They don't necessarily want you to say that either, they had a few problems and so on, and for the sake of them I don't say it.

Over the centuries, ʿAlawis have adopted the practice of secrecy as a traditional imperative that their children learn to obey during early in their socialisation. Many ʿAlawi children in Turkey were often taught to identify themselves as Turkish when they started attending formal education institutions. This way of self-identification at schools could more likely reinforce their passing as Turkish among their Turkish Sunni classmates, while erasing their difference as Arab ʿAlawis, and asserting their affiliation to Turks. Another way of expressing, or in other words, performing the Turkish identity was to carry the photograph of Atatürk (the founder of the Turkish Republic) in their wallet or purse. In so doing, they are able to quickly dispel any lingering doubts about their identification as patriotic

Turkish citizens. However, it is important to note that Atatürk is highly respected among ʿAlawis as a historical political figure standing for laicism.

Another common strategy of passing was to encourage ʿAlawi children to learn Turkish. The idea was that it would be easier for them to speak accent-free Turkish, if they could not speak Arabic. Thus, their Turkish friends were not able to detect their linguistic and ethno-religious difference. By not teaching their children Arabic, ʿAlawi parents believed that their children would not have to downplay their Arab ʿAlawi identity. In this way they could make a pre-emptive avoidance of stigmatisation or discrimination.

In her study on ʿAlawis living in Antakya, cultural anthropologist Şule Can (2020) aptly explains the parental fears about speaking Arabic. Here, she talks about her individual experiences that she made as an ʿAlawi in her teenage years:

> My generation was raised with a fear of discrimination and thus a plan for "Turkification" by concerned families. Families like mine avoided raising Arabic-speaking children for fear that broken Turkish with a heavy accent would hinder our university prospects, marginalize us in Turkish society, and prevent us from gaining social and cultural capital. I was advised a dozen times to keep secret my Arab and Alawite identity outside the community. (p. 19)

Similar to the Turkish Jewish community in Istanbul (Brink-Danan, 2012, p. 91), the assimilation of ʿAlawis into the Turkish society, through adoption of the Turkish language, was an important strategy of the community for maintaining invisibility. Nevertheless, this strategy is today not necessarily used by the new generations of ʿAlawi parents because many of them cannot speak Arabic.

Some of the ʿAlawi youth I encountered in my fieldwork stated that their parents were reluctant to talk with them about their ʿAlawiness when they were younger. They added that their parents preferred to do so for their safety. I also met parents who advocated this approach by explaining that it would be easier for their children to protect themselves and to remain unnoticed in public when they did not know much about their difference from others. In this way, these parents indeed enforced their children' passing as non-ʿAlawis. The next anecdote exemplifies this situation well. My interviewee, Irem, explains why her parents refused to answer when she asked questions about her identity:

> I always asked so many questions and my parents didn't want to talk with me about it [about being ʿAlawi] when I was younger. It was because they thought they were protec-

ting me by doing so. They, maybe, thought they prevent me from talking with other people about it. I think that was wrong! Of course, you have to talk with children and with young people carefully about it. But I believe that my parents on the other hand didn't want me to identify with ʿAlawism. But I always asked myself, "What are we actually?" and "What was I?" Whenever I spoke this to my parents, they always reacted strange.

Given the fact that Irem asked questions about her true identity, she must have noticed her difference from others. It seems that when she tried to learn more about her difference, her parents tried to avoid the issue or under-communicate it. It is important to note that in favour of protecting their children, such parents indeed encouraged their children to be ignorant about their cultural identity. The result was that children grew up devoid of knowing who they really were. As will be presented later in this section, some of them accidentally discovered their true identities later, in interaction with their Sunni Muslim and Alevi friends.

3.1.2.The strategies of visibility

Secrets usually are communicated in indirect ways. (Bellman, 1984, p. 53)

This part of this chapter deals with the indirect ways of communicating Arab ʿAlawi identity in public spaces. Indirect speech is a theme that has been already explored by some anthropologists who demonstrated that opacity in everyday communication is an important part of the practice of secrecy. The descriptions in these studies highlighted the diversity of indirect speech techniques through which a secretive information is partially conveyed (Bellman, 1984, pp. 51–52; Piot, 1993; Throop, 2010, pp. 148–156). The ways in which the Arab ʿAlawi community in Germany that I studied adumbrate information about their community are different in form but similar in essence to the previous anthropological studies above.

In one way or another, all of the ʿAlawi associations I visited are concerned with their security. For fear of attracting too much negative attention, some associations refrained from using their self-designations as Arab Alevis, *Arabische Alawiten* (in German) or *Arap Alevileri* (in Turkish) for naming their associations. Instead, the word *Alevi* is used in combination with a group of words pointing to their geographical origin in Turkey, such as *Akdeniz Alevileri* (Alevis from Mediterranean Sea), or *Çukurova Alevileri* (Alevis from Cilicia).

I assume that such practices of naming are inclined to divert the direct attention away from the ʿAlawi community by creating ambiguity and uncertainty about the true origin of these associations. ʿAlawis know that by using an oblique reference to their community, embedded in these general names, their identity can only be guessed at but not known for sure. In doing so, it is possible to perpetuate their community's invisibility in public without giving explicit information about their ethno-religious background. Naming is an important issue when it comes to maintaining a secret identity on the grounds that "names enter into a complex interplay between secrecy and revelation, concealment and display, essence and substance, the interior and the exterior" (Hugh-Jones, 2006, p. 87).

The use of the Turkish word *defne*, which means bay (or laurel) tree, as self-designation provides another example of indirect communicating of ʿAlawi identity. There are Arab ʿAlawi organisations in Germany and in Turkey named after defne. Besides, defne is the name of a town in the province of Hatay, which has homogeneously Arab ʿAlawi population.[15] In order to better understand the connection of this word with ʿAlawis, it is worth first looking at its significance among the community. In the Turkish coastal city of Hatay bay trees spread throughout the region. The essential oils that are obtained from bay leaves are traditionally used in soap production. And this soap, called *gar sabunu* in Turkish, can be often found in ʿAlawi households. The reason why it is called this name is because of the Arabic word *ghār*, meaning bay tree. It is also internationally known as Aleppo soap. Aleppo is the place from where the ʿAlawi religion was scattered through Syria since the late 10th century (Winter, 2016, pp 19-20). It is also one of the cities where ʿAlawis in Syria mostly live.

Taken together, it can be said that defne tree is part and parcel of Arab ʿAlawi socio-cultural and economic life. The fact that a town where ʿAlawis mostly live is named after the word defne also adds a political force to this signifier. For these reasons, it should not be difficult for ʿAlawis to recognise that an organisation named after the word defne may most likely connote their religious community. In order to recognise the reference of this word to ʿAlawis, an outsider definitely needs background information about the social and cultural meaning that the word bears. With the strategy of indirect communication, "the secret is maintained (or assumed to be so) by disengaging signifiers from their signifieds" (Brink-Danan, 2012, pp. 160–161).

However, it cannot be ruled out that some ʿAlawis can fail to interpret the aforementioned designations with the correct meanings, or in other words, might not recognise the

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[15] For more on the ethno-religious importance of the town defne*,* see the study entitled *Refugee Encounters at the Turkish-Syrian Border,* conducted by Şule Can (2020).

indirect references to the ʿAlawi community. In the same way, non-ʿAlawis could guess at the oblique meanings of these signs. The names ʿAlawis use to refer to their community in public places have the task of providing "them with a vehicle for identity; that is, that identity is implicit in reference and address" (Lambek, 2006, p. 118). As Lambek argues, "Once we give someone [or something] a name, we grant them a condition for identity" (p. 118).

3.1.3.The criticism of secrecy

Today, we live in an age in which the world seems to be, in Eriksen's and Schober's terms (2016), "overheated" by the accelerated changes occurring in almost every aspect of life (pp. 1–3). In times of rapid change, ʿAlawi way of life has of course not remained unaffected. The changing political, social, and economic conditions of present-day ʿAlawis have not only challenged their traditional forms of identification but also forced them to reconsider the traditional structures of their cultural practices. It is therefore not surprising to see that the historical practices of secrecy within the ʿAlawi community are being negotiated more openly and more courageously today.

Over the course of my research, I noticed that some of the ʿAlawi youth have begun to rethink the utility and necessity of concealing ʿAlawi identity. In repeated discussions and interviews, it became apparent that in comparison to older generations, these youths are more open to revealing their Arab ʿAlawi background in interaction with non-ʿAlawis, as in the case of my interviewee, Zeynep. The concealment of information about ʿAlawi identity was, in her opinion, part of the ʿAlawi history, but she says it is no longer necessary to employ it, especially in contemporary Germany:

> I think it's totally ridiculous [to keep relying on concealment] … I understand that it had historical reasons, with all the persecution stories and so on, I really understand that, and maybe I would say in the current political climate in Turkey, maybe I can understand a bit too. But I think, yes, ridiculous is maybe a harsh word, that was maybe really the wrong word choice, but I believe that the time has simply come that you can just open up. Well, we live in the 21st century, I think we don't have to keep it a secret anymore, and we don't have to be as afraid of persecution as we did 50 or 60 years ago.

It is reasonable to assume that Zeynep's choice of word "ridiculous" was not meant to undervalue in any way the importance of the practice of secrecy, as we can see how she tries to justify its usage in the past and in present-day Turkey. Instead, I believe that after

over hundreds of years of practicing concealment, Zeynep simply suggests that it is now time to readjust this tradition in the face of changing contemporary circumstances. Zeynep was not the only one who advocates for making shifts in the traditional politics of invisibility; Meryem is another interviewee who thinks similarly. The conversation with Meryem about the question of necessity of practicing secrecy started with her short anecdote about her grandfather's advice to her mother. She underlined the fact that her grandfather discouraged her mother from identifying herself openly as ʿAlawi in the past. She explained the reasoning behind her grandfather's advice in terms of historical narrative of persecution:

> My grandpa always said to my mother, "Don't say that you are ʿAlawi." Because back then there was still this fear as a minority, but I think times have changed. And for a minority, standing by one's opinion is much more important now. But I think it's time now for the others to find out the truth about us. I think it's no longer okay when we keep it a secret, we should rather inform the people about us.

Similarly to Zeynep, Meryem points to the fact that today's conditions in which ʿAlawis live are different from the past. It is the fact that the hostile conditions in the past, under which her ancestors feared displaying their identity, have started to ease since in last few decades. Perhaps, inspired by the emerging identity politics of minorities (of all kinds) in numerous countries around the globe, she argues that it is important to stop keeping secrets in order to claim their rights as a minority.

Another interlocutor, Defne, suggests that her community's motivation for concealing information about themselves partly stems from the fact that revealing secrets about themselves can antagonise those who are already intolerant towards them. Yet, she still holds the view that her community should put an end to its practice of secrecy of identity:

> But actually, I think, [the concealment of identity] has to stop now, I think we have made progress, but I don't think it is necessarily up to us that we keep it a secret, but rather often because of those who have problems with it.

As part of the imperative of secrecy, one of the first and most important tasks for the initiated ʿAlawis is to safeguard the divine secrets of ʿAlawism. In principle, ʿAlawi religious authorities decide which secrets to share with the initiated community members and which to conceal from the uninitiated and non-ʿAlawis. For the protection of secret doctri-

nes, the confidentiality of newly initiated young ʿAlawis is crucial, and ʿAlawi clerics ensure this "through pedagogy" (Johnson, 2002, p. 28). This pedagogy entails "the oath, and threats of penalties" (Simmel, 1906, p. 473). The initiates are strictly taught, in Simmel's words, "the art of silence" (p. 474). However, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, it was not always possible for ʿAlawis to ensure that the secrets remain secret. As Bellman notes, "It is the very nature of secrets that they most often are told" (1984, p. 3). While keeping this in mind, I encountered one particular youth over the course of my research who explicitly expressed his doubts about the rationality of keeping religious doctrines secret in present-day conditions. This interviewee was Hakan with whom I had a long conversation over this issue.

In the course of our discussion, Hakan drew my attention to the fact that ʿAlawi secret doctrines had already been revealed a long time ago. He was referring to Sulayman al-Adani,[16] who revealed all the religious prayers in a publication in 1864. What seems to be difficult for Hakan to comprehend is the imperative to keep something hidden, which is in reality no longer hidden:

> We don't have to keep [ʿAlawism] secret anymore because all of the prayers were already published 200 years ago. … There are Arabic scripts and their English translation that have been known to outsiders since around 200 years. They were even translated into Turkish and German. … So that, why do we have to disguise our religion? This is not a secret anymore!

By this question, Hakan expresses his criticism of the contemporary practice of secrecy. Hakan's words point to a constant challenge facing the ʿAlawi community: namely, the protection of its secrets. In today's digital media era, it is more difficult to guard secret information from the uninitiated and non-ʿAlawis. There are, for example, various websites where anyone can read the information about the ʿAlawi religious teachings in English or in Arabic. The disclosure of such information is normally considered to be restricted only to initiated ʿAlawis but no one can control its dissemination on online platforms.

In my view, the uncontrolled exposure of religious teachings can be a problem in many ways but especially in theological terms because ʿAlawi women, girls and uninitiated men can also read the religious content that has been hidden from them for centuries. For example, over the course of my research, one of the young ʿAlawi girls I met told me that she

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[16] For more on this historical figure, see the subsection on the practice of taqiya in Chapter 1.

had already found the English translation of the religious teachings. She made it clear to me that every time when she was in the pilgrimage site (Turkish, the *ziyaret*—which next section will address in detail), seeing ʿAlawi men suddenly disappearing for praying was enough to spark her curiosity about the secrets of her religion.

Another problem with revealing the secret knowledge on the websites is that users publishing such information can easily scatter false interpretations of the ʿAlawi religious teachings by making derogatory accusations against the community. This could harm the community's public reputation. Whether it is effective or not, for ʿAlawis, one way of dealing with the unwanted disclosure and interpretations of secrets is to simply deny their accuracy.

People can have a variety of reasons for disclosing information which has been guarded as a secret. In his 1993 article on *Secrecy and society*, Beidelman put forward an explanation for revealing secrets. He placed the motivations for revealing secrets into three categories:

> The power and attraction of the secret lie in the possibility that it may be disclosed, either as a favor to the uninformed who seek to learn it [1] or as a betrayal [2] or lapse on the part of those hiding it [3]. (pp. 1–2)

The first category presented above corresponds to the reason that Hakan put forward for revealing ʿAlawism. Later on during our conversation, Hakan argued that the accessibility of ʿAlawi religious doctrines cannot be restricted only to a group of initiated elites. In his view, whoever wishes to gain information about this religion should be permitted to do so. This is a highly contentious idea because it basically requires ʿAlawi religion to be transformed from a secret to a public religion that is accessible to all others:

> You keep it a secret by swearing 1, 2, 10 and 40 times. But for me this is not even correct because this esoteric religious knowledge that brings someone closer to God should be open for everyone to obtain. There is no reason that only a certain group of people in this big world have access to this spiritual knowledge.

This view entails that the codes of secrecy and the tradition of initiation should be reinvented or reinterpreted. However, given today's political and social conditions, the prospect of a public expansion of the ʿAlawi religion is considerably low. I do not believe that the desire to openly disseminate the ʿAlawi religion would appeal to the majority of ʿAlawis.

This is not only because it would violate the traditions, but also because such attempt would most likely contradict the wishes of other coreligionists and the religious leaders of the community. Simmel wrote that "secrecy involves a tension which, at the moment of revelation, finds its release" (1906, p. 465). However, throughout my research in Germany and Turkey, I did not meet anyone interested in disclosing religious secrets or disseminating ʿAlawism. According to those I met, I would expect a great number of ʿAlawis would contradict such an attempt.

Apart from concerns over safeguarding the sanctity of religious teachings, the practice of religion is a private matter, as one of my interviewees, Ümit, argues, and should therefore be kept hidden:

> I think it's good, because I don't believe it is good to talk much about your religion or have discussions about it. Because everyone has their own belief, and for everyone it is the correct one. … I think it's a good thing that we just have our belief, we adhere to it, and we don't try to spread it somehow.

The perpetual concealing of markings of ʿAlawi identity has helped ʿAlawis to escape from difficult and oppressive circumstances, although it has increased the community's invisibility; Jenkins (2008a) points out, "A group that was recognised only by its members—a secret group—would have a very limited presence in the human world" (p. 106). The price that the entire community has paid for its tenacity of secrecy is the fading of its cultural identity.

During numerous discussions with the ʿAlawi youth, it became apparent to me that many of them are unanimous in concealing their religious prayers but also revealing their true identities openly. For these individuals, keeping secrets of ʿAlawism is important as it is a traditional demand from their religious community. However, in my time among the ʿAlawi youth, I noticed that both young men and women are influenced by the worldwide emerging utility of identity politics. Many of them share a common view on the necessity of reformulating the long-held policy of invisibility. To reiterate, the practice of secrecy has historically been a useful method of escaping the threat of external attacks. But for many of the ʿAlawi youth, the possibility of persecution or physical attack is lessened such that revealing their true identity should no longer be feared, especially in Germany.

3.1.4. Discovering Arab ʿAlawi identity

As has been previously mentioned in this section, the parents of some of my interlocutors avoided disclosing to them their ʿAlawi identities so as to foster their passing as non-ʿAlawis. In so doing, their parents intended to protect them against the prospect of social ostracism and discrimination on the part of Sunni Muslims. This avoidance strategy made these youths inept in recognising the cultural difference between themselves and others. After I had listened to their stories, it became clear that it was not until their adolescence that they discerned their difference from their Turkish speaking peers. My intent in this subsection is to recount the moments when these interlocutors learned about their true identities.

I first begin with two anecdotes in which, my two female interlocutors, Defne and Meryem, describe that it was their Turkish Sunni peers at school who made them aware of their difference as ʿAlawis. It would be not wrong to say that the curiosity of their friends sparked their own curiosity to learn more about their true identities. In the following quote, Defne recalls the time when her friend at school asked her who she was:

> I was in 5th or 6th grade. My Turkish-Sunni classmate, whose family was very religious, came up to me once and asked, “Defne! Are you an Alevi, or a Turk, or a Sunni?” I didn’t know what to say, I had no idea. I looked at him in silence because I wasn’t aware of the difference between those names. Since I couldn’t answer his question, he said to me, “Then you’re probably like Emrecan, half and half, right?” Emrecan was a friend of mine whose mother was Sunni and father Alevi. And I just replied “Yes, exactly, I’m half and half” Later, I went home and asked my parents. They then explained to me who I am.

It is interesting to note that Defne’s Turkish Sunni friend was already informed of the basic confessional division between Anatolian Alevis and Turkish Sunnis, whereas Defne did not even know in the first place which ethno-religious category she was ascribed to. Defne’s ignorance about ʿAlawism was the result of the ʿAlawi practice of secrecy which has been central to the construction of ʿAlawis’ self and group identifications. In another conversation, she told me that her parents could not offer convincing and clear information about her religious affiliation. She added that when she started studying at the university, she went to library and read the works of Western orientalists who primarily studied the history and religious beliefs of ʿAlawis.

In the next excerpt, Meryem, who was 23 years old at the time I interviewed her, talks about the moment when she became aware of the fact that the use of the Arabic language among ʿAlawis is what differentiates her from her Sunni school friends. She added that she was at the age of 13 or 14 during that time. Apparently, she first assumed that Turkish Sunnis could speak Arabic as ʿAlawis, as she notes below:

> Several languages are spoken at home but I didn't realise that the other Turks don't speak Arabic. So, I somehow noticed this when I said something in school and that was in our Hatay Arabic dialect. And my classmates [said], "What are you talking about, what does that mean?" I was like, I didn't know what to say. Then I asked my parents at home, and then, they said to me, "Yes, it is true that they [Turks] don't speak Arabic." And they explained to me further differences between ʿAlawis and others.

Unlike Meryem, many of my interviewees were aware of the linguistic difference between ʿAlawis and Turks in their early youth. However, depending on their young age, it was still very difficult to understand how this difference mattered. Both of the above examples indicate that the parents did not voluntarily inform their children about the cultural boundary between their community and Turkish Sunni community until asked about it. As explained earlier, this is related to the strategy of invisibility that reinforced the erasure of ʿAlawis' cultural difference.

The strategies of passing used by ʿAlawis seem to parallel the observations made by anthropologist Martin Sökefeld (2008) about the Anatolian Alevis living in Germany. In his research on the Alevi politics of identity in Germany, Sökefeld writes that some Alevi parents avoided telling their children their true identity out of fear of discrimination by Sunnis. However, by virtue of the ways Alevi children acted and expressed themselves, their Sunni counterparts could recognise their Aleviness. It seems that these children were unaware of their difference as Alevis and learned it after confrontations with Sunnis (p. 45).

I continue with the following two excerpts taken from the interviews with Zeynep and Salih. These two examples illustrate how both youths discovered their ʿAlawi religious identities during casual conversations with their parents. The first anecdote below is cited from the interview with Zeynep. She said she was in Turkey for her summer holiday when she heard for the first time about her ʿAlawi background. She was 14 or 15 years old at that time. She added that she was sitting driving with her family and some close relatives in the city of Adana:

> I still remember this moment, very banal, really, I was in Adana, in the car—I exactly remember—with my aunt, her husband, my mother, my cousin and my brother. And I suddenly heard them speaking about ʿAlawis. It wasn't that they wanted to tell us that we're all ʿAlawis, but they were just discussing something. Until that moment, my cousin didn't know either that we're ʿAlawis. That was quite interesting because she was born and raised in Adana. [She was living in an ʿAlawi milieu]. I wasn't raised up as an Arab ʿAlawi but as a Turk. [Zeynep was born and raised in Germany].

Zeynep's remark that her cousin did not know that she was ʿAlawi although she grew up according to ʿAlawi values in an ʿAlawi community in Adana suggests that the practice of secrecy is an inherent part of ʿAlawis' lives, and the tactics of secrecy can be used in much the same way everywhere. During my time among ʿAlawis in Turkey, I met several youths who told me stories similar to that of Zeynep. It is sometimes at a particular moment in time chosen by ʿAlawi parents and sometimes just in an ordinary moment when ʿAlawi children learn who they are.

The next story describes Salih's first experience when he came to know that he was an Arab ʿAlawi. He was around 11 or 12 years old during that time. He said he had been a Turk, just like his Turkish friends, until one day his father told him the truth about his ethno-religious identity:

> My father told me, I didn't ask him, we were sitting, and then he started talking about it. … That's how it was back then. He was reading something in the newspaper about the oppression of Alevis, something that was related to our community. And what he read apparently annoyed him. Since I was sitting next to him at this moment, he probably thought, he should talk to me about our identity now.

In a retrospective tone, Salih explained to me that he was previously unaware of the cultural differences between himself and others. He said that although he saw and heard people around him speaking Arabic during his summer holidays in Turkey, he did not ask himself why they spoke Arabic. He added that his interest in ʿAlawism and its history became more intense only after the age 15.

Before concluding this subsection, I will recount one last story about the discovery of ʿAlawi cultural identity. When I asked my interlocutor, Sercan, how he first found out that he was an Arab ʿAlawi, he started talking about his experience in an Alevi soccer team. He

said when he was younger, he had a predominantly Alevi circle of friends. He underlined the fact that he was unaware of his ʿAlawi background during this time:

> I grew up with Turkish Alevis because I played in an Alevi soccer team. The majority of my teammates were *Zaza* speaking Alevis. So I first identified myself with them because I knew I was an Alevi but I didn't know that I was an Arab ʿAlawi.

Over the course of time, the more Sercan learned about his Alevi friends, the more he realised that he was different from them. To reiterate, it is not unusual that some ʿAlawi parents tend to abstain from talking with their children about their difference. This is because their children could be subject to defamatory criticisms and social rejection in case of their recognition as ʿAlawis. This seems to be one of the reasons why some ʿAlawi children grow up without knowing their true identities. However, along with the rise of ʿAlawi cultural politics in Germany, as already described in Chapter 1, young ʿAlawis have various opportunities to learn about their religious culture today. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, increasingly more information on the ʿAlawi community has become available on the internet and in academic publications. There is also a positive tendency among today's young ʿAlawi parents to educate their children about their ʿAlawiness at an early age. Taken together, once ʿAlawi children know more about their difference, they learn through the pedagogy of invisibility how to under-communicate this difference in public.

3.1.5.Conclusions

ʿAlawis are constantly engaged in the activity of telling and hiding information regarding their ethno-religious identity and religious doctrines. Over the course of centuries, a strict commitment to secrecy has established a set of rules that define how ʿAlawis should behave in public spaces in order to keep a low profile. In the struggle for keeping their religious identity secret, the effacement of some cultural and linguistic practices was widely overlooked by the community leaders. The practice of secrecy has caused many generations of ʿAlawis to grow up with the lack of information about their cultural history and identity.

The membership into the ʿAlawi community is bound up with the pledge of secrecy. This involves both the concealment of one's religious affiliation to ʿAlawism and the doctrinal teachings of ʿAlawism. In this section, I have focused on five strategies employed by

ʿAlawis to conceal their religious identity in the public spheres and in interaction with others. All of these strategies function as a means of maintaining the invisibility of their difference in everyday life. These strategies, which effectively maintain the secrecy of ʿAlawi identity, are strategies that are necessary for ʿAlawis to protect themselves from conflicts. These strategies also facilitate the ways in which the Arab ʿAlawi identity can be indirectly communicated. Through the techniques of indirect communication, ʿAlawis are enable to maintain their appearance in public without drawing negative attention from others. These strategies of secrecy are not fixed, but rather fluid in nature.

Most of the young ʿAlawis I met agree on the practice of concealing the religious truths of ʿAlawism. They do not advocate hiding their ethno-religious identities in public, yet still they understand that being discreet is sometimes inevitable in hostile circumstances. Some youth expressed the need to reformulate the imperative of secrecy. In rapidly changing social and political environments, the promotion of welfare, equality, and empowerment of their community as a religious minority seems to be conditional on a shift in the politics of secrecy.

In the last part of this section I have demonstrated that it was by mere chance that some of the ʿAlawi youth came to know their true identities in their adolescence. Before then, these youth considered themselves non-ʿAlawis. They had been not aware of their distinctive difference until their Turkish Sunni friends and parents informed them about it.

In the course of my fieldwork among ʿAlawis in Germany, I was frequently confronted with questions about the ʿAlawi cultural identity. ʿAlawis of all ages I met wanted to learn more information about their community. “Are we Muslim? Are we Alevi? Where are we coming from? Is ʿAlawism a culture or a religion? Is ʿAlawism the only true religion? May we disclose our true identities? Why should we not share our esoteric religious tenets with others? Or, what is our true ascription, ʿAlawi, Nusayri or Arab ʿAlawi?” Some of these questions were addressed to me as an academic and some of them I heard ʿAlawi youth asking older ʿAlawis.

The reason for the lack of knowledge of ʿAlawis about their identity and religion dates back to the historically established implementation of secrecy. Throughout my fieldwork research, I observed how the shroud of secrecy caused the partial erasure of ʿAlawi cultural and linguistic identity. I observed that, generally, ʿAlawi women and girls were more under-informed about their ʿAlawi religious identity, religious practices, and community.

It is important to reiterate that there is a paucity of empirical research that investigates the ʿAlawi practice of secrecy—not the content of the secrecy, but rather the doing of secrecy, should be the focus of interest. Avenues for future research to illuminate this topic

could for example be to examine the strategies of secrecy that were employed by ʿAlawis in Ottoman Turkey and Syria. Such research could certainly improve our understanding of the present-day practice of secrecy and ʿAlawi culture.

By virtue of ʿAlawis' assimilation of Turkish culture (though it is still incomplete) and their non-Sunni religious practices, their minority position, and their commitment to the tradition of secrecy, ʿAlawi youth have undergone both similar and different socialisation processes from their neighbouring religious communities in Germany and Turkey. As a result, it is their kaleidoscopic identities that have brought up multifaceted challenges for their individual relations with Turkish Sunni Muslims and Alevis. In the next section I will focus on the various aspects of these relations.

3.2. ʿAlawi youth's relations to Turkish Sunni Muslims and Alevis

The discussion in this section is about ʿAlawi youth's personal experiences with their Turkish Sunni and Alevi acquaintances and friends. In polyethnic German society, ʿAlawi youths frequently interact with members of these communities. The fact that Turkey is their common country of origin might initially bring them closer. However, despite the ʿAlawis' assimilation into Turkish society through the adoption of the Turkish language and culture, some sociocultural differences between ʿAlawis and Turkish Sunni Muslims have remained and are still apparent in social interaction. My intention here is to portray how these differences complicate the individual relationships between ʿAlawis and their Turkish Sunni counterparts. I will continue the discussion by delving into the negative views held by Turkish Sunni Muslims on ʿAlawi youth's Muslimness and their ʿAlawiness.

The second part of this section concentrates on my interlocutors' negative and positive experiences during their everyday interactions with Alevis. ʿAlawis may often identify themselves by reference to their affiliation to Alevis. Some of my interlocutors with whom I was engaged in repeated conversations believed to have similarities with Alevis. I will demonstrate how the collective self-identification as Alevi has led my interlocutors and their Alevi acquaintances to mistakenly believe that their religious beliefs are the same and that they practice their faith in similar ways. Indeed, there are various elements that connect ʿAlawis with Alevis, such as the worship of imam ʿAli, avoidance of headscarves, not attending mosque, and wearing a pendant in the shape of zülfikar (imam ʿAli's sword) which symbolises one's affiliation with Shiʿi Islam. However, according to some of my informants, the differences in the way they practice their faith seem to have permeated the nature of their interactions with Alevis, while some other informants seem to have ignored such differences.

3.2.1. Confrontational issues with Turkish Sunni Muslims

ʿAlawi youth sometimes find themselves in conflict with Turkish Sunni Muslims. Confrontation between the members of these communities who live in Germany seems to become almost unavoidable when it comes to such matters as socio-religious perspectives on gender relations, the question of ʿAlawis' belonging to Islam, and the disclosure of ʿAlawi identity. The analysis of interviews with ʿAlawi youth and my fieldnotes indicate that most of the arguments put forward by Turkish Sunni Muslims are partially driven by the historically contrived negative stereotypes of ʿAlawis. These stereotypes have apparently remai-

ned static in the Turkish collective memory until today. Some ʿAlawi youths reported that they had even been discriminated by some Turkish Sunnis on the basis of their religious identity. In the pages that follow I want to give accounts of these conflicts in detail which some of my interviewees experienced in their daily lives.

Different perspectives on Gender relations

The position of women in the ʿAlawi community, according to my findings, is what significantly marks the ʿAlawi-Sunni difference in terms of cultural values. The dress style of ʿAlawi women is seen as an appropriate boundary marker between both communities. It has already been documented by previous studies that ʿAlawi women and girls see themselves as having more freedom in their clothing choices compared to conservative Sunni neighbours living in Turkey and in Germany (Prager, 2010, p. 217; Procházka-Eisl & Procházka 2010, p. 83; Arnold, 2005, p. 309). Clothing serves as a matter of identification (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 26). It is often referenced by ʿAlawi girls to show that their way of life is more modern and to symbolise the cultural contrast between them and pious Sunnis. Dress patterns simply function as a means of setting ʿAlawis apart from Sunnis, as Cohen (1985) suggested more than three decades ago, “The community can make virtually anything grist to the symbolic mill of cultural distance” (p. 118).

This narrative of comparison based on clothing is similar to that found in the recent work of Sarsilmaz (2017). She has shown, in her study about the sociopolitical and religious position of ʿAlawi women in Antakya, that while identifying themselves as “modern, secular and democratic” (p. 168), ʿAlawi women regard the customs of *tesettür* (the Turkish term for Islamic covering) among Sunni women as “oppressive and backward” (p. 170). This essentialist view reminds me of the earlier observations of Leila Ahmed (1992) on Western thought which emerged within the colonial narrative of Islam in the 19th century. In the prevalent Western representation of Islam, veiling was and is still (today) stereotypically connected to “the oppression of women” and “the backwardness of Islam” (p. 152).

For many of my female interviewees not wearing a headscarf, and the afforded flexibility to choose Western-style clothes such as wearing a mini skirt represent a particular aspect of their culture and to some extent their Europeanness. Interestingly, this collective self-image of ʿAlawi women generated by these particular dress patterns is received and interpreted externally by Sunnis in Turkey in an unfavourable way, as Sarsilmaz (2017) found during her fieldwork in Antakya. She notes that because of their dress style—not using

any forms of veiling—ʿAlawi women are accused by some Sunnis of being "loose and promiscuous." She argues that such accusations are also connected with the more relaxed social mores of ʿAlawi families (p. 177).

In the establishment of an identity certain criteria are used to separate group members from non-members (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 84). Not wearing a headscarf is in this respect an important criterion for ʿAlawis. It is frequently used by ʿAlawis to illustrate the difference between ʿAlawis and Sunnis. Hüseyin, for example, a 23-year-old student who grew up in a small German town, told me in our interview that when he was a child, he associated ʿAlawi group membership with not wearing a headscarf:

> It was always said that you're an ʿAlawi person but as a child you can't really see the difference from others, the only difference was, "we are ʿAlawis, we don't wear a headscarf." So I always associated ʿAlawism with by avoiding wearing a headscarf. For example, I was assuming by myself, "Ok! She wears a headscarf, so her children are not from us," or "Ok, she wears no headscarf, then I know she may be from us."

In this citation, we can see how Hüseyin used a headscarf as a visual cue, which may refer to "explicit signals of ethnic identity," to ascribe unfamiliar others to an ethnic/religious category (Jenkins, 2008b, p. 66). His sense of belonging to an ʿAlawi community is informed by reference to its opposite, in this case, Sunnism. As Cohen (1985) put it, "They [boundaries] provide people with a referent for their personal identities" (p. 118). For Hüseyin, headscarves appear to be a source of difference from Sunnis, and a source of similarity to ʿAlawis.

Here, it is also important to clarify that ʿAlawi women in general do not deliberately choose to avoid wearing headscarves in Turkey or in Germany. In contrast to Sunni Muslims, avoiding a headscarf is not a free choice for ʿAlawi women. It is, after all, not a question of avoiding it. It is taken for granted that ʿAlawi women, especially in urban areas, do not wear a headscarf, except during religious rituals and while visiting a sacred site. But the situation might be different for elderly ʿAlawi women, especially in rural villages. For them, wearing a scarf—but only covering some part of their hair—seems to be a customary style of clothing today, though not in terms of a rigorous religious observance, as many ʿAlawis say. In so doing, they probably also fulfil their community's requirement of modesty that is connected with someone's age. ʿAlawi women, elderly or young, who live both in rural and urban areas, may also wear a scarf for hygienic reasons while cooking or cleaning, much as Sunni women in general, regardless of religiosity.

Indeed, one may raise the question of why the wearing of the veil is not imposed on ʿAlawi women and why some elderly ʿAlawi women do veil. For an effective answer to the first query, I tried to reconcile all the opinions advanced by my interlocutors and academics in this discussion. For example, when asked about veiling, many ʿAlawis were unanimous in the view that in Qurʾan veiling is not explicitly decreed for all Muslim women and it is not compulsory and avoiding it is not a sin. It is true that the wearing of the veil signified in Qurʾan with the term hijab is only confined to the wives of the Prophet (Chelhod, 2012; Ahmed, 1992, p. 55). For an alternative answer, I also analysed the previous studies on ʿAlawis. But it becomes clear that researchers have not dealt with the issues of the veil among ʿAlawi women in much detail.

To conclude, it is very possible that the reason why there is no practice of veiling among ʿAlawi women today, neither in Turkey nor in Germany, may lie in ʿAlawi religious principles. ʿAlawis do not adhere to Islamic orthodoxy, and therefore unlike other Muslims they do not follow the regular religious obligations of Islamic shariʿa, divine law (Moosa, 1988, pp. 409–410; Friedman, 2010, pp. 149–150). Besides, ʿAlawis have in general an allegorical meaning of the Islamic law.[17] In short, the absence of the obligatory wearing of the veil as a tradition among ʿAlawi women seems to be bound up with the non-observance of Islamic shariʿa, as Friedman puts it, "there is a great amount of detail concerning the Islamic *sharīʿa* that is absent in the Nusạyrī writings" (Friedman, 2010, p. 149). For that reason, it is important to note that the tendency not to wear a headscarf among ʿAlawi women in Germany cannot be regarded as an additional attempt to reduce the cultural distance from the German society, as Prager (2010, p. 217) suggests. But it is certainly true that not observing the customs of veiling is often used by ʿAlawis to show their similarity with German society and to emphasise their difference from conservative Sunni Muslims.

Before attempting to answer the second question, I want to present two historical texts dealing with ʿAlawi women's clothing that can be traced back more than 170 years. Although these texts do not provide any explanation for why ʿAlawi women do not wear long-sleeved, ankle-length clothes or coverings for the face, they offer vignettes of women's lives in the ʿAlawi community. We can retrieve first impressions about the dress of ʿAlawi women in the writings of British naval officer Frederick Walpole who traveled to the coastal mountains of Syria which is also called ʿAlawi mountains (*Jabal Ansariya*) between 1850 and 1851. As he observed:

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[17] See Friedman (2010) for a detailed explanation of the allegorical understanding of *sharīʿa* in Alawism.

> With the women, the dress consists of the white cotton shirt, hardly differing from the men, a zenaar or belt, a jacket, similar to that of the men; trousers resembling European trousers, save that they are slightly fuller and tied at the ankle; a tarboosh and handkerchief on the head, or more generally a common handkerchief. They never conceal their faces though they keep retired, except when the stranger is a guest in their houses, and then they will enter freely into conversation. (1851, Vol. 3, pp. 346–347)

The text clearly portrays ʿAlawi women participating in community life without covering their faces. Similarly, anglican reverend Samuel Lyde wrote in his book about the advantage of not wearing a veil in matters of marriage: "Women among the Ansaireeh [ʿAlawis] do not veil, and therefore a young man has every opportunity of seeing and choosing his intended (1860, p. 183)."

These two texts reveal an important aspect that ʿAlawi women did not veil in the last decades of 19th century. It could be argued that the adoption of the veil today among elderly ʿAlawi women is a recent custom which has established itself in the time of Abdülhamid II, as a result of assimilation and Sunnification policies implemented during the campaign called the "rectification of belief" (tashih-i akaid)—as already discussed in Chapter 1). This campaign was a crucial step for the integration of the ʿAlawis into the Ottoman Muslim community. During this process the focus was to build new schools and mosques in the areas where ʿAlawis lived. As documented in a wealth of records from this time, ʿAlawis from Latakia immigrated to Antakya and İskenderun where they converted to Hanafi Islam. But this conversion was regarded by the local Sunni population and ʿulamaʾ to be strategic and understood as part of the ʿAlawi practice of taqiya (Winter, 2016, pp. 220–228). It could be suggested that during this time, in order to show themselves as Muslims and to display their conversion to orthodox Islam, the wearing of the veil might have seemed necessary to many ʿAlawi women and their wider community.

A further ʿAlawi-Sunni difference with respect to gender relations is the practice of gender seclusion among pious Sunnis that regulates social life in terms of morality. Seclusion is another meaning for the word *hijab* which originally signifies the word *curtain* (Chelhod*,* 2012). Like veiling, seclusion was also practiced primarily by Prophet's wives (Ahmed, 1992, p. 53). With the regional expansion of Islam, the custom of seclusion was probably extended to all Muslim women in the world. It is today practiced in many Islamic countries, *inter alia,* in Turkey. This custom, though not legislatively regulated, has intruded into various parts of daily life in Turkey, including in restaurants, cafés, classrooms and public

transportation—for example, one may observe that long-distance bus companies in Turkey deliberately separate individual travellers based on their gender.

Here we should note that unlike conservatively living Muslim women and girls, ʿAlawi women and girls are in fact not obliged to follow Islam's strict gender segregation policy. In general, ʿAlawi men and women socialise together in mixed-gender social occasions, although women are required to be separated from the men during religious rituals. On the day of a religious ritual, which takes place at a sacred site, two important forms of seclusion can be observed: firstly, during the performance of the ritual; and secondly, during the meal that usually follows. The segregation of men and women during the ritual itself is religiously regulated and strictly observed. Since women are not given religious training, (as outlined in detail in Chapter 1), they do not attend congregational prayer with the men and neither are they permitted to enter the place of ritual while the men are performing the ritual prayer. During that time, women often stay somewhere else where they are out of sight of the men performing ritual prayer. For the meal, women may enter the place of ritual to help serve the food but also to share the meal with others. However, those ʿAlawi men who participate in the ritual are granted priority when it comes to seating arrangements, thus women either distribute meals, wait for the men to finish their meals in order to take their seats, or eat somewhere else.

Coming back to the present state of social relations between ʿAlawi and Sunni youths, Zeynep's case, as explained in the following paragraphs, shows that this freedom given to ʿAlawi women in social activities may sometimes cause problems when sharing a social space with Sunni Muslims. During our interview, Zeynep, who was 29 years-old at the time I met her, gave an account of her experience when she was prohibited from sharing the same bench in a cafe with her male Turkish Sunni friends.

Zeynep lives in a small apartment located in a multicultural neighbourhood in Cologne. Upon entering her flat, I was overwhelmed by her generosity and hospitality: She gave me a packet of baklava from the refrigerator and offered me a cup of coffee or tea. I asked her for a cup of coffee and we started our conversation while heading to the kitchen. After she had placed her coffee maker on the stove top, we went to the living room and sat at the table facing each other. Zeynep, who was in a talkative mood, told me a little bit about her life. I learned that she works as a research assistant at a university and that she is an active person who likes to do sports, going to cafés to read a book and enjoys watching the most prominent German crime film series *Tatort* (crime scene) with her German friends. She also added that she works voluntarily—providing tutoring for students.

Before we started the actual interview, she brought us coffee in a French press and returned to the kitchen to warm some milk. Within a couple of minutes, she came back with a traditional Turkish coffee pot full of warm milk. It was a perfect combination of coffee preparation techniques from different cultures. During the interview we jumped from one theme to another, using mainly German but also Turkish. One of the themes we talked about was her relationship with Turkish Sunni muslims. I asked her if there was a particular situation that made her aware of a noticeable difference between her and Turkish Sunni Muslims.

Zeynep pointed out that she had very little personal experience with Turks because the majority of her circle of friends consisted of Germans, “not really many Turks,” as she put it. She was at pains to make clear that by saying German friends she did not mean those people whose parents are ethnically German, instead, those people whose parents have different ethnicities, and who have grown up in Germany. Later she told me that for a short while she had studied Islamic religious education, where students are trained to become educators in Islamic religion. Those students who were enrolled in this university programme “were all Muslims, of course,” Zeynep emphasised. During this time she came to know some Turkish Sunni Muslims.

Zeynep went on to tell me about an experience she had when she went for a cup of coffee with her new and apparently conservative—as it turned out later—Turkish Sunni Muslim friends. She said they were a small group in which the women outnumbered the men. When they entered the café together, “I will never forget this,” Zeynep commented, there was a free table with two benches. She emphasised that all of her female friends sat on one bench together so that there was no more room on it for her. So she went to sit on the second bench. She was completely unaware that it would cause such a problem and was surprised when, shortly after sitting down, one of the girls sitting on the other bench came up to her to say: “I think it’s better if you sit on the other side [on the bench where all women sat] because the men wanted to sit on this bench.”

Zeynep told me that she became very frustrated when her Turkish Sunni Muslim friend asked her to change seats, and went so far as to say to herself, “I don’t want to have nothing to do with these people.” On the basis of her experiences with those Turkish Sunni Muslims, Zeynep came to a more general conclusion about her classmates, saying: “I couldn't get on with them because they had a too rigid view of religion, for me.” This is a moment of identity construction in which Zeynep differentiates herself from her Turkish Sunni counterparts while ascribing a certain kind definition to them as a whole (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 84).

Zeynep, her anger still palpable, explained to me, “the other bench was fully occupied, it doesn’t really matter so much when he [a man from the group] sits next to me.” She said that the entire situation was, for her, illogical, and she criticised her friend for not being pragmatic. I could sense in her tone of voice how much this situation bothered her; her memory of that day appeared to be filled with disappointment and anger. Nearing the end of her story, Zeynep conceded that she had experienced a certain amount of emotional ambivalence that day. On the one hand, she said she often puts a lot of effort into being tolerant towards people like her Sunni friends who think differently depending on their religions and cultures. On the other hand, she told me that such statements like those of her Sunni friend test the limits of her tolerance. That was the point where she said she was overwhelmed by the situation.

It is important to bear in mind that differences in such matters as dressing, socialising in mixed-gender environments, or alcohol consumption between ʿAlawis and Sunnis become less apparent when those Sunni families are from the educated middle classes and less or non-religious. Similarities between ʿAlawis with these groups of Sunnis in such matters are quite obvious. Sometimes, these similarities may help ʿAlawis and non-conservative Sunnis to come together more easily. The same tendency can also be observed in relations between educated Alevis and Sunnis (Akdemir, 2017, p. 179).

On being Muslim

ʿAlawis largely embrace the idea of being part of Islam and their identity as Muslims. The members of this community even regard themselves as being “complete Muslims,” because their interpretation of Islam involves the combination of ẓāhir (exoteric) and bāṭin (esoteric) aspects (Friedman, 2010, p. 202). However, some of my interviewees have experienced how their self-definition as Muslims may cause conflict with Turkish Sunni Muslims in Germany for whom ʿAlawis are non-Muslims. This stereotypical view is also shared by a great number of Sunni Muslims in Turkey (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 71).

The majority of ʿAlawi youths I interviewed claim that Sunni Muslims see themselves as possessing the legitimate authority to criticise and question ʿAlawis’ belief, as well as the right to categorise them as apart or outside of Islam. This view is shared by some ʿAlawis in Turkey as well (Sarsilmaz, 2017, p. 94). Commenting on ethnic categorisation (also applies to other categorisations) Jenkins points out: “Power and authority are completely basic to how categorization works” (2008b, p. 3). As previously shown in Chapter 1, by virtue

of this authority, in diverse fatwas (legal opinions) Sunni religious leaders have accused ʿAlawis of heresy and condemned them as extremists outside Islam.

In fact, not all Muslim clerics have considered ʿAlawis as heretics. ʿAlawis have been recognised as Muslims in the fatwas of certain religious leaders, although this recognition still remains very controversial in the Islamic world. There are, for example, three important fatwas issued over the course of the 20th century, aimed at strengthening ʿAlawis' integration into the Shiʿi Muslim community (Talhamy, 2010, pp. 185–191), although this decision seems to have been taken for purely political reasons. The first fatwa, issued by Sunni mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni in 1936, marks a critical point in ʿAlawi history, as it recognised them for the first time as Muslims. By means of this fatwa, Hajj Amin, a pan Arabist, probably intended to encourage ʿAlawis to identify with Syrian unity which was under threat from the French imperialist policy of divide and rule (p. 185).

The next two fatwas were written by Ayatollah Hasan Mahdi al-Shirazi in 1972 and by Musa al-Sadr in 1973 who followed a similar rhetoric to Hajj Amin al-Husayni, confirming ʿAlawis as adherents of Shiʿi Islam. These two Shiʿi clerics apparently had a good relationship with Hafiz al-Asad, who became the President of Syria in 1971. Alongside his appointment as President, his subsequent attempts to reduce the influence of Islamic religion caused discontent among Sunni Muslims in Syria, especially among the members of the Muslim Brotherhood who deemed Hafiz al-Asad, due to his confessional ʿAlawi affiliation, a non-Muslim. These two fatwas were announced while authorities were attempting to restore public order in Syria after a period of unrest. Indeed the fatwas could be seen as diplomatic and tactful gestures, which provided a basis for a future ʿAlawi-Shiʿi rapprochement—that is to say, between Syria and Iran (pp. 188–191).

Apart from these fatwas, that were favourable towards the ʿAlawi community, a recent study by Kais Firro (2005), which investigates the transformation of the ʿAlawi community's identity in the 20th century, has revealed that there was a similar effort made by ʿAlawi elites themselves to be accepted as Muslims during the period of the French mandate (1920–1946). In this period in Syria, the French authorities were encountering resistance from ascendent Arab nationalism to their policy of religious separatism. As already shown in Chapter 1, despite the autonomy granted by the French to ʿAlawi areas, ʿAlawi elites were split into two opposing groups: *separatists,* who supported the autonomy of ʿAlawi community and *nationalists,* influenced by Arab nationalism, who, using religious arguments, supported the integration of the ʿAlawi community into a unified Syria (pp. 18–19). An example of this kind of nationalist rhetoric can be found in the proclamation of ʿAlawi

shaykhs from 1926, in which the ʿAlawi community's Muslim faith was sharply emphasised:

> Every ʿAlawī is a Muslim and practices the five pillars of Islam. According to al-sharʿ (the law), every ʿAlawī who does not confess his Islamic faith and rejects the Qurʾān and Muḥammad … is not ʿAlawī … The ʿAlawīs are Shīʿī Muslims … and the Qurʾān is [their] book. (as cited in Firro, 2005, p. 19)

One of the most important figures among nationalists that advocated ʿAlawi' integration into Arab Islam was the ʿAlawi shaykh Sulayman al-Ahmad (d. 1942). In his preachings he emphasised the "pure Arab descent and the genuine Muslim characteristics" of ʿAlawis (p. 20). His following fatwa, published in 1938, shows the extent of his efforts:

> Say that we believe in God. I accept Allah as God, Islam as religion, Muhammad as Prophet and *amīr al-muʾminīn* (the prince of the believers) ʿAlī as *imām*. I have no other religion but Islam … This is what each 'Alawi says and believes. (as cited in Firro, 2005, p. 20)

ʿAlawis continued to propagate their Arab nationalist ideas in the contributions of two ʿAlawi journals, *al-Amani* (established in 1930) and *al-Nahda* (established in 1937). The published articles strongly emphasised the relationship between ʿAlawi and Shiʿi Islam. ʿAlawi shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khayr (d. 1986), for example, is of special interest here because through his writings he sought to disseminate his ideas on the attachment of the ʿAlawi community to Islam. These writings proved influential and inspired other ʿAlawi writers who came after him (pp. 25–27). In one of his articles, entitled "Who are the ʿAlawīs? (*Man hum al-ʿalawīyūn*?)," he wrote, "The Nuṣayrīs, as they were once called, and the ʿAlawīs as they are called now in the period of the [French] occupation, are one of the Muslim sects … They are Imamate Muslims and pure Arabs" (as cited in Firro, 2005, p. 26).

The French mandate period established new economic, social and political systems in Syria (Firro, 2005; Winter, 2016). In the face of nascent Arab nationalism, ʿAlawi clerics and intellectuals had to transform the ʿAlawi religious identity from its heterodox deviation into a truer form of Shiʿi Islam. The evidence reviewed here seems to suggest that being incorporated into the Arab nationalist movement was of huge significance for the future of the ʿAlawi community. To achieve this, the recognition of their Islamic faith by Sunni and Shiʿi clerics was necessary. For that reason, various fatwas and proclamations, as mentioned

before, were published to help ʿAlawis to prove their attachment to Muslim *umma*. Following Brubaker's account of the relationship between difference and the creation of inequality (2015, p. 32), it can be argued that the inequalities ʿAlawis had suffered up until that point may have been caused by their external categorisation as non-Muslim, bound up with their religious difference. Thus, the ʿAlawis' petition for their adherence to the Muslim faith to be recognised was, in part, seen as a way to achieve more political equality. The extent to which the efforts of former ʿAlawi generations have been acknowledged by Sunni Muslim communities is laid bare by personal experiences of ʿAlawi youths documented in the following pages.

Inspired by Jenkins' model of the internal-external dialectic of identification (2008a, p. 42), I suggest that what Sunni Muslims think about ʿAlawis is equally important as what ʿAlawi youths think about themselves. The following anecdotes illustrate how youths' identification as Muslims is open to debate and negotiation. Let me start with the case of Yusuf, a 22-year-old student. He told me a story from his school days which shows how he was denied his Muslim identity. Yusuf told me that he was once forced by his Turkish Sunni Friends to prove his Muslim faith. To test his knowledge of Islamic teachings, his friends asked him to recite the Fatiha (opening chapter of the Qurʾan, in Arabic *Fātiḥa*). In so doing, his friends put themselves in a position of authority to evaluate whether or not he belongs to Islam:

> I was 13 or 14 years old, just before I learned our … [religious teachings], some of my classmates [Turkish Sunni Muslims] came up to me and asked, "come with us, don't you want to come with us to the mosque?"… Or once a friend came up to me and said, "Yusuf! Do you know how to recite the Fatiha?" I said,"I don't know how to recite it," I actually knew how to recite it at that moment, but I didn't want to escalate the situation into a conflict. Following this, my friend said, "How don't you know it?—A Muslim learns it at a very early age," then I said, "it is a little different for us," upon my answer he promptly convicted me and meant "when you can't recite the Fatiha, you are not a Muslim after all!"

Yusuf complained that neither his Turkish Sunni friends nor anyone else can have the right to question his Muslim faith. He repudiated the accusation of his friend, saying: "Only God may decide whether someone is Muslim or not." During our interview, I realised that he found himself caught in a moment of introspection by admitting that it was not until this incident that he started to discern the differences between him and his Turkish Sunni fri-

ends. At this moment, he said, he questioned why he could speak Arabic but his Turkish friends could not. Further questions arose in his mind, such as “How can it be possible that my right to be a Muslim is taken away by another Muslim?” or “Who are we now?” He remarked that these questions had remained unanswered until he went to learn religious teachings. He said only after his initiation into ʿAlawism he had become a self-confident ʿAlawi owning his Muslim identity. He continued to recount that later on he learnt how to defend himself when confronted with such accusations without delving into the details of his ʿAlawiness. In the end, he said, after all these experiences, he began to introduce himself to others as “a mix between Arabic and Turkish.”

The examination of religious belief by Sunnis is apparently not a phenomenon that is only confined to the ʿAlawis in Germany. Sarsilmaz (2017) noted in her study that her female ʿAlawi interviewees in Turkey had similar experiences; many of them complained that they were often questioned by their Sunni counterparts about their Alawi religious identity. It is true that, when compared to ʿAlawi men, Alawi women are in general more lacking in religious knowledge regarding ʿAlawism. And Sarsilmaz found that this situation led ʿAlawi women to have more difficulties in answering questions properly. As a result, Sunnis used the opportunity to accuse them of being “heathens.” She concludes that the majority of her interviewees complained about being incapable of defending their religious faith when interrogated by Sunnis (pp. 101–102). However, there is an inconsistency within the argument that claims that ʿAlawi women are “heathens” due to their lack of knowledge about ʿAlawism. In fact, other Muslims label ʿAlawis as heretics because of their religious system which is considered to be at odds with the prevailing forms of Islam.

Let me now continue with the case of Defne, a 25-year-old student of islamic studies. She also reported to have experienced similar discrimination to Yusuf without referring to any particular case. In our interview she espoused the belief that Sunni Muslims are not authorised to decide about her belonging to Islam. When she believes she is a Muslim or when she is, in her words, “convinced of being a Muslim” then she is one, “nobody can say, no, you are not,” as she put it. For Defne, being a Muslim or feeling like a Muslim seems to be an obvious reality embedded in her everyday life. She simply made it clear to me that her Islamic faith is not an issue that is open to be questioned by other Muslims. She also added that it does not really matter for what Sunnis blame her.

Emre (24, apprentice) facing similar accusations like those mentioned above stated that on one occasion a Turkish Sunni acquaintance had repudiated not only his but all ʿAlawis’ Muslim faith, saying: “you (ʿAlawis) are not Muslims.” Emre said he had fended off these remarks by making a counter-claim, “You Turks! When did you become Muslim? Much la-

ter than us, we, Arab ʿAlawis, became Muslims much earlier, how can you say we are now not Muslims?" With this analysis, he uses an historical perspective[18] to prove the early established Islamic roots of his community while claiming the Islamic faith of Turks to be a later development, as if to say: "less authentic." In so doing, he clearly aims to cast doubt on his Sunni acquaintance's right to question his Muslim identity.

So far we have primarily focused on the attitude of Sunnis towards ʿAlawi religious identity. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there has been little discussion in previous studies about the attitude of ʿAlawis towards the Sunni religious identity. However, some important historical information on this much neglected topic can be obtained from the *Diwan* of al-Khasibi, the manuscript of al-Husayn ibn Hamdan al-Khasibi who is the main founder of the ʿAlawi religious community. Considering his importance for the community; it could be argued that his *Diwan* shaped the Alawi religious tradition to a great extent. In this document, which contains all the religious doctrines of the community, al-Khasibi writes about his rejection of different religious groups, among others, Sunnis. As Yaron Friedman, who was the first scholar to study this document, observes, "concerning their [ʿAlawis'] attitude to the Sunnīs, they follow the Shīʿī hard line of considering them as the nāṣibīs, i.e. enemies of the Imāms." Friedman continues to argue that "this hostility to Sunnism is an echo of the accusations made against the Imāmīs [Twelver Shiʿa]" (2010, pp. 200–202). Similarly, in another ʿAlawi religious book (written by a disciple of al-Khasibi) Friedman noticed further hostility directed towards Sunnis. To this effect, Friedman writes, "For the Nusạyrīs the *nāsịba* [Sunnis] … are the worst of God's creation" (p. 207).

The historical records cited above show us that ʿAlawis were not recognised as Muslims until the first half of the 20th century. But the personal accounts provided by my interviewees suggest that ʿAlawis' struggle for recognition still goes on today and the need to defend themselves against discrimination from other communities persists. The historic narrative that describes ʿAlawis' non-Muslimness seems to dominate the views of some Turkish Sunni Muslims even today. For them, being a proper Muslim is apparently measured by observing certain mandatory practices which Sunni Islam has assigned. And the reason why ʿAlawi youth are not acknowledged as true Muslims by their Turkish Sunni friends and acquaintances is most likely because ʿAlawi youths do not practice Islam exactly as it is prescribed by Sunni Muslims. In short, ʿAlawi youths resist externally imposed labels and are still required to vigorously claim their collective identity as Muslims. Recalling the concept of the internal-external dialectic of identification (Jenkins, 2008a, 2008b) may

[18] It is a subject of debate which community first adopted the Islamic faith but it is beyond the scope of this study.

help us to better understand the relationship between ʿAlawi youths' group identification and their categorisation. This mutual identification has consequences, as Jenkins (2008b) points out:

> Pre-existing established internal definitions may provide a defence against the imposition of external definitions. The experience of categorization may strengthen existing group identity through a process of resistance and reaction. Thus, the experience of being categorized as 'A' may, only apparently paradoxically, contribute to the reinforcement, or even perhaps the formation, of group identity as ‚B'. (p. 59)

The disclosure of ʿAlawi identity

In interaction with Turkish Sunni Muslims, ʿAlawi youths can tell directly that they are ʿAlawis or adumbrate information about their affiliation with ʿAlawism—whether voluntarily or not. Presumably, some Turkish Sunni Muslims can guess ʿAlawis' religious background based on information about their place of origin and ethnic language. Religious accessories are also helpful indicators for Turkish Sunni Muslims to guess ʿAlawis' affiliation with ʿAlawism. My research shows that ʿAlawi youths are more likely to face negative reactions when they reveal their ʿAlawi faith vis-à-vis Turkish Sunni Muslims. Some of my interlocutors told me that they had experienced rejection and discrimination by disclosing their religious affiliation. Drawing on Goffman's concept of Information management and stigma (1963), I examine the experiences of the ʿAlawi youths that arise from their Arab ʿAlawi identification.

One of my interlocutors, Ipek, a 23-year-old university student, told me that a friend once asked her, "Where are you actually from?" Ipek remarked that she and her friend had a good friendship, "everything was going harmoniously" until her friend came up with that unexpected question. She said after she had responded "Hatay" (as mentioned before, ʿAlawi-populated province in Turkey), her friend became uncomfortable and started acting distant towards her. Ipek went on to tell me that, after a moment of observing a perplexed expression on her friend's face, she asked him, "Why, what happened, can't you be a friend of someone with an ʿAlawi background?" She commented that he did not mean that so at all. Ipek admitted she felt the distance between both of them evolving and increasing afterwards, saying, "He probably remembered all prejudices about ʿAlawis."

It was not the only negative experience Ipek had by revealing her ʿAlawi identity, as she told me during our interview. She said when she was a child, she attended an Arabic

course offered at a mosque—which for many Alawi immigrants was often the only way to acquire some Arabic in the past. To Ipek's surprise and embarrassment, the Arabic teacher was well aware of her affiliation with the ʿAlawi religion. How her teacher acquired this information, Ipek did not mention. Once her teacher came and told her that her participation in the Arabic language class in the mosque was not appropriate: "actually, you do not belong here," Ipek recalls her teacher's words. Her teacher's reaction might have been caused by the prejudice that assumes ʿAlawis are unbelievers and not real Muslims.

Later on during our conversation, Ipek admitted that her parents had not told her anything about the difference between ʿAlawis and Sunnis before such incidents happened. Her anecdotes show that the revelation of her religious affiliation put her in difficult situations. What she experienced corroborates the ideas of Goffman (1963) who indicates that by disclosing oneself an individual may transform "his [or her] situation from that of an individual with information to manage to that of an individual with uneasy social situations to manage, from that of a discreditable person to that of a discredited one" (p. 100).

The comparison of my findings with previous studies with respect to the disclosure of one's ʿAlawi faith is limited because up to now far too little attention has been paid to this issue. However, drawing on the personal anecdotes of their interviewees, Procházkas (2010) reported some similar situations for the ʿAlawis in Turkey. Authors demonstrated that Sunni Muslims' discovery of ʿAlawi faith resulted in humiliation and discrimination for some of their interviewees. The anecdote of an ʿAlawi girl that was referred to by the authors shows a close similarity with that of Ipek: The girl, who accidentally spoke about her belonging to the ʿAlawi community in front of her friends, found herself, just like Ipek, being ostracised by her friends (p. 72).

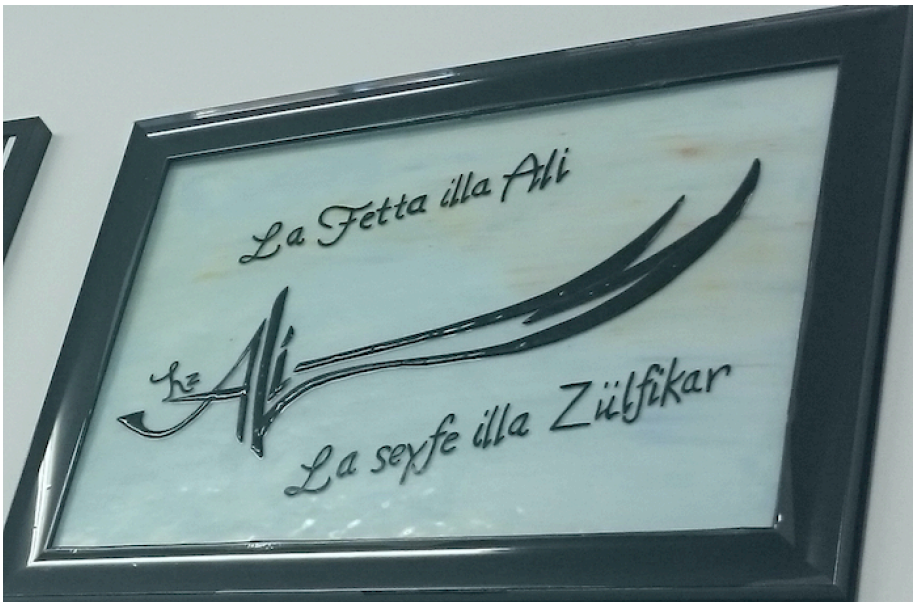
As indicated at the beginning of the discussion, Turkish Sunni Muslims are able to associate someone with ʿAlawism thanks to some visual symbolic cues such as a necklace with a pendant in the shape of Imam ʿAli's sword, known in Turkish as zülfikar. It is a religious accessory used widely by ʿAlawis. The popularity of this necklace among ʿAlawis living in Germany and Turkey was also observed by Prager (2010, p. 44).

To better understand the zülfikar's socioreligious significance today, it is important to recognise its evolutionary interpretation in political and religious contexts. In the Shiʿi tradition, ʿAli's possession of the sword is seen as being evidence for his legitimate entitlement as Prophet Muhammad's true successor (Bellino, 2012). It is thereby clearly representing the political interests of the Shiʿi communities. Today, the sword has gained another political dimension. For example, in the Alevi community it is used as a symbolic means of de-

corating “Alevism’s fight against oppression and inhumanity.” It is further employed to symbolise the assertion of the community’s minority rights (Zimmermann, 2018, p. 171).

In the ʿAlawi religious tradition, zülfikar is seen “as the sword of the apocalyptic revenge” (Friedman, 2010, p. 148). In the contemporary ʿAlawi community, the sword has probably become one of the most popular visual expressions of one’s faith and relation to Shiʿi Islam. It is also a sign of worshipping Imam ʿAli, who appears as a religious emblem in various pictorial formats. For example, in ʿAlawi sanctuaries in Turkey, the walls are often adorned with the hand-painted pictures or posters of Imam ʿAli’s sword zülfikar (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, p. 176). Decorating the walls with the pictures of the zülfikar is also a popular tendency among the ʿAlawi diaspora organisations in Germany (Figure 3.1). During my fieldwork, I also saw a replica of the sword hanging on the wall of an ʿAlawi association (Figure 3.2).

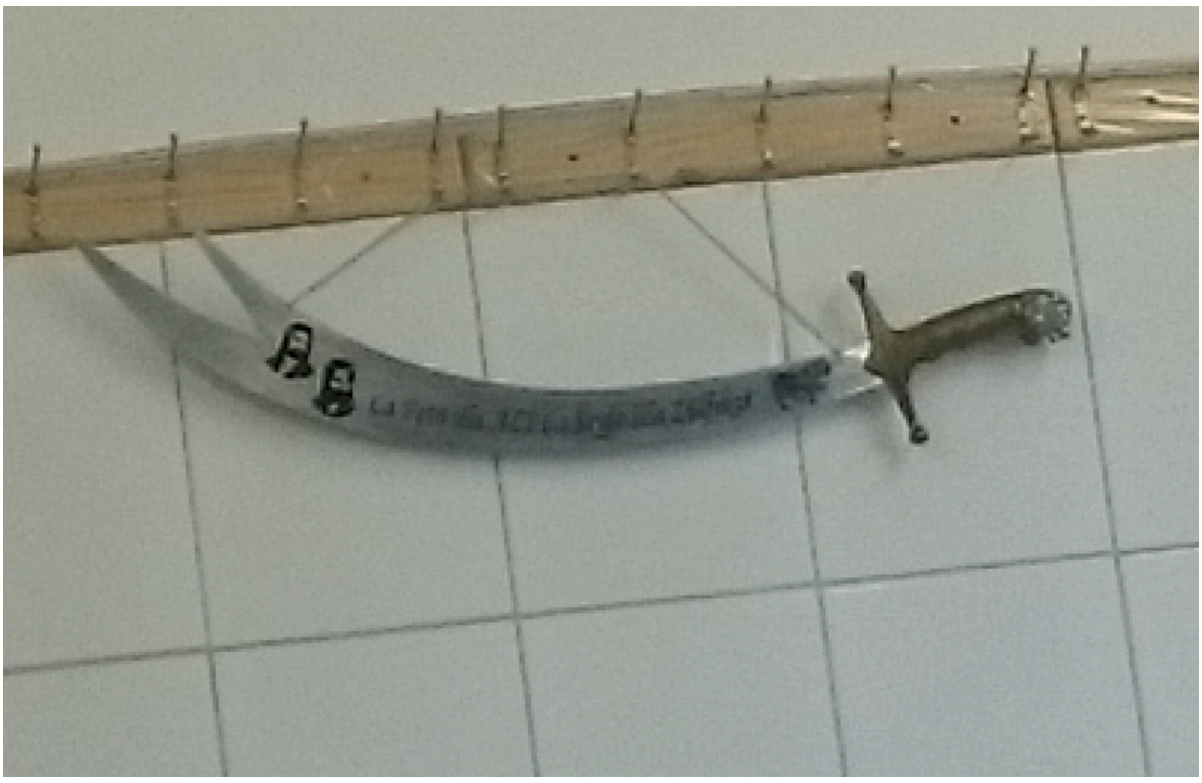
Figure 3.1



Note. The picture of *zülfikar* (Dhu l-Faqar), in an ʿAlawi association, Germany 2018. Over and under the sword is inscribed in the common Turkish transcription of Arabic text with the Prophet’s words announcing “*lā sayf illā Dhū l-Faqār lā fatā illā ʿAlī.”* It means “there is no sword but Dhū l-Faqār and no hero but ʿAlī” (Bellino, 2012). Source: Author.

Returning to our first point in this discussion, a necklace with a pendant adorned with the zülfikar is a religious dress which, as the anthropologist Lynne Hume writes, conveys the information that "the wearer chooses to follow a certain set of ideological or religious principles and practices" (2013, p. 1). In this respect, the message given by zülfikar to others is its emblematic connection to Imam ʿAli and the Shiʿi religious belief system. Hence, the zülfikar's portrayal may serve as an important reminder of the conflict between Shiʿi and Sunni communities, evoking negative images in the eyes of some Sunni Muslims. Suffice to say that material objects illustrating the zülfikar may turn into "stigma symbols." These symbols are, as Goffman (1963*)* describes, "Signs which are especially effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity discrepancy, breaking up what would otherwise be a coherent overall picture, with a consequent reduction in our valuation of the individual" (pp. 43–44).

Figure 3.2



Note. A replica of Imam ʿAli's sword *zülfikar,* in an ʿAlawi association, Germany 2018. *Source: Author*

The comment of my interviewee Salih below illustrates this point clearly. At first I did not notice his necklace, which was adorned with the zülfikar*,* because it was placed under his t-shirt—probably, as a practice of secrecy. When asked whether he had been subject to any negative treatments like discrimination or humiliation on the part of Turkish Sunni Muslims, Salih, a 22-year-old student, proudly showed me his necklace and then went on to say: "I have this necklace now, I never used to wear it , but I've been carrying it for a couple of years now, but it's like, it's really so that I don't even need to do anything to be hated by Sunnis." For Salih, wearing this necklace, which indicates his belonging to Shiʿism in general, is one of the reasons for stigmatisation. He underlined that no matter how sympathetic he could be, he would remain deviant for Turkish Sunni Muslims.

Such disapproval on the basis of one's religious affiliation refers to what Goffman (1963) defines as "tribal stigma of race, nation and religion." This kind of stigmatisation has to do with the previous stigmatisation of one's ancestors, indeed, according to Goffman, it "can be transmitted through lineages" (p. 4). Salih's testimony concurs with this view: "These people [Turkish Sunni Muslims] already have that hate against me, just simply because I was born as ʿAlawi, I am an ʿAlawi and people hate you for what you are."

Some of my other interviewees also wear a necklace decorated with the zülfikar, for example, Deniz, as already mentioned. She was 26 years old at the time I interviewed her and was working as a retail management assistant. She stated that she wears her necklace, everywhere she goes, including in her place of work where she routinely encounters people who have different nationalities and religious affiliations. In the following anecdote she recounts how her necklace puts her in uneasy situations that repeatedly occur when she meets (Türkish) Sunni Muslims:

> I always wear our necklace, so that one can already see that I'm an Alevi [Alawi]. I always feel uncomfortable when now veiled Muslim women come and then see it, because then I realise how they then suddenly behave differently towards me.

Goffman points out that the same signs may convey various messages to two different groups, "the same category being designated but differently characterized" (p. 46). This variety in meaning of the same symbol also applies to the zülfikar*,* which is, on one hand, assessed by Sunnis as the proof of the bearer's affiliation to a community that has deserted the true path; on the other, assessed by ʿAlawis as the proof of the bearer's affiliation to the only true religion.

Despite its stigmatising effect, Deniz said she will carry on wearing her necklace. The same is true for Salih as well. It is probably because wearing a pendant adorned with the zülfikar also leads to positive experiences, like in a social situation where Salih or Deniz are surrounded by similar others (i.e., Alevis or ʿAlawis). In such a surrounding, this religious symbol can relate youths to others, as it affirms their membership of the same community, it simply symbolises togetherness. As I observed during our interviews, demonstrating their ʿAlawi faith by wearing a pendant in the shape of the zülfikar is also what makes Salih and Deniz proud.

Irem, 21 years old, a student of primary education, recounted an anecdote that is similar to the others:

> Once I was at a friend's house, her family is strict Sunni, her mother was wearing a headscarf and stuff like that, and then I sat and dined with them, it had been not really a problem before, but [at this moment] her father looked at me extreme strangely the whole time. It was never like that before, but since I carried the zülfikar, he was, I think, so shocked, somehow he couldn't believe, he stared at me as if I were a different person.

During puberty, Irem said after she had learned more about the particularities of her religious identity, she started to wear the necklace—apparently feeling the need to express her ʿAlawi faith. Wearing such a pendant probably marks the transition from one identity to another. She added to the anecdote above that when visiting her Turkish Sunni friend, she had never worn her necklace before.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that giving information about an ʿAlawi's true religious identity may sometimes increase the risk of them being rejected by Sunni Muslims, thus leading to a breakdown of social relationships. Having negative experiences as a result of revealing one's ʿAlawi identity may force ʿAlawis to conceal their identity and faith. To mitigate the risk of criticism and discrimination, they may adopt various strategies in concealing their identities, as previously delineated in the first section of this chapter.

3.2.2. Identifying as *Arap Alevisi* in interaction with Alevis

Following Jenkins, referring to someone in Turkish as *Arap Alevisi* (pl. *Arap Alevileri*; in English Arab Alevi/Alevis) can be both a nominal and a virtual identification. The nominal

identification indicates the label or "the *name*" of an identity, and the virtual identification signifies "the *experience* of an identity" (2008a, p. 44). Jenkins further suggests that "it is possible for individuals to share the same nominal identity, and for that to mean very different things to them in practice, to have different consequences for their lives, for them to 'do' or 'be' it differently" (p. 44). Jenkins also argues that the experiences of being nominally the same can be situationally variable, adding that the name can remain stable while the experience can change (2008b, p. 171). Viewed from this perspective, the anecdotes in the pages that follow show how ʿAlawi youths, in identifying as Arap Alevileri, had, at times, negative and at others positive individual experiences, while interacting with other Alevis. Their collective name Arap Alevileri remains the same, but it generates different consequences for their lives. Recognising the difference between virtual and nominal helps us explain ʿAlawis' individual experiences constructed out of their collective self-identification as Arap Alevileri (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 100).

"ʿAlawis and Alevis, those are two completely different things"

The collective self-identification as *Alevi* is a particularly salient marker of what ʿAlawi and Alevi communities have in common. Some of my interviewees living in a small city of Bavaria indicated that by virtue of sharing the same name with Alevis, they occasionally came together in the seminar rooms of *Stadtjugendring* (the city youth council). They told me that as an informal youth group they aim at presenting themselves as a united people to the outside world. They noted that at their meetings they usually talk about different topics, but particularly religion. These meetings were for both sides important occasions in which their difference in religious beliefs became experientially salient for the first time. The interesting point here is that, as my interviewees reported, they found themselves in conflict with Alevis when they discovered other Alevis' different views on *being* and *doing* Alevi.

An interviewee Sibel, a 26-year-old student, attending the meetings in Stadtjugendring told me the anecdote of how she had noticed one major difference that, according to her, exists between both communities; the insignificance of the month of Ramadan for Alevis. She said ʿAlawis and Alevis in Stadtjugendring use a common WhatsApp group to stay informed on news about various subjects. And once, on the occasion of the feast Ramadan (Şeker Bayramı in Turkish), Sibel said she posted a message in the group wishing all ʿAlawis and Alevis, "Bayramınız Mübarek olsun!" (May your feast of fast breaking be blessed). She told me that it seemed to her like a good idea to congratulate others be-

cause she had thought that Anatolian Alevis and Arab Alevis must have regarded the month of Ramadan as equally important. Yet, she said her message was not welcomed by everyone in the group: A person with Alevi background felt offended and accused Sibel of being not a real Alevi, as Sibel repeated her words:

> It can't be that someone who loves ʿAli celebrates Ramadan, you are assimilated, you're doing this just to assimilate yourself, that you'll be accepted by Sunnis, that's why. You can't be Alevi if you fast in the month of Ramadan or if you believe in this month.

Along with these words, the Alevi person in question defines the boundaries of her/his community on the basis of the features regarded as characteristics of Alevism. The Alevi faith accordingly does not encompass the celebration of Ramadan. Sibel argued that for her and for the ʿAlawi community, any such notion is considered to be wrong. This experience, she said, had taught her that for Alevis the month of Ramadan does not mean the same as it does for ʿAlawis. Like Sibel, Hüseyin, who also attended the meetings in Stadtjugendring, reported to have had a similar discussion with Alevis. In the course of our conversation, he complained about the lack of respect Alevis had for Ramadan in comparison to ʿAlawis. A few moments later, he went on to say that unlike his Alevi acquaintances, during this month he avoids eating in the company of Sunni friends who fast, though he himself does not fast. He further justified his claim about the significance of Ramadan in the ʿAlawi community by pointing out that ʿAlawis even hold evening prayer on a daily basis during Ramadan.

It is true that the month of Ramadan means predominantly different things to ʿAlawis and Alevis. In most Alevi communities the practice of fasting during this period is not observed but during the Muharram month (the first month of the Islamic year) for twelve days. It is the month of mourning for al-Ḥusayn, the prophet Muḥammad's grandson, and the martyrs of the *Karbalā*' massacre (Dressler, 2008; Kehl-Bodrogi, 1988, p. 223). The fast during Ramadan is in general not practiced among ʿAlawis either, yet this month, in which the Qurʾan was revealed, has a great theological significance for the community. My own observations in İskenderun, just as the study of Procházkas (2010, p. 96) in Cilicia, confirm Hüseyin's statement above about daily evening prayers of ʿAlawis during this month. Besides, based on religious texts, Friedman (2010) explains that in ʿAlawism fasting during Ramadan has a mystical meaning; In addition to refraining from food and drink, ʿAlawi religion also prohibits talking (p. 138). However, he does not explain what this practice means

to the members of the ʿAlawi community. According to my observations in İskenderun, contemporary ʿAlawis do not practice silence during the month of Ramadan.

Another example of difference comes from a group discussion in which my interviewees, who also met Alevis in Stadtjugendring, criticised Alevis for positioning Alevism outside of Islam. These ʿAlawi youths told me that they had started to distance themselves from their Alevi peers after hearing the notions such as "the Qurʾan is not our book and so it's not the way of being an Alevi" or "Alevism is not a religion but a way of life." Such a stance was unacceptable for them, Burak immediately added, because they (Arap Alevileri) regard themselves as Muslims and part of Islam. He noticed that as a result of this anti-Islamic attitude of Alevis, his sense of belonging to Sunnis became stronger. This statement was confirmed by other participants of group discussion as well. They all agreed with the idea that in recognition of their differences with Alevis, their similarities to Sunnis became apparent, as Burak put it:

> When we came together with Alevis, I started to see for the first time how different we are. I didn't know it before, I thought, "they think just like we do", but since then I feel more connected to Sunnis.

It is important to stress that Alevis' collective self-identification is accentuated on the basis of their perceived differences to Sunni Islam which Martin Sökefeld (2008) defines as a "master difference" (p. 94). What it means to be an Alevi in Germany (perhaps also in Turkey), though not completely but partly, is a consequence of what Sunnis have made it mean. In contrast to this Alevi identity, which depicts itself as opposed to Sunni Islam, no matter if located inside or outside the Muslim community, the ʿAlawi self-identification involves, to a certain extent, the acceptance and observance of some basic religious principles of Sunni Islam.

The interviewees remarked that their primary concern became the preservation of their religious boundaries vis-á-vis Alevis during the meetings in Stadtjugendring. Some even claimed to have nothing in common at all with Alevis because of their anti-Islamic attitude. Focusing only on religious distinctiveness led to a greater difficulty for mutual communication to take place between them and their Alevi friends and acquaintances. These youths lapsed into thinking that they must have similar religious practices and theological concepts because they describe themselves in the same way. Being subsumed under the category Alevi erroneously sowed the seeds of confusion and misunderstanding among the

youths of both communities.[19] Their limited knowledge about the history of their religions may have contributed to this perception. However, as explained earlier in Chapter 1, both communities' appropriation of the label Alevi as group identification has different historical trajectories. To repeat, the religious systems of ʿAlawi and Alevi communities are de facto based on completely different rituals and practices even though they in part share the same nominal identity resulting from their similar confessional basis. In the next pages, I continue to discuss ʿAlawi youths' positive experiences as a consequence of being identified as Arap Alevileri.

The establishing of good relations with Alevis

> Up to a point, I also identify myself with Anatolian Alevis because I believe that we Arap Alevileri share many things with them in common. Whenever I met Alevis for the first time, I told them without any worries that I am an Arap Alevisi, and they always welcomed me. Whereas my Turkish Sunni customers stopped coming to my barbershop, for example, after I had told them that I am an Arap Alevisi.
>
> —Mehmet, a Hairdresser in Berlin

As we can see from the quotation above, Mehmet has generally had positive experiences when introducing himself as Arap Alevisi to Alevis, but faced quite negative reactions from Turkish Sunni Muslims. This positive attitude of Alevis towards Mehmet is probably because his self-definition portrays him nominally as a member of the Alevi community, which creates a sense of shared identity.

The quote above is from a conversation with Mehmet during an event organised on the occasion of the International Women's Day in the *cemevi* (Alevi gathering house) of Berlin Alevi community (*Alevitische Gemeinde zu Berlin e.V.*) in March 2018. Among the huge number of Alevis, Mehmet was one of the few ʿAlawis who were present on that day. During the event, we had many opportunities to talk about his personal experiences, religious belief and migration to Germany. Even though he is not a young Adult, Mehmet's experiences can provide us with some important insights on the extent of ʿAlawis' positive relationships with Alevis.

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[19] Unfortunately, such misperception is dominating even today's academic studies, spreading the erroneous idea that both communities belong to same religious tradition and have the same religious faiths (Çelik, 2017, p. 46; Uçar, 2017, p. 133).

Meeting Mehmet at an Alevi event aroused my curiosity to know more about his relationship to Alevis. When asked how he would describe the way in which he feels connected to Alevis, he responded that "my wife is a Zazaki-speaking Alevi." He said they first met in Mersin and later he migrated to Germany for the purpose of family reunification. His relationship to Alevis is not confined only to his marriage as he told me later in the course of our conversation (which occurred in Turkish) that in 2017 he had joined public demonstrations and protest marches on the anniversary of the Sivas massacre (these events are organised annually to mourn the massacre of Alevis in Sivas, Turkey, in 1993). In the city where he lives he also supports an Alevi association of which he is a membership and pays monthly fees. He pointed out that in the association he attends the Alevi ritual ceremonies called *cem*—but only passively watches. Interestingly, he noticed that he is also a member of an ʿAlawi association in the same city. Mehmet is not an exception in this regard, I met a few more ʿAlawis who have memberships in the associations of both communities. After a while, he said that though he teaches his son Arabic and raises him principally in accordance with ʿAlawi religious culture, it is also important to him that his son is taught the particular characteristics and norms of Alevism, in his words, "because my son should also know that he is an Alevi."

To demonstrate further how closely Mehmet feels attached to Alevis, I would like to talk about the encounter Mehmet had with a *dede* (Alevi spiritual leader) which I observed during the aforementioned event. While Mehmet and I were sitting and chatting, a dede entered the assembly room. As Mehmet saw the dede entering the room, he immediately stood up and hurried over to greet him: He kissed his hand and brought it to his own forehead and the dede*,* returned the affection by kissing him very warmly on his cheeks. They talked for a while, and then the dede left. This incident made me question why and how an Alevi religious leader matters to someone with an ʿAlawi background.

In Turkey hand-kissing (*el öpme*) is a widely practiced custom, also among ʿAlawis. It is a demonstration of obeisance to elders. Likewise, when ʿAlawis see their religious spiritual leaders—shaykhs—they often greet them by kissing their hands. Of course, the situation in rituals is different: when a shaykh attends a religious ritual, due to the number of attendees, he often greets them by placing his hand on his chest or raising it towards them. Among Alevis there is also, for example, a special greeting style of a dede during a cem: If a person wants to show respect to the man in his function as a dede, he or she slips on his/her knees towards him during the cem and kisses his shoulders as well as the ground in front of him.

In ʿAlawism, kissing the hand of a shaykh as a greeting is an obligatory display of respect and can be regarded as fulfilling a religious duty. It can also be linked to the spiritual status of this person. That is, by practicing this custom believers can be filled with the emotions of religious faithfulness. Besides, as Parrinder notes: “In the Islamic world, kissing the shoulder, the foot, or, especially, the hand of a holy man is believed to communicate spiritual benefit” (1987/2005, p. 9259). And since Mehmet considers the dede as a holy man, as he explained, “he is like our shaykhs, he is a very wise man,” establishing a tactile contact with him seems to be a way of expressing his spiritual affiliation. Mehmet said he identifies with Alevis but not in terms of religion, as he notes, “my religion is for me private.”

The case of Defne is also a good example in demonstrating the degree of an individualised attachment to Alevis. Defne said she grew up in a small town in the southern part of Germany where many Alevis live. She told me that she meets other Alevis when she attends the Alevi cultural-religious association in her town. She remarked that since she was a child, she has visited the association, among other things, in order to attend *saz* courses, and for events or meetings that have political and historical significance, like *the International Workers’ Day*. Attending the religious ceremony of cem is something she is keen to carry on doing. When asked whether other Alevis in the association know that she is Arap Alevisi, she responded: “Yes, they all know it and it has never caused a problem between us.”

Considering her personal history, it was not surprising when she admitted that her circle of friends at school consisted mostly of Alevis, the same is also true now when she is at university, or that she had a romantic relationship with a young man with a Kurdish Alevi background. Towards the end of this discussion, she explained why she felt such a close connection with Alevis, putting it down to the fact that they (she and other Alevis) had similar experiences as a result of being a minority in Germany.

Another example of positive relationships with Alevis comes from a conversation in which Salih was describing quite similar personal experiences to those of Defne. He said he grew up in a large community composed of ʿAlawi and Alevi families. He added, “we have also an Alevi association in the city where I live and I have some good Alevi friends there.” It is interesting to note that in the first statement he happened to use the word “we” in a way that he explicitly involved himself as a part of this Alevi collective. However he went on to admit that he never attended the meetings in the association.

When asked whether he could further describe his relationship to Alevis, he explained that he was now in a romantic relationship with someone who was Kurdish Alevi. I was cu-

rious whether he talked with his parents about his girlfriend or whether he thought his parents would have any problem were he and his girlfriend to marry, he replied that it was no problem for them, and then added “they even know each other … but I could imagine that my father might prefer someone from us, from Hatay, but he likes my girlfriend very much.” In concluding this discussion, he admitted that compared to his old girlfriends who were of different nationalities, he believes that he and his Alevi girlfriend have a lot of things in common, arguing that it may be because of her Alevi background.

Let me adduce now one last example that that describes the friendship between Ahmet, a Kurdish Alevi from Elbistan, and Bülent, an Arab ʿAlawi from İskenderun. Bülent is a good friend of mine whom I have known for many years. He introduced me to Ahmet almost a year ago. Bülent and Ahmet are both conscious of their different ethnic backgrounds and religions but they do not base their relationship on these themes. In our repeated conversations, they often made these differences the subject of jokes, while the Turkish state’s decision not to recognise their communities minority status became a subject of political discussions. In a casual conversation with both of them, Ahmet stated that their friendship would probably be impossible were they religiously devoted. In a moment of introspection, they both agreed with the statement that sharing the same collective identity as Alevis helped them feel sympathy for each other at the outset of their friendship. They also both suggested that the reason for their strong affinity to one another is due to the fact that they do not practice their religions.

As we observed above, the nominal religious identification as Alevi contributes powerfully to the creation of a sense of connectedness between my interviewees and their Alevi friends and acquaintances. This common designation in part serves as a resource for strengthening the solidarity between them. However, that is not say that sharing the same collective name is the only aspect that can contribute to friendly relationships between the members of each group. This positive attachment for each other appears to be possible, when both sides tend to ignore what distinguishes them from each other. In some cases, it became clear that ʿAlawis’ membership in or intention to visit Alevi associations is rather nominally and not necessarily connected with the observance of Alevi faith. This is exactly the case for Mehmet who can be nominally Alevi at a particular moment and in a particular context without being experientially Alevi. Some believe to share much in common with Alevis but without specifying the similarities they feel exist between both communities.

3.2.3.Conclusions

The different ascriptions of feminine gender-identity in ʿAlawi and Turkish Sunni communities appear to be a source of social conflict between their members. ʿAlawi women's gender-based responsibilities in social and cultural spaces distinguish them from their Turkish Sunni counterparts. For many ʿAlawi women I talked to, the fact that they enjoy more freedom in social life compared to the pious Sunni women represents a deeply embedded cultural contrast between both communities. The sociocultural impact of mutual condemnations between ʿAlawi and pious Sunni women may become a major focus over the course of interaction.

Another point of conflict is related to the ʿAlawis' self-ascription as Muslim which clashes with the Turkish Sunnis' rejection of ʿAlawis as adherents of Islam. This refusal probably harks back to the historical Sunni vilification of ʿAlawis' as non-Muslims. It is an undeniable fact that the ʿAlawi religious identity is associated with pejorative stereotypes evoked in the perspectives of many Sunni Muslims. This section has provided empirical evidence that shows that, even in present-day Turkey and Germany, ʿAlawis may become subject to discrimination and stigmatisation when they reveal information concerning their membership of the ʿAlawi religious community. For that reason, many ʿAlawis may prefer to conceal their religious identity in social situations.

The common self-designation of Turkish ʿAlawis is usually expressed as Arap Alevileri (Arab Alevis). Despite the fact that the term *Alevi* is used as a group identification by several religious communities in Turkey, their appropriation of this name took place in different historical periods and geographical regions (for a historical evolution of the term, see the section *Some remarks on the genealogy of the word ʿAlawi/Alevi* in Chapter 1). Using this term may evoke the sense of sharing similarities, among the members of the Alevi and ʿAlawi communities. However, some of my interlocutors learned through bitter experience how each community has a different theological interpretation of Islam and Muslim life in general. For them, the Alevis' anti-Muslim attitude was reason enough to abstain themselves from affiliating with Alevis.

It would be wrong to portray the relationship between the both communities as constantly strained. This study offers another picture and shows that the members of the two communities can also find common ground on which they can build friendly relationships, solidarity and empathy for each other. The idea that ʿAlawis and Alevis share much in common is partly derived from the narrative of collective past sufferings, same nominal

identification as Alevi, and current political difficulties and problems, which both communities have experienced or still experience.

To conclude, the ʿAlawi youth of Germany (and also Turkey) continuously negotiate their religious self-identifications as Alevi and Muslim in interaction with the members of other communities with which they also feel affiliated. The empirical findings presented in this section show that my interlocutors' acquaintances of Sunni Muslim and Alevi backgrounds tend not to be ready to accept the emic descriptions of ʿAlawis about their Muslimness and Aleviness. Nevertheless, for the purposes of collective political mobilisation, the representatives of ʿAlawi and Alevi organisations struggle for solidarity and cooperation, although the individual relationships between the members of the respective communities may have biased attitudes towards each other.

As has already been mentioned in the previous sections, the ʿAlawi practice of secrecy, which goes hand in hand with the exclusion of women from religious training, has engendered young generations of ʿAlawis to partly forget their religious difference from other ethno-religious communities. Through the strategies of invisibility adopted by the community at large, a generation, especially of women, was raised to have a profound lack of knowledge about its religious and linguistic identity. In the next section, I intend to deal with the ways in which young ʿAlawi women experience their exclusion from religious teachings. A particular focus will be given to women's practice of their religious faith.

3.3. ʿAlawism through women's eyes

The ʿAlawi "practice of secrecy involves a do-not-talk-it proscription" (Bellman, 1984, p. 144). This proscription, grounded in ʿAlawi cosmology and biological differences between men and women, has created the basis for the socio-religious organisation of the community. That is to say, the Turkish ʿAlawi community is divided between those who know the secrets and those who do not. Like many other religious communities, the ʿAlawi community has been built upon a strict gender hierarchy, according to which the extent of women's religious knowledge has been determined by men. Urban (1998) considers the practice of secrecy as "a discursive strategy that transforms a given piece of knowledge into a scarce and precious resource, a valuable commodity, the possession of which in turn bestows status, prestige, or symbolic capital on its owner" (p. 210). The fact that women are devoid of such status, prestige and capital relegates them to a secondary socio-religious role within the ʿAlawi community .

This section is about the exclusion of ʿAlawi women from religious training and active participation in communal rituals. I deal with the theological and sociocultural justifications and reasonings behind this tradition, which has been preserved since the 11th century. I then discuss the multifaceted opinions of my female interlocutors regarding their exclusion from religious education. The second part of this section attempts to review young ʿAlawi women's religious experiences and the extent to which they feel integrated in their religious community. In this context the question arises: If ʿAlawi women are not allowed to learn their religion's secret knowledge, which is necessary for performing individual and communal prayer, how do they practice their religious faith?

3.3.1. The denial of equal access to religious teachings

> In the Nuṣayrī creation myth, women are believed to have been created from the sins of the devils. As such, they can never become believers or participate in the salvific religious rituals of the Nuṣayrī community. The best they can hope for is to be reborn in a future life as men who may then strive to enter the community. (Tendler, 2012, p. 65)

This excerpt is taken from Tendler's study of ʿAlawi initiation in which the author, drawing on various sources concerning ʿAlawi theology, points to the anti-feminine nature of the ʿAlawi religious tradition. It is for this reason that ʿAlawi women are not taught ʿAlawi religious doctrines (2012, p. 65). Indeed, such misogynistic belief is amenable to interpretation as equating women with the devil.

Friedman (2010) similarly adds in a footnote that the anti-woman sentiments are manifested in ʿAlawi religious beliefs. One of the reasons behind the misogynistic representation of women, according to the author, is "the association of women with evil and guile throughout history." It is believed that the rebirth of a man as a woman is a punishment. However, there is still a chance for a woman to gain access to the religious truths of the community and thus deserving salvation. By being pious and obedient, a woman will be reincarnated as a man and therefore can be initiated into the religious community in her next life (p. 166), just as already described in the above quotation from Tendler.

Even though it is not my intent to explore the possible sources of inspiration for the anti-woman sentiments within ʿAlawism, it is worth mentioning Leila Ahmed's (1992) argument, which claims that "misogyny was a distinct ingredient of Mediterranean and eventually Christian thought in the centuries immediately preceding the rise of Islam" (p. 35). One could also argue that the misogyny faced by ʿAlawi women could be understood with reference to its close connection to Arab culture, in which, according to the Tunisian scholar Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (2008), "misogyny constantly recurs as a leitmotif" (p. 119).

However, needless to say that misogynistic thoughts and practices are not only confined to ʿAlawi religion, they can be found in various forms in different cultural traditions and in different time periods around the globe. In his introduction to the study of misogyny, anthropologist David Gilmore (2001) documents "the ubiquity of misogyny" (pp. 2–8) by giving examples of culturally constructed anti-woman attitudes. He goes so far as to argue that antifeminist "feelings appear to be almost universal" (p. 9). Besides, he concludes that the condemnation of women is a common theme appearing in all three major Abrahamic religions, (i.e., Islam, Christianity and Judaism):

> It is Eve, not Adam, who brings about the expulsion from Eden. It is Eve who allows herself to be seduced by the serpent. Weak and gullible, it is Eve … who introduces sin and sorrow into the world. (pp. 4–5)

Even though ʿAlawi women have been denigrated as lower than ʿAlawi men in the cosmology of ʿAlawism and underrepresented in the positions of social and religious power, they are still considered to play a fundamental role in religious matters because women's biological capacity to reproduce is central in the process of one of the primary doctrines of ʿAlawism: the transmigration of souls (Prager, 2016, p. 290), in which "the soul of a dead man passes through the sperm into a woman's womb" (Friedman, 2010, p.

107).[20] Prager (2016), in her study of transmigration among Turkey's ʿAlawis, describes the importance of the women's role in ʿAlawi religion as, "genetrix of bodies" as well as "keeper of souls" (p. 290).

In contrast to the misogynistic rhetoric of the ʿAlawi theological sources, a few academic studies made some laudatory remarks concerning the situation of the ʿAlawi women within their community. For example, in their book of the tradition of saint veneration among ʿAlawis of Cilicia, Procházkas (2010) describe the situation of women as positive, saying: "Alawi womenfolk are treated with great respect" (p. 83). Similarly, Balanche (2015) presents a positive image of ʿAlawi women in Syria. He argues that ʿAlawi female emancipation took place in Syria as a result of modernisation and policies conducted by the Ba'athist regime whose efforts were open-mindedly endorsed by ʿAlawi religious philosophy (pp. 93,105).

What is interesting to note is that the above-mentioned cosmological argument (which can be found in many of the academic works on ʿAlawis) for the exclusion of women from religious initiation is not known to the ʿAlawis I talked to (or they avoided mentioning it). I did not meet any ʿAlawis who were aware of this mythical reasoning embedded in the ʿAlawi cosmology—indeed, many do not know about this cosmology at all. Instead, ʿAlawi youths I interviewed or with whom I was engaged in casual conversations frequently told me about other reasons for which women do not learn the religious secrets: Namely, that men keep secrets from women because women are emotionally weaker and more labile than men and are therefore more likely to reveal these secrets. This is a common line of thought that is taught by parents, grandparents and also religious leaders. In a telling anecdote, the interviewee, Defne, recalls her conversation with a shaykh who argued that "women are not told the secrets for the reason that our community was persecuted and women were not strong enough to keep secrets and could easily and quickly reveal what was hidden."

Another interviewee, Meryem, briefly explained to me, "Men have excluded women from religious education in order to protect them." By this she means the protection of women against the torture of invaders or enemies who might try to force women to reveal secrets. Procházka-Eisl and Procházka (2010) seem to have heard similar reasonings during their fieldwork in Çukurova, Turkey. They found that women's lack of spiritual sufficiency and reliableness was considered to be the reason for their exclusion from religious training. In a footnote, they added the explanation of a shaykh, who says that "it is a well

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[20] Transmigration is known in ʿAlawi religious parlance as *tanāsukh, naskh, naql, radd, karr,* for more information on this, see Friedman, 2010, Chapter 2.

known fact that women are unable to keep secrets" (p. 90). Sarsilmaz (2017), who conducted fieldwork among ʿAlawis of Antakya, also registered similar reasons put forwarded for the exclusion of women:

> Some also claim that women would be more likely to crack under pressure and expose the secret, which plays on gendered notions of weakness. … It is said that women "have a big mouth" and cannot be trusted with the secret. (pp. 87–88)

It is interesting to note that in her study of the Italian secret society of Freemasonry, Mahmud (2014) writes that although women are an integrated part of the community, the issue of their initiation into Freemasonry was still open to discussion at the time when she conducted her fieldwork (p. 15). The following observation from Mahmud has parallels with my own findings regarding ʿAlawis in Germany and Turkey. Apart from cosmological reasons (p. 99), the biological difference between man and woman was adduced by some of Mahmud's interviewees to explain the exclusion of women, that is, "Women cannot keep secrets and would by nature violate the initiation oath" (p. 141).

Young ʿAlawi women I interviewed often hold contrasting opinions about women's exclusion from religious training and performing namaz. While some women were ready to discuss their frustration with this situation, others were content with not performing namaz or actively participating in rituals. Besides, some of my female interlocutors expressed ambivalent feelings towards this custom. Deniz, who displays her religious belonging and identity by wearing a zülfikar*,* is one of those youths who does not see the exclusion as a disadvantage:

> Personally, I don't think that it is bad, what I mean is that there were reasons for the exclusion of women, and it has just remained so until today. But, I don't find it a big disadvantage for women now when they don't actively participate in ritual ceremonies.

For Meryem, an interviewee with whom I was engaged in a long discussion about women's religious life, the exclusion of women from men-only religious spaces is a deeply rooted tradition in the ʿAlawi religious community. She points to the fact that this tradition is central to the practice of rituals. In her view, it does not seem to be tradition that could be easily changed:

> I think it [the exclusion of women from rituals] is part of our culture and our religion that women are excluded from religious training. It would be weird now, I think, if they would participate in rituals now, I don't know, because we used not to. But one can still pray as a woman, the only thing that is denied to us is actually entering collective namaz.

Meryem, like some other young women I interviewed, has ambivalent feelings towards being excluded from the religious community, as she explains in our conversation, "I think it's [a] pity that we are somehow excluded but when you look back at the past, you can explain why it has been so." Ipek formulated similar notions about the exclusion of the women during our discussion. She is one of my female interlocutors who strongly feels involved in her community. The fact that she is excluded from religious training does not mean that she has given up on the pursuit of spiritual growth. However, despite her thorough understanding of the arguments against women's initiation, she says: "It's [a] pity because maybe there are some things in the religious teachings that would also interest me."

Another interviewee, Çiğdem, stated that she accepts and understands the reasons for women's exclusion, yet she is still somehow discontent with this custom. In explaining the rationale behind her discontent, she pointed to the difference between the past and present livings conditions. She underlined the fact that ʿAlawis "live in the 21st century, and things are handled differently now." She added that "the technological developments have changed the world completely." But she still believes that "there is definitely a point behind it [the custom of exclusion]."

An important thing to note is that some youths argued in several group interviews that the affiliation with ʿAlawism or the practice of ʿAlawism should not only be dependent on the knowledge of secret prayers and participation in religious rituals. This view is strikingly similar to that of ʿAlawi women living in Turkey (Sarsilmaz, 2017, p. 92). One of my interlocutors who holds such a view is Mine, a woman in her early twenties at the time we met. In an interview about ʿAlawi women and practicing religion, Mine told me that:

> Undergoing initiation is not the only way to learn about ʿAlawism. A woman is still allowed to learn much about us. … I think, initiation is not the only chance that we have if we want to learn about ʿAlawism. We don't need all these prayers to able to be a religious person.

When our discussion turned to attending namaz, Mine confessed that she does not pray very much. For this reason, it makes her happy to know that male family members already pray in the name of all other female family members during ritual prayers. It is not uncommon that initiated men are expected to pray for their sisters, wives, or daughters during religious rituals.

Of course, no one can be compelled to pray for others but, as I repeatedly noticed, some fathers and mothers generally advise their newly initiated sons to observe this custom. Some men I spoke to view praying for their female family members during religious rituals as part of their religious duty. However, as I was informed by some ʿAlawis, a father, for example, can stop praying for his daughter when she gets married, as from then on it becomes the responsibility of his daughter's husband.

For some of my female interlocutors, reading the Qurʾan appears to be the most important way of acquiring religious knowledge and practicing their faith, given the fact that they are not allowed to learn men's religion. However, according Sibel, a young ʿAlawi woman who was a student when I met her, ʿAlawi women should first develop the ability to understand and interpret the Qurʾan before they consider being initiated. She seems to be firmly convinced that the Qurʾan is the best opportunity that she has to fill her spiritual void, as she explains:

> So, I think, ʿAlawi women actually have the complete religion to study, it is actually open to them, except for a certain part. I think, they should focus on studying Qurʾan. I believe they should rather concentrate on what they are allowed to do … I don't know, I don't feel excluded from my community.

Apart from reading the Qurʾan, there are alternative ways in which ʿAlawi women can express and practice their religious faith. This is the subject I will examine in the next subsection.

However, as already briefly mentioned, the tradition of excluding women from religious training has been criticised by some of my interviewees, especially by Zeynep and Defne. Zeynep frequently stated her scepticism about the pervasiveness of hegemonic masculinity throughout the ʿAlawi religion during our interview. She thinks that gender inequality is deeply embedded within the ʿAlawi secret society. She went to question the rationale behind this historically established tradition of women's exclusion from religious practice:

> I was once told that women gossip too much, I don't know if it's really a necessary condition for their exclusion from initiation. … What I can't understand is if you want your religion to be passed on from generation to generation. … Women are just central, when it comes to pass things on to children.

For my interlocutor, Defne, it is not always easy to tolerate the gender-based exclusion or to understand its reasons adduced by ʿAlawi men. She finds it very hard to accept her marginalisation by her co-religionists only why she is a woman:

> I find it [women's exclusion form initiation] unnecessary meanwhile. But I understand that it used to be like that in the past. I can also understand that it has permeated [the community life]. … I can no longer find any reason why we are not initiated, especially since we are also Arab ʿAlawis, but we don't even know what we believe in, unless you aspire yourself to learn more about your religion.

Towards the end of our discussion about women and the practice of religion, Defne went further in her criticism, and addressed the negative consequences of women's exclusion from religious education. She believes that ʿAlawi women are endowed with a remarkable ignorance that they cannot distinguish the essence of their beliefs from other religious traditions. She continued by complaining about the general passivity of women in religious practices, as she observed on her recent visit in Turkey:

> I'm an Arab ʿAlawi, but if you don't even know what makes you different from others, what your belief is, it's a pity. And I don't know what else [women] practice. I was recently in Turkey. On one side there were men, performing namaz or whatever they were doing, and we, women, sat next to them [but at an enough distance] and someone came to read the Qurʾan and so on, but you don't do anything that has to do with religion.

In the quotation above, Defne frankly underlines her wrath about women's exclusion. She notices that ʿAlawi women have limited opportunities to practise their religious faith during rituals. According to her, the passive listening to recitations from the Qurʾan is the only way for women to participate in ritual. Even though this observation at first seems to be a veracious account, the analysis of casual conversations and interviews with some of my female interlocutors delivers a counterclaim. As will be shown in the following pages,

these interlocutors refuse to accept the condemnation of women as passive participants in religious rituals.

It is not surprising to find that there is a collective frustration among ʿAlawi women in Germany and Turkey concerning their exclusion from the religious training and from active participation in the religious rituals of men. Once again, I will refer to the study of Sarsilmaz (2017) in this respect. During her fieldwork among the Alawi women in Turkey, she noted that the anger and frustration of her female interlocutors about their exclusion were palpable (p. 93). She concluded that most of the interviewees she talked to agreed with the idea that women should be allowed to choose whether to undergo initiation (p. 95).

When asked about the exclusion of women from religious training, most of my male interlocutors made it clear to me that it is a long-held custom and its continuation must be ensured. Only a few were uncertain as to which attitude to follow. They expressed their neutrality about the issue of women's exclusion, as Emre explains, "I wouldn't mind if they [women] would learn it, but I'm not in favour of it either that they learn it." Emre seems to be caught in a double bind between tradition and change. However, it was often pointed out that there are some traditionally established roles in the practice of religion that are ascribed to men and women. These traditional gender roles, according to most of my young male interlocutors, should remain unchanged, as Ibrahim puts it, "We have traditional patterns of gender-role allocation in our community. I think that's a good thing, I think man and woman should be given different roles regardless of what role that is." Some of the youth are inclined to conceive of performing namaz, organising rituals and exercising ritual leadership as being the responsibility of men, while they describe women's responsibilities mainly in terms of serving food and helping for the preparations of rituals.

As has been noted previously, for reasons of theological misogyny embedded in the ʿAlawi cosmology and women's biological difference from men, ʿAlawi women have been formally excluded from religious training, practice, and appointment as religious clerics for centuries. This exclusion is a vital problem for ʿAlawi women from a theological standpoint because the denial of access to initiation and thus the secret teachings precludes women from attaining salvation. Women have to await their reincarnation as men because only men are allowed to learn the esoteric beliefs that are essential for attaining salvation (Tendler, 2012, p. 153; see also Friedman, 2010). In many cases, I noticed that traditional ideas about different gender roles are stubbornly retained, especially by young male interlocutors. On many occasions, I also realised that most of my male and female interlocutors were reluctant to criticise the traditional structures of their religion, because as Yusuf, a young initiated ʿAlawi man, puts it, "A culture must not be questioned." He argues that

the gender-based responsibilities refer to the basic reality of his community whether an ʿAlawi woman accepts it or not.

3.3.2. Women's religious world

> But I don't know what to practice, when you can't attend namaz, you can only pray alone at home.
>
> —Defne, an uninitiated ʿAlawi woman from Germany

This statement underlines one of the negative impacts of women's exclusion. Being excluded from religious training and communal prayer seems to have forced many women to create alternative forms of religious practice. In expressing their religiosities, they manifest various ways of sacralising their everyday lives. For many of the young ʿAlawi women I spoke to, the exoteric practice of ʿAlawi faith has become central to their practice of religion. During my fieldwork, I noticed that the way ʿAlawi women experience collective spirituality is, per se, very different from that of ʿAlawi men. It is because women are bereft of one of the most intense, exciting, or relevant moments of religious practice; namely, participating in intermittently organised collective prayers (namaz). I also found that while women's individual religious practises vary in form from those of men, they are very similar in principle. In this part of the study, my intent is to explore how ʿAlawi women practice and experience their religious faith both collectively and individually.

The recitation of dua

> I tell you how I observe my religion. I recite some short prayers over the course of the day, like in the morning or after taking shower. I always recite Fatiha [the short opening chapter of the Qurʾan] before I eat *hrisi* [a religious food]. That's all I do, and that's how I observe my religion.
>
> — Mine, an uninitiated ʿAlawi woman from Germany

These words were uttered by Mine when asked to describe the way in which she practices her religious faith. It becomes obvious that the recitation of particular prayers throughout the day is central to how Mine practices her religious faith. These prayers can be understood as prayers of invocation to God. Invocation is one of a set of prayers that ʿAlawis (like Sunni Muslims) often perform. In Arabic, it is called *duʿāʾ* and in Turkish *dua.* In fact, there are a variety of short prayers performed in supplication that ʿAlawis practice for different

occasions in everyday life. The practice of dua, as Gardet (2012) notes, is seen as a "prayer of request" and plays an important role in the attainment of spiritual well-being. Dua can be recited regardless of place and time. For believers, practicing dua is an important way of addressing God.

As already mentioned above, For Mine, reciting the prayer of Fatiha before consuming hrisi is a part of her religious life. Hrisi is a traditional and religious food, made from wheat and the meat of sacrificed animals. It is usually prepared for religious rituals and served to all members of the community at the end of a communal prayer but firstly to those who actively participate in the rituals. The preparation and consumption of this food are linked both to a religious and a social ritual. Besides, in cooking and consuming hrisi*,* certain religious regulations must be followed, such as the obligatory recitation of the Fatiha prior to consumption. The preparation of hrisi involves various ritualistic enactments and usually accompanies a joyful socio-religious event. For its preparation, which can start a couple of days prior to the religious feast, some ritual experts come together in order to sacrifice animals accompanied by some prayers and in accordance with the formal religious rulings.

By means of these religious and ritualistic activities, a certain degree of spirituality has been ascribed to cooking and consuming hrisi. Undeniably, hrisi symbolises an important part of ʿAlawi socio-religious life. Following Grimes, it can be defined as a ritual object because it falls into the category of ritual elements as an "edible things, foodstuff" (2014, p. 240). Indeed, by consuming hrisi one can feel involved in the ritual process, even retrospectively. Eating hrisi is clearly related to a ritualised activity. The interlocutor, Meryem, seems to concur with these assessments as she thinks that hrisi is laced with believers' prayers and blessings:

> I wasn't really involved in the preparatory activities. But when my father comes home with hrisi, we all sit together at the table, and after we first pray [reciting Fatiha], we eat that together. But we are also aware of how many people pray about it and everything else. We also appreciate it. So somehow, even though I'm not that involved in rituals, I still always feel good, when I share hrisi with my family.

Meryem has not been actively involved in organising rituals but she still feels part of these rituals by virtue of consuming the religious food hrisi. The obligatory recitation of Fatiha prior to consuming hrisi reminds her (and many others) of the liturgical character of this food and the fact that it is a sacred food.

Returning to Mine, towards the end of our conversation about rituals and ʿAlawi women, she added that she often recites a religious formula to protect herself from accidents and misfortune when she drives a car:

> Every time when I start the car, I recite [the Arabic formula] *Eûzü billâhi mine'ş-şeytâni'r-racîm* [I take refuge with God from the accursed Satan]. I don't think about it … but as long as I start the engine, I always say [this].

Her invocation to God for protection is a part of her daily worship. It is a way of practicing her religious faith. The formula, uttered in Arabic, *aʿūdhu bi'llāhi min* is known as *taʿawwudh* in Islamic parlance and means "I take refuge with God against." The practice of *taʿawwudh* is viewed as a subcategory of dua (Heinrichs, 2012). By the act of speaking dua—short phrases from the Qurʾan—Mine generates the feelings of being connected to her religion. Taken together with what Parkin says about practicing dua in his study of Islamic prayer, we can aptly describe the situation of Mine and many other ʿAlawis: "Invocation in Islam … may be solely or mainly an assertion of faith in God's existence" (2000, p. 5).

Preparing and serving food as a religious activity

For many of the young ʿAlawi women I spoke to, being involved in cooking and serving food during religious rituals has a significantly positive influence on their ritual experience. For some women, it is almost equivalent to taking part in the prayers themselves and provides an opportunity to fulfil their religious obligations and beliefs. An ʿAlawi ritual event involves a set of ritual actions. These actions imply different responsibilities that are allocated based on gender. Regardless of their importance, all responsibilities could be considered essential in the performance of the ritual. ʿAlawi women cooperating in the preparation of rituals can be seen, following Grimes (2014), as "behind-the-scenes actors" who "may be scarcely visible, considered outside the ritual, but … regarded as utterly essential to the ritual" (p. 250). Based on my interviews with a number of ʿAlawi women and my own observations in the field, I am inclined to consider ʿAlawi women as important active ritual participants who do not perform namaz with men but enthusiastically cooperate before, during and after the rituals.

For many of the female interviewees I spoke to, attending religious rituals and engaging in different kinds of assistive work is definitely related to a form of religious practice. The

work mainly involves cooking food, serving food, cleaning, and washing dishes, and taking care of guests. In her study of ʿAlawi women of Antakya, Sarsilmaz (2017) indicated that women's spiritual fulfilment can be strengthened by various activities in which they are involved before and after a ritual (p. 92). In a group discussion, Çiğdem told me that she enjoys helping out during a ritual:

> For example, when we have our most important religious festival, *Gadir Hum*, I almost always go to help to serve hrisi and to socialise with people. I feel very much a part of this religious feast. I also enjoy it, and there, I feel part of this religious community, that's actually enough for me.

Just as serving hrisi to the ritual participants, helping in the kitchen brings Çiğdem into closer contact with her co-believers. In a similar vein, the ritual turns into an occasion in which Çiğdem feels being more involved in the collective practice of her religion.

Participation in the *Ghadir* holiday or in Arabic *ʿĪd al-Ghadīr* holiday has for many ʿAlawis a special significance. It is also a very important festival in the Shiʿi tradition. ʿAlawis in Turkey, Syria and also Germany celebrate this festival every year. *Eid al-Ghadir* is described by ʿAlawis as the religious festival *par excellence*. The *Ghadir* holiday commemorates the event when imam ʿAli was declared by the Prophet Muhammad as his spiritual successor in a place called *Ghadir Khumm,* situated between Mecca and Medina (Amir-Moezzi, 2014).[21] The historical and religious importance of this event is so great that some ʿAlawis I met in Germany told me they had previously travelled to their region of origin to participate in this religious feast.[22] The involvement in preparatory activities during the *Ghadir* holiday is expected and seen as an informal religious duty.

While carrying out my fieldwork in İskenderun, Fulya, an ʿAlawi woman in her early forties with whom I had many long conversations about women and practicing ʿAlawism, told me that cooking for rituals is a way of worshipping God for ʿAlawi women. During my time in İskenderun, it was not uncommon to hear similar notions from young and old ʿAlawi women. Fulya added that by engaging in preparatory work, especially for the *Ghadir*

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[21] There is a further significance of this event that is allegorically described in the ʿAlawi religion, for further information on this significance, see Friedman (2010, p. 156).

[22] ʿAlawi federation of Germany organises the festival of *Ghadir Khumm* every year. Many ʿAlawi organisations participate in this festival where various academics, journalists, writers and religious functionaries are also invited to talk about topics related to ʿAlawism. The relevance of this event also lies in its transformation into a cultural festival where political, historical and social developments of the community are discussed.

holiday, women were able to accumulate religious merit. According to her, because of the great importance given to the *Ghadir* holiday, it is believed that washing the dinner plates of those who participate in the ritual is a meritorious act. In Fulya's view, to wash the cauldron used to cook hrisi is the greatest merit that a woman can acquire on that day. Many other ʿAlawi women commented that by serving hrisi to the ritual participants one would be bestowed with divine merit. Fulya describes this action as an attempt to carry out her religious duties, and she feels that by serving food to men she actually takes part in the ritual.

By preparing and serving food on the day of a ritual, ʿAlawi women intend to create a religious bond with their male co-religionists who perform the ritual, but first of all with their God. The relationship between food, food preparation and religious experience has long been the focus of many anthropological studies. For example, in her analysis of Middle Eastern Jewish women's religious life, anthropologist Susan Sered (1988), claims "cooking as … one aspect of the religious mode that permeates the women's lives" (p. 130). According to her: "The fact that women prepare for holidays means that it is the women who are the ritual experts, the guardians of law and tradition, the ones with the power to *make* or *create* not simply to participate" (p. 135).

Most of my female interlocutors do not regard their non-participation in communal prayer as their exclusion from religion. Performing namaz, in their eyes, is not the only way of practicing the ʿAlawi faith. Personal accounts, gathered during my fieldwork, show that many ʿAlawi women prefer to talk about their integration and involvement before, during, and after religious rituals rather than focusing on why they are not allowed to pray with men during a ritual. Deniz, for instance, is one of my interlocutors who considers that women play a significant role in the successful performance of a ritual:

> The women make a huge contribution [to a religious ritual] by food preparation and organising carefully everything. So I think it [religious ritual] is still a communal thing because without us, the women, the men would have nothing to eat after praying. I don't know exactly why they eat it, but the bottom line is that we also contribute something, we pray not with men, but during the whole namaz, we are also there, so we are not excluded.

According to Deniz, ʿAlawi rituals cannot be conceived of as occasions in which only men are actively engaged. The fact that men gather in a sequestered area hidden from the gaze of uninitiated members and practice ritual prayers does not mean that women are

excluded from the communal activity. Serpil, like Deniz, considers food preparation as a way for women to participate in these rituals. In the following quotation, she describes how she was engaged in different tasks necessary for conducting the ritual at home:

> When we organise namaz [communal prayer], we start with house cleaning, and buying necessary supplies. The most important parts are of course done by my parents or other close relatives but I am involved in everything else, such preparing the food, serving the food, maybe helping others out a bit, and taking care of the guests.

It is an undeniable fact that there are a great deal of household responsibilities that women have to carry out when a ritual takes place at home. Especially preceding the ritual, women feel obliged to thoroughly clean their homes for many hours. Almost every corner of the house is meticulously cleaned and washed. While cleaning, a special attention is paid to the room where the ritual takes place due to the fact that the impending ritual changes the function and very meaning of the space. Indeed, it seems that meticulous cleaning serves to purifying the home.

Serpil, as many of the women I talked to, contributes to the meticulous preparation for these rituals, through cleaning-up, cooking food, or serving food to hungry guests. These are daily household activities but from the perspective of Serpil and some other female interlocutors, these activities seem to turn into ritual activities when they are performed on ritual days in ritual places. This reminds me of Sered's notion of the transition of profane activities into sacred activities. Sered suggests that for Middle Eastern Jewish women, cooking and cleaning during the Passover holiday "become, at least temporarily, honored and sacred rites" (1988, p. 136).

For another interviewee, Sibel, being engaged in the preparations for a religious ritual is essential to her religious experience. Over the course of our conversation, she expressed her great enthusiasm for and the feeling of satisfaction that she derives from helping during rituals:

> So for me it's just like this, for example, when I know that there is a community feast on a particular day and the congregational prayer takes place at 1 p.m., I already go help with preparations the day before the feast day. I help for everything where I can.

Like many of the ʿAlawi women I talked to, Sibel believes that food preparation for religious feasts is part of the ritual, and therefore it is a ritual activity, it is a form of worship.

This idea seems to parallel with what Sered (1994) (in her study of women's religions) says, "In many cultures food is one of the few resources controlled by women, and food indeed plays a central religious role for women crossculturally" (p. 6).

During our conversation about ʿAlawi women's willingness to help out during rituals, my interlocutor, Zeynep, admitted that she had not yet been involved in any kind of ritual preparation. This is because, as she puts it, "There are always so many women who volunteer to help." She suggests that ʿAlawi women are inclined to engage with great enthusiasm in helping prepare for ritual activities, on the grounds that they cannot perform namaz in congregation:

> They [women] want to do something, I think they just feel useless otherwise. You don't really pray there, somehow men are protagonists. And what do women do? "What can we do, what can we do?" I think at that moment it is simply the only thing that they can somehow contribute to. … [Women probably think that] "I have to do something" and that's the only thing they can do. What else do you want to do? And there are always so many who can just help.

It is true that ʿAlawi men are active participants and the main figures in religious rituals. However, many ʿAlawi women I spoke to believe that the contribution of women is very important for the accurate progression of the ritual. Those ʿAlawi women who are actively engaged in the preparation of a ritual are behind-the-scenes actors. For some of my female interlocutors, such involvement in the ritual is a way of practicing their faith. Helping to cook meals and serve food to ritual participants is a means through which ʿAlawi women can establish a connection with their religion. It creates an emotional bond through which they can identify with ʿAlawism.

My interlocutor, Zeynep, was among the few who criticised the auxiliary role of women during rituals. In a similar vein, some other interlocutors stated that ʿAlawi women are only in charge of cooking and serving ritual food (except hrisi, because only initiated men are allowed to cook it). Such claims could serve to simplify ʿAlawi women's religious sentiments and might dangerously place them outside religious life. But, in contrast, as aforementioned findings have shown, many of my interviewees expressed their religiosity by reference to their contributions before, during, and after rituals. They do not feel excluded from the practice of their religion, despite initial impressions. Their personal accounts of their religiosity have pointed out that, on the day of the ritual, cooking and serving are transformed from profane, daily activities into the sacred responsibilities of women. The

consumption of religious foods after the ritual is traditionally anchored in the practice of ʿAlawism and this tradition is only possible to realise when women take part in.

Visiting holy shrines

Another common feature of ʿAlawi women's religious life is pious visitation of the *ziyaret* (pl. *ziyaretler*)—sacred shrines of the saints. It is called *ziyāra* (pl. *ziyārāt*) in Arabic, literally meaning pilgrimage to a holy shrine. The term is also applied to the sanctuary itself (Meri et al., 2012). An ʿAlawi ziyaret is a ritual place, a shrine that is dedicated to a holy person, whether it is a real grave or only a cenotaph. It serves as a site for individual worship, and on specific occasions for collective worship. An ʿAlawi ziyaret may also have a separate room for conducting communal religious rituals. Women and uninitiated boys can be present at the ziyaret, although they are not allowed to be present in the ritual room when the formal communal ritual prayer takes place. However, it is sometimes unavoidable that they can hear or see those men praying. This is especially the case when the praying room or place is not totally covered with walls or a roof. Rituals taking place in a private house may also be audible or visible for the uninitiated.

The ʿAlawi practice of pilgrimage has already attracted interest among some academics from similar disciplines over the last decade. For example, Procházka-Eisl and Procházka (2010), in their ethnographic research, focussed on sacred ʿAlawi sites and their sociological and religious relevance in ʿAlawi daily life in the Cilicia region of Turkey. In this work, they provide an extensive catalogue of ʿAlawi religious sanctuaries and saints in Adana, Mersin, and Tarsus. In 2013, Laila Prager published a paper in which she examines the sacred ʿAlawi sites in Hatay, the province of southern Turkey. In this paper, she exposes the interreligious conflicts between Christians, ʿAlawis, and Sunni Muslims with reference to their respective historical links, dedications and original ownership claims on these sacred sites.

Similarly, Kreinath (2014), details the practice of venerating saints at local pilgrimage sites in Hatay. He touches upon his interlocutors' accounts of healing in their dreams, which took place during their stay at the sanctuary of *Şeyh Yusuf el-Hekim* in Harbiye, Hatay. He describes his interlocutors' virtual encounters with the saints and his own virtual experience during the time he stayed at a pilgrimage site over night.

In another article published in 2019, Kreinath continues to write about the Arab ʿAlawi tradition of the ziyaret in Hatay. But this time, he explicates the ʿAlawi ceremonial practice of tomb and tree venerations in terms of ritual performances. He centres his focus on the

popular pilgrimage site dedicated to the mystical saint *al-Khaḍir* (Turkish, *Hızır*) where a huge white chalk rock can be found inside the sanctuary. Here, his main purpose is to present an analytical tool that should help better understand the function of tomb and tree veneration in the practice of religion. A common feature of all these studies is that the veneration of saints by women at sacred sites receives either little or no attention.

Almost all of the ʿAlawi women I talked to pointed to the importance of visiting saint's tombs (in other words, saint veneration), especially, during a religious holiday.[23] The ziyaretler are considered sacred sites where visitors wish to find solutions for problems or difficulties, or cures for any kind of physical pain. Pilgrimage to sacred shrines is central to ʿAlawi religious life. ʿAlawis visit the sanctuaries of saints to acquire their blessings (in Arabic, *baraka*). During my fieldwork in İskenderun, I observed that men and women, young and old, pious or profane, ʿAlawis from all social classes make pilgrimages to a ziyaret and these pilgrimages can have a variety of purposes. The veneration of saints is believed to be a very meritorious act for the worshippers.

When ʿAlawis enter the pilgrimage sites and shrines, there are some prescriptive enactments to be followed. Upon walking through the door of a pilgrimage site, visitors feel obliged to act in a ritualised way. Visitors perform saint veneration rituals diachronically. Visitors enact a series of ritual gestures and postures during their individual rituals at these pilgrimage sites and shrines. For the efficacy of ritual practice, these ritual acts are completed in a phased sequence. All of the authors referenced above on the whole describe quite similar ritual acts of worship. Procházka-Eisl and Procházka (2010) probably provide the most detailed analysis of the worship rituals at pilgrimage sites in Cilicia (see pages between 194–214). It is important to note that there can be regional variations in the practice of saint veneration between different sanctuaries.

Next, I offer a summary description of the ritual acts of worship I personally observed at different sanctuaries in İskenderun and Arsuz (province of Hatay) over the course of a regular day. These observations were complemented by interviews and informal conservations with ʿAlawis. The visit to a pilgrimage site is often preceded by some preparatory ritualistic activities at home, such as bathing, cleansing the body to achieve physical and spiritual purification (the performance of ablution), and putting on clean clothes on the day

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[23] It is important to note that in addition to the physical pilgrimage, there is also a spiritual pilgrimage that is practiced during the holiday called the night of mid-*Shaʿbān* in the ʿAlawi religious practice. For the metaphorical understanding of the practice of the ziyaret during this holiday, see Bar-Asher and Kofsky, 2002, p. 146; and also Friedman, 2010, pp. 160, 171.

of pilgrimage. Of course, preparations for a visit to a pilgrimage site on the day of a religious festival can vary.

At pilgrimage sites, some ritual actions are strictly adhered to. Before entering shrines, visitors remove their shoes, kiss and touch the left and right sides of doorframes with their foreheads three times and then step over the thresholds of the shrines. The women I talked to stated that they usually recite the Fatiha (the opening chapter of the Qurʾan) when they enter shrines.

Another common practice among visitors is the recitation of the incense prayer (*bahur duası* in Turkish*)*, which is only possible through smelling incense. It is therefore necessary, among other things, for visitors to burn incense. Unfortunately, Kreinath and Procházkas, in their observations of this ritual gesture at sacred shrines seem to have misinterpreted the main purpose of this ritual activity. In contrast to Kreinath's assertion (2014), visitors do not burn incense to "fan themselves with the smoke from the incense burner" (p. 52), nor, as Procházkas (2010) claim, to "fan the smoke into their faces" (p. 196). At first sight, it might seem like visitors burn incense so as to fan themselves with the smoke, as a form of worship, but the real purpose of this ritual act is to recite bahur duası while smelling the incense. ʿAlawis usually recite bahur duası whenever and wherever they smell the incense. These authors might have missed this point if they restricted themselves to strict observations of the pilgrims' acts of worship without enquiring about the nature and purpose of the ritual.

After reciting the incense prayer, visitors may continue their pilgrimage rituals at a shrine by circulating three times around the tomb while kissing Qurʾans placed on the tomb. The tombs of saints are also kissed. It is not uncommon to see visitors rolling marble cylinders (which are available in shrines) on different parts of their bodies where they feel pain. This is believed to cure illnesses. Besides, the sticking of incense onto the walls in sanctuaries is a popular way of making wishes (for more information on this ritual, see Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, pp. 202–203).

During their stay at the sanctuaries, visitors recite different prayers that they know. It seems that Fatiha is the most recited prayer. It is important to note that kissing the objects in shrines is a sign of reverence to the saints. I once heard that kissing the corners of the tombs is indeed an act of greeting the saints. Knotting rags in sacred trees around sanctuaries is also a frequently practiced custom. Some ʿAlawis told me that it is not appropriate to stay in shrines for too long because other visitors may want to come to pray as well. As exiting the shrines, visitors should ensure they walk backwards through doors to

show respect to the saints lying in the shrines. To turn one's back to the saints is considered disrespectful. Before leaving a shrine, the door is kissed three times again.

ʿAlawism has strict menstrual proscriptions that seem to be similar to those of Sunni Islam. For example, it is said that ʿAlawi women are not supposed to enter shrines during their menstruation periods. This is because women need to be in a state of ritual purity—*ṭahāra* (Ibrahim, 2021) during saint veneration rituals. Menstruating women should wait until the end of their menstrual cycle before they are permitted to perform ritual acts of worship again. Early studies of ʿAlawism provide only scarce information on the relationship between the practice of religion and menstruating women. Though to a limited degree, Tendler (2012) touches on the issue of menstruation in her study of ʿAlawi initiation and delivers an interesting esoteric interpretation:

> The Quranic prohibition of having sex with one's wife while she is menstruating found in Quran 2, 222 is interpreted by al-Ṭabarānī [ʿAlawi religious scholar] as an interdiction of teaching students religious secrets if they are not completely honest. For as al-Ṭabarānī writes, "dishonesty is the menstruation of men," and just as a man may not have sex with his wife when she is menstruating, so a sayyid [religious teacher] may not teach his student religious secrets when he is being dishonest. (p. 73)

In her fieldwork in Turkey, Prager (2013) also noticed the prohibition on menstruating women entering shrines. She writes that "Alawi … women would never enter any sacred place during their menses or without a veil" (p. 48). This statement seems to be a normative interpretation of the religious codes. In my view, it would be erroneous to describe ʿAlawi veneration traditions in terms of very strict regulations. It is true in general, that women enter shrines with veils but it is also true that this rule is not always followed by ʿAlawi women. For example, an ʿAlawi woman in her early forties told me that she visited a pilgrimage site with a few female ʿAlawi friends and entered the shrine without a veil. Similarly, Sarsilmaz (2017) presented an anecdote about her female interlocutor who reported to have attended the ziyaret during her menstrual cycle (p. 224).

Taken together, I share the view held by Procházkas (2010), that saint venerations among ʿAlawis are predominantly performed by women (pp. 346–347). I made similar observations during my stay among ʿAlawis in İskenderun. Women's strong interest in visiting pilgrimage sites, both authors suggest, is strongly linked to their exclusion from the religious training and thereby from the religious rituals (p. 347). In my view, such interpretations are imprecise because they overlook ʿAlawi women's personal perceptions of their re-

ligious lives. As the preceding pages have indicated, most women do not agree with the idea that they are excluded from rituals, on the contrary, many women believe to be actively involved in rituals and in their religion in general, by cooking and serving food, as behind-the-scenes actors. In contrast to what Procházkas suggest (p. 347), for my female interlocutors, visiting sanctuaries is not the only way of practicing their religion or fulfilling their spiritual needs.

Some other ways of practicing faith

Given that ʿAlawi women are barred from ʿAlawi religious training, obtaining religious knowledge requires resorting to alternative sources. For example, my interviewee, Deniz, who does not know any Arabic religious prayers, told me, in our conversations about practicing her religion, that she focuses on the central tenets of Islam or the humanism ascribed to ʿAlawism. These aspects play a central role in understanding and practicing her religion. In so doing, she believes that she has adopted the principles of right and wrong behaviour, in her words, "I know what's right and I know what's wrong."

Some of my interlocutors told me that they use certain female Islamic figures as role-models to guide them in practicing their faith. Ipek, a young woman in her early twenties, who describes herself as a devout Muslim, pointed out that she learns a lot by reading the biographies of the women from the Prophet Muhammad's family. Ipek emphasises that she tries to practice her faith in ways these historically important women did in the past:

> For me, I read a lot. I just identify myself with those women from back then such as Fatıma [the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, and the wife of imam ʿAli]. I try to practice my religion the way they did. … I'm learning the biographies of the prophets and other sacred persons.

As already described in the first chapter of this book, ʿAlawi associations offer a variety of educational programs, especially, for their younger members. During one religious education course, which I attended in the city of Cologne, I met Meryem. In our conversation about her religious life, she told me that she regularly attends such educational activities. She explains that attending such courses is a way of practicing her religion:

> Just the fact that I am interested in learning more about it [ʿAlawism], and I come here [the ʿAlawi association] for these [educational] seminars shows my interest [in practicing] my religion. I could also just sit at home and do something else.

The last point to be noted is the reading of the Qurʾan, which represents for many of my interviewees a special place in the practice of their faith. Some young women believe that through studying the Qurʾan, they can learn more about the essence of the ʿAlawi religious teachings. The interlocutor, Sibel, is the best case in point in this regard. She repeatedly told me that she tries to memorise the content of the Qurʾan in Arabic. Even though she cannot read or write in Arabic, she said she can understand the content when it is explained to her by someone else in Arabic. She holds the view that by devoting herself to studying the Qurʾan she could indeed gain intimate knowledge that ostensibly corresponds to the teachings of ʿAlawism: "I have already heard about some stories where people say that it's actually only the Qurʾan, and if you learn it thoroughly you might have a closer understanding of the essence of the hidden secrets."

3.3.3.Conclusions

"I was waiting until everybody went to sleep. While they slept, I prayed like Sunni Muslims. I was praying secretly in my room." This quotation is from a conversation I had with Dünya, a woman now in her late forties, who recalled this story from her teenage years. She said that she had grown up with the notion of "*Kadınlar namaz kılmaz*" (women do not perform namaz). In explaining how her interest in performing namaz grew during her teenage years, she touched on another story. She said that she was a pious young person and wanted to practice her faith like ʿAlawi men. After having observed ʿAlawi men praying in sequestered places a couple of times, she asked her parents how to learn men's religious prayers.

However, it did not take too long until she came to realise that she, as a girl, had only a very limited access to ʿAlawi religious knowledge. The only way of practising her faith, she notes, was learning religious prayers presented in Sunni religious books. One of the most important sources for gaining religious knowledge was a Turkish school book given in *Din Kültürü ve Ahlâk Bilgisi dersi* (Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethics class). Dünya, like some other ʿAlawi women I spoke to, found new ways of practising her religion and fulfilling her spiritual needs through the adoption of Sunni ways of praying. She learned how to pray by imitating Sunni Muslims' bodily actions and formulaic recitations.

In their concluding chapter, Procházka-Eisl and Procházka (2010) suggest, in my view correctly, that the practice of secrecy influenced ʿAlawi women's religious lives by making them vulnerable to Sunnification:

> To the outsider it may seem a paradox that the exclusion of the women from their own religion sometimes leads them away from Alawi "heresy" to Sunni "orthodoxy"; but the exclusion of women from the secrets of their religion has only encouraged them to resort, for lack of alternative, to Sunni practices. Worse, the lack of instruction in their own faith makes Alawi girls vulnerable to indoctrination by the so-called "ethic lessons" of the Turkish schools, in which only Sunni Islam is taught; and we now have heard of cases … where Alawi women have begun to cover their heads. (p. 348)

This section has revealed that most young ʿAlawi men are content with the tradition of exclusion of women from religious education. According to them, the codes of secrecy embedded in the practice of ʿAlawism are part of the communal religious life and should be maintained. Any attempt to change the traditional forms of secrecy, some of them think, would be against the nature of their religion. It became clear to me that almost everyone I talked to about this issue acted carefully so as not to violate the prescription of secrecy, which is considered essential to the ʿAlawi religious culture. However, when asked about their exclusion from religious training, my female interlocutors, to my surprise, appear to be at odds with each other: Some of them wished change in their socio-religious status, some of them advocated the continuation of the tradition of secrecy, and some of them had an ambivalent attitude.

The fact that ʿAlawi women are barred access to religious knowledge is not seen as a reason for a woman to lead a passive religious life. Many young women believe that they have many ways of practicing their faith. In the face of the androcentric nature of ʿAlawi religion, ʿAlawi women have found alternative practices for enhancing their spirituality. Helping to organise a ritual seems to be the most valued religious activity among the women I spoke to. In this section, I have attempted to detail the religious practices of young ʿAlawi women, this has shown how women construct their religious lives and roles within the realm of the culture of secrecy. It has been shown that ʿAlawi women's religious experiences have crossed the boundaries of secrecy. This practice of secrecy overwhelmingly controls how far and how deep an ʿAlawi woman can acquire ʿAlawi religious knowledge.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the ways in which young ʿAlawi women acquire religious knowledge can be similar to those of Sunni women. This is because the

concealment of esoteric knowledge has led ʿAlawi women to pursue an exoteric practice of their religion. Some women focus their interest on alternative religious practices that are similar to those of Sunni women. Yet, this is not to say that they put their faith into practice exactly the same way as Sunni women do, even though there are some overlaps in this respect. But in view of the fact that certain religious knowledge can only be retrieved from the Qurʾan, or from other Islamic religious books, ʿAlawi women's religious practice may coincide with other Muslim believers. In the following section, I will explore how the practice of secrecy is passed on to the next male generation. The focus will be laid on the religious world of my male interlocutors through an examination of their accounts of their initiations into the ʿAlawi religion.

3.4. ʿAlawi youth's initiation from first-person perspectives

> If you seek to *create* highly valued information, i.e. basic sacred truths, you must arrange worship [like ritualised initiations] so that few persons gain access to these truths. (Barth, 1975, p. 217)

For ʿAlawi boys, the only way to enter into the community of elites and to obtain sacred knowledge is to undergo a tripartite initiation. Previous studies on ʿAlawi community have paid much more attention to the ritual texts of initiation than the actual rites of initiation. The only known study that has examined the actual performance of initiation rites is Laila Prager's dissertation from 2010. However, it provides limited information about the ways the rituals are conducted, more akin to an instruction manual; the personal experiences of initiates received no attention.

This study explores, for the first time, the individual narratives of ʿAlawi youths about their initiation experiences. The first subsection is concerned with the issue of decision to undergo initiation. The second deals with the initiations' social and psychological effects on initiates, whereas the last subsection addresses the discussion of infelicities occurred in the process of some initiations and their negative effects on the initiates in question. In this section, I will frequently use the term "*passage narratives*" borrowed from Grimes, to refer to "accounts told by individuals who narrate their experiences of passage" (2000, p. 9). Paying attention to the ʿAlawi youths' interpretations of initiations may help us to better understand the way an actual initiation indeed takes place and what internal and external effects it has on initiates. The primary focus of this section is to bring backstage details into light. By doing this, the social and psychological dimensions that the ʿAlawi initiation creates can be unpacked.

3.4.1. Factors in the decision to undergo initiation

At present, there is much that remains unknown about the events that precede initiation ceremonies. If we step away from abstract descriptions of initiation rites, we find that there is much to talk about. My field notes and ʿAlawi youths' reminiscences describe how before embarking on the journey of initiation various feelings and motivations can arise. In this subsection, I will focus on how young boys are prepared and encouraged by their parents to be initiated and to what extent their parents were involved in the decision-making process prior to undergoing initiation. After that, I will move on to discuss what factors influence the candidates and encourage them to be initiated.

Fathers' initiative

When an ʿAlawi boy reaches the appropriate age for initiation, his father usually takes on the responsibility to prepare him accordingly. In doing so, the initiate's father assumes the primary responsibility as a ritual initiator. This commitment makes him, in my view, one of the most significant defenders of the continuity of the ʿAlawi community's distinctive heritage.

In every stage of the initiation process, the father is on hand to support and guide his son, giving him advice on basically anything. It is worth remembering that the whole series of rites of initiation is funded by the father, who has to pay, among other things, for a sacrificial animal and alms to the shaykh. The mother of the initiate may also step in to replace the father on some occasions, especially when he has serious health problems or is deceased.

Among the ʿAlawis in İskenderun, I noticed that fathers coming from shaykh families give much more importance to initiating their sons than those who do not belong to a shaykh family. Since shaykhs are regarded as religious dignitaries, it is taken for granted that their family members take on more responsibility for their actions than the rest of the community. The family members are often reminded that they are seen by others as an example to look up to. Therefore, the non-observance of such an important religious tradition would most likely damage the reputation of the family of a shaykh.

Murat, who is a grandson of a shaykh and a father to twenty-one-year-old Ümit, immigrated from İskenderun to Germany more than 20 years ago. Referring to his family background, he stated that he feels morally and religiously bound to ʿAlawi initiation traditions. He told me, his son's initiation took place in İskenderun five years ago. I asked him what the initiation of his son meant to him, he replied:

> It was my most religious duty as a person descended from a shaykh family and I just accomplished my task: I led my son towards the religious path [of ʿAlawism], I opened the spiritual way between God and my son.

He was keen to make it clear to me that he offered his son a faith that would accompany him throughout his life. In a state of contentment (achieved by the fulfilment of the requirement of initiating his son), he stressed that from now on, it is up to his son whether to perform the ritual prayers or not.

Most fathers see it as their duty to accompany their sons on their spiritual quest and, thus, to prepare them to assume their new social and religious responsibilities in the

community and the family. In İskenderun, I observed that some fathers found an effective way to inform their sons of the rites of initiation, without violating the principle of taqiya. They would take their uninitiated sons (who were in adolescence) to the sacred site ziyaret on a day of a religious feast or when an initiation ritual was organised for another boy. By bringing their sons to the ziyaret on such an occasion, fathers aimed to cultivate their sons' sensibility and awareness for the initiation. In the following quote, Murat explains this process:

> When we went to Turkey [İskenderun] for the summer holidays, I always took my son with me when I went to participate in the rites of initiations of the other youths. It was a good occasion to explain the significance of this tradition to my son. I told him that he would attend the religious rituals with us [initiated men] after completing his own initiation. I emphasised that performing namaz is a necessary step in becoming a man.

What is interesting in this quote is that Murat regards performing namaz as a part of the process of maturing from adolescence to manhood. From this statement, manhood can be understood less as a physiological development and more as something that is formed socially, as Bell (1997) points out, "many initiation rites do not neatly coincide with the hormonal changes that usher in fertility and young adulthood" (p. 94). I also talked to Murat's son, Ümit, about his experiences of visiting the ziyaret with his father prior to his initiation. His account of his attendance of religious events in the ziyaret shows how his intention to be initiated was galvanised by these experiences:

> When I was in a ziyaret, I had to stay with other kids, some of whom were much younger than me, while the initiated men, my father, uncle and other relatives went for namaz. And when I was sixteen years old, I didn't want sit there anymore with other kids, I didn't want to be excluded anymore from namaz. The idea of being together with the initiated men in a namaz was exciting.

In spontaneous conversations with some fathers, and through my own observations, I came to learn that recounting their experiences of their own initiations is another way to convey information to young boys about the rites of initiation. These stories often served to emphasise the importance of initiation by promoting a positive imagery around it. A central topic in these accounts is the spiritual strength which is believed to be provided

through learning sacred knowledge and performing namaz alone or in community with other believers.

Initiation is seen as a challenge involving unknown ritual enactments and outcomes. Such uncertainty can produce fear and resistance among the adolescent candidates. For some fathers, preparing their sons both mentally and emotionally for the forthcoming initiation is an important part of helping them to develop confidence and motivation for initiation. Bringing their sons to the ritual events and telling them stories about their own passages are a means of creating a positive emotional connection with initiation.

Social pressure

Going through the rites of initiation seems to be about performing one's imperative duty to his community but particularly to his family. One assumption, often made by members of the ʿAlawi community, is that every adolescent must be eager to undergo initiation. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find that parents very seldom ask their sons whether they want to be initiated or not. In our interview, Ümit stressed that he was not asked by his father whether he wanted to be initiated, for him, undergoing initiation was not something to be negotiated. He knew one day he had to be ready for this process, saying, "It was for me obvious that I would do it, it was entirely to be expected that I would go with my father to namaz in the future. I hadn't thought about not undergoing initiation."

Compared to Ümit, when we look at the case of Hüseyin, we see that his parents allowed him to decide whether to learn the ʿAlawi religious knowledge. Even though he points out in the following quote that his initiation was a matter of personal choice, the influence of his parents and others is apparent:

> When you reach the age of 14 or 15 years, you voluntarily do it [initiation] but the parents want that from you too, so they say "do you want to learn it?" and you say "yes," because you don't want to disappoint your parents either, and with 14, 15 years of age, I couldn't identify myself with the faith, I also say openly and honestly, I wanted to learn it because everyone [all those men in the community] learned it, because it is a privilege to learn it.

Hüseyin, the interviewee quoted above, shared these thoughts in a group discussion in which he and two other interviewees described their personal experiences of initiation. The description above shows that Hüseyin's parents played an important part in his decision to undertake the rites of initiation. Because, as he explains, if he had decided not to

be initiated, he feared this decision might have disappointed his parents. His parents clearly wanted him to be initiated and managed to express their wish somewhat indirectly.

We can also glean from the comments above that Hüseyin had difficulties in establishing emotional bonds to the ʿAlawi religion before he undertook the initiation process. He suggests that what motivated to be initiated was not his faith in religion but rather the fact that the observance of initiation is a religious custom which each man in the community must practice. His lack of religious identification with ʿAlawism prior to this period of religious education can be linked to the principle of taqiya. This religious imperative limits the amount of information on the ʿAlawi religion provided to the uninitiated.

The following quote is an excerpt from an interview in which Salih recounted how, upon reaching the appropriate age, his uncle pressured him to undergo the rites of initiation:

> My uncle, "come on, do it [initiation]," he made jokes like that, the pressure was definitely there, started at age of 16, with the words such as "eyy come on, you better think about it [initiation], choose someone [a religious mentor]," between the ages of 18 and 19 years I then did it, and before that time the topic was often there.

In the course of our conversation about the process leading up to his initiation, Salih implied that his father did not ask him about his intentions regarding initiation. He added that he knew it was important for his father that he would undergo the initiation, in part, to ensure that he would not forget his culture. And, according to Salih, because his father is a person who closely follows the old ways.

It is interesting to note that Salih was 19 years old, when he underwent the last initiation ritual. This seems to be a relatively mature age to end the initiation process, especially if we compare it to the normal age of initiation in the Hatay region, which can vary from thirteen to sixteen years of age. There are different reasons why youths living in Germany undergo initiation at a later age than their contemporaries in Turkey. One major reason is probably the lack of proficiency in the Turkish language. I noticed that some parents prefer to initiate their sons when they are between 16 and 18 years of age. By doing this, they allow their sons more time to improve their Turkish language skills before beginning the initiation process.

In reality young ʿAlawi boys play a relatively passive role in the decision making process regarding initiation. They are not usually asked whether they want to undergo initiation because observing the tradition of initiation is not a matter of individual choice and volition. In general, they are expected to demonstrate submission and obedience to the authority

of their parents and thus to their culture. For most parents, I assume, it does not make sense to expect boys to make an independent decision, considering the fact that they are young and ignorant about the principles of the religion.

Personal experiences

An important point to bear in mind, is that some of my interviewees talked about their strong willingness to learn the secret knowledge and to be a part of the male religious community, when they were approaching the age of initiation. Yusuf, for example, told me that in his adolescence he was yearning to be initiated. He stressed the fact that he was looking forward to the day when his initiation would take place, in our conversation he remarked: “the entire time something was missing, until my initiation there was always a question mark in my head about who we really are.”

The same enthusiasm for initiation was shared by another interviewee, Ibrahim. During our discussion about the process of his initiation, he made the point that when he was younger, his impatience to start his initiation was recognised by older men and they had to settle him down by saying: “wait wait you will get, you will get it!” Yusuf and Ibrahim both informed me, independently, that during this period they had many questions regarding their community of faith but unfortunately they only received incomplete answers or sometimes no answers at all.

When Yusuf talked about his background over the course of our interview, he explained how he grew up in Berlin in a multicultural environment. As an adolescent he had many Sunni friends from different ethnic groups. He told me that during this time he was asked provocative questions by his Muslim friends about his religious knowledge and identity. He said he had difficulties answering the questions and defending himself because of his lack of knowledge about his religion. This situation often put him in unpleasant situations.

I tend to believe that these negative experiences, stemming from those encounters with Sunni youths, made Yusuf feel a strong need to identify with ʿAlawi religion. Consequently, his wish to know more about his religious beliefs was amplified, just as his willingness for initiation was enhanced. Because he knew that his access to religious knowledge—and his entry into the religious membership—was only possible through his initiation. And knowing that exclusion from his religion would finally come to an end by undergoing initiation appears to be a major contributor to his eagerness and willingness for initiation. He admitted that questions about where and what he belonged to were of paramount importance.

As has already been touched upon, undergoing initiation is not only about one's self-determination, the influence of one's family members is to be counted as a decisive factor in this regard. But it is by no means an exaggeration to state that some boys tend be more eager and willing to undergo initiation than others. A strong willingness for initiation may be the consequence of one's life experiences, like in the case of Yusuf. It should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that the degree of one's religious identification and his social environment may similarly play an important role in establishing willingness for initiation.

Before concluding this subsection, it is worth looking into the theoretical descriptions of the rites of initiation, which offer an interesting perspective on novices' willingness for initiation. Tendler, in her study of ʿAlawi religious books referring to the tradition of initiation, pointed out that during different stages of his initiation a novice is expected to declare his wish to choose his own sayyid[24] (a religious mentor) and to be initiated. She stresses the importance that the request for initiation must be submitted by the initiate because starting an initiation process is seen as a strenuous journey. And therefore, it requires the initiate's conscious act of volition (2012, pp. 126, 131–132). However, today, such a procedure is rarely observed in the actual rites of initiation in İskenderun. In addition, Tendler's study makes no attempt to determine whether a novice is allowed to decide of his own accord to go through the initiation or not, before any kind of ritual activities are started. In the next subsection, I will trace the development of the positive effects of successful initiation.

3.4.2. The affirmation of manhood and community membership

"You passed the test. You get a kind of recognition from society: Yes, now you've made it, now you're grown up, now you're a real man, who is independent." It is to be noted that when asked about their personal experiences after having completed their initiations, the majority of the interviewees, first of all, emphasised the importance of attaining their manhood. The entry into the community as full-fledged member seems to be secondary in importance. Among the youths I interviewed, the initiation both refers to the ritualisation of their memberships into the sacred community and the ritualisation of their manhoods.

This is a manhood that David Gilmore (1990), author of *Manhood in the Making,* describes as "the approved way of being an adult male" (p. 1). It is about the social experience of being affirmed as manly. It is not regarded as the result of the process of natural maturing, but as "a matter of socially orchestrated training that is learned and mastered despite

[24] In the performance of actual rites, as already noted in Chapter 1, the arrangement of a sayyid should already be completed before starting the rituals of initiation.

difficult obstacles" (Bell, 1997, p. 101). From this point of view, the manhood in the ʿAlawi society can be interpreted as something that a boy does not spontaneously arrive at.

In a similar vein, Gilmore writes that this manhood "is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds" (1990, p. 11). In his analysis of different cultural descriptions and constructions of manhood, Gilmore noticed one common feature which continuously reappears in many cultures, that "real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness" (p. 11). This is also a feature of manhood in the ʿAlawi community. It seems that the transition from boyhood to manhood is to be achieved by way of initiation.

It is undoubtedly the case that the completion of ʿAlawi rites of passage symbolises for some initiates their exit from childhood and admission into male adulthood. It is important to reiterate that initiates' experiences of manhood amount to a social manhood and not a physical one. In line with my own observations, the examination of their passage narratives makes clear that the patterns of manhood are culturally constructed. For an ʿAlawi boy to become an adult male, he requires in this respect much more than just the physical characteristics typical of men. Bell similarly proposes such a viewpoint in her analysis of rites of passage, "the appearance of facial hair … does not make someone an adult; only the community confers that recognition, and it does so in its own time" (1997, p. 94). Some interviewees' passage narratives agree with this image of manhood.

A young ʿAlawi boy who completes his initiation proves his manhood and is worthy of asserting himself as an adult man. But merely claiming to have become a man after initiation is not enough to constitute such an identity. It is apparently necessary that his co-religionists should recognise his manhood. Ibrahim's experience, stemming from his encounter with his uncles after returning from his religious education, exemplifies this situation clearly. This is a moment of the affirmation of his adulthood:

> In a short time, it [initiation] made me very adult, I felt it so in the reactions of my uncles towards me. My relationship towards them has changed to a great extent. And the other way around, yes, they started seeing me differently after hearing what I did … It was like a big step into adulthood.

In this quotation we can see that the ways in which Ibrahim's uncles welcomed him can be construed as the hallmark of the change in his status. Here again, the internal-external dialectic of identification is at stake (Jenkins, 2008a). The external recognition or affirmation of an initiate as a man serves as a means by which he may identify himself as such. It

shapes the patterns of internal identification as a man, as is also evident in the case of Yusuf:

> After having learned the secret knowledge, one did not only see oneself as a man, but one was also recognised by others as a man. And this [public] acknowledgement was something quite important. It gave you the feeling that you have become a man yourself.

Drawing on Jenkins' arguments, it is possible to suppose that ʿAlawi initiation rituals have an important role in reinforcing an initiate's internal identification with the ʿAlawi community. It is through initiation that a new member and old members come together to share a sense of community. While an initiate's new identification is being generated and affirmed within the initiation process, he may begin to renounce his old identities. Van Gennep's threefold model of passage (1909/1960), as previously discussed, can describe this change very well: "separation weakens existing internal self-identification(s); during transition the new identity is introduced 'from outside' and dramatised; incorporation affirms and strengthens the new identification" (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 175).

The following two accounts demonstrate the effects of the transition and incorporation stages on the formation of new identity. The first is an excerpt from the conversation with Ibrahim about his experiences of passage. It demonstrates how he learned to experience himself in the course of the transition phase (which, as indicated at the onset of this section, refers to the education period). He stressed that spending days in isolation from normal life had influenced him emotionally and cognitively. His experience of being in the time of isolation, away from familiar domestic environments, he believes, helped him to generate his new identity as an adult man:

> During the intensive learning period, I was taken away from my normal life, not permitted to practice my conventional daily routines, and had the chance to look at my life from above, and this made me definitely very adult, you feel that you have become an adult. In a short time, it made me feel very adult.

The second excerpt is taken from an interview with Hüseyin, in which he recounted his time after returning from completing his obligatory religious task. He talks about the effects of the first religious ritual in which he participated and then goes on to describe the

warm and enthusiastic reception of his family. As we can see in the quote below, his grandfather's affirmative reactions in particular infused him with positive emotions:

> After I had learned it [religious knowledge], I went to namaz and then I noticed, "Ok, I belong to your community" because they accept how you are, I just became a part of it. After completing initiation, I came back and then the whole family was … but especially my grandpa looked at me and I saw the whole pride in the look of my grandpa and I thought myself, "Wow, I must have accomplished something really nice," and I found it really cool.

These anecdotes point to the transformative power of the incorporation phase in which others bestow the community membership on Hüseyin and then verify and celebrate it. There can be little doubt that his attendance at the collective practice of religious prayers has strengthened his internal identification as a member of his community.

Just before I ended the discussion with Hüseyin about his passage narratives, it surprised me to hear him say hat he had experienced some physical alterations in the course of his learning phase: "I believe I stayed at my uncle's [religious teacher's] house for three weeks and it felt like I grew 10 cm during that time." While it is unlikely that he grew 10 cm in such a short time, it is important to remember that Hüseyin's experience of physical change distinctly reflects the postulated mystical dimension and magical power of his initiation.

An ʿAlawi boy's admission into the community through undergoing an initiation is what Jenkins refers to as "ritualised affirmation of ascriptive identity" (p. 175). Only by means of this admission does an initiate's transition from passive to active community membership gradually begin to transpire. This is presumably best experienced in a ritual event where the believers share their joy of gathering and praying together. The psychological and social benefits of such an active membership cannot be ignored. Recounting his first active participation in an initiation ritual, Cihan indicates these benefits in the below excerpt:

> The first time when I attended a namaz, it was an initiation ritual organised for an acquaintance who would also learn the prayers. I was just happy to be able to pray with others in the ritual room for this young boy that he can learn the prayers too. In such a moment, you feel like being united with your co-religionists as a community, you are part of it, you do something for others and I think it's something special.

The practice of ʿAlawi initiation does not, as in the conventional rites of passage, test the boys' virility by shows of toughness, physical strength, courageous or boldness (Gilmore, 1990, pp. 9–20). In ʿAlawi initiation, the candidates must prove, rather, that they are amenable to learning, practicing and protecting the secret truths. ʿAlawi initiation generates a reborn pious individual who is made responsible for the continuation of the community's sacred tradition and religious existence.

An initiated boy's proclamation of becoming an adult man as a result of completing initiation is linked to his admission into the male community in which "an individual's gender becomes interactionally real in large part because of … [his] membership … [to this] collective category" (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 83). This observation corresponds with another feature of the ʿAlawi initiation practice, namely its function of attributing maleness to the initiates. The gendering effect of initiation has already been observed by anthropologists in the previous studies on the male initiation rituals. Regarding the male initiation ritual of the Bimin-Kuskusmin of the West Sepik interior of Papua New Guinea, Cohen, in his study of social identity, concludes that, "[t]he ritual retrieves the boys from the female domain, and places them firmly in the male domain, definitively gendering them" (1994, p. 58).

Those initiates who declare their manhoods after their initiations do so because they are integrated in the religious and social traditions of men. The acts of gathering, praying, and socialising together before, during and after a ritual in a space from which women are excluded seem to reinforce the notion of manhood. This resembles what Ümit also said to have experienced after concluding initiation: "I felt more grown up, I felt as an adult male because I can go now with my father to such religious events." In this narrative the link between the assertion of manliness and the assignment of community membership becomes apparent. ʿAlawi initiation marks and enhances the differences between the masculine and feminine identities.

3.4.3. Deviations and mishaps in initiations

> Engaging in ritual criticism presupposes that rites can exploit, denigrate, or simply not do what people claim they do. (Grimes, 2010, p. 183)

When an initiation fails to achieve its postulated effects, its efficacy may be called into question by the persons involved. The initiations of Ümit, Salih, Hakan, and Ekrem are cases in point. Their passage narratives deal with a variety of shortcomings that they experienced during their education periods. Ümit and Salih frankly admitted to having inter-

rupted their religious educations without memorising all of their prayers. Hakan and Ekrem complained that they did not understand what they were being taught in the course of their educations. The central focus of this subsection is therefore to determine what went wrong with these initiations, why, and what arose as a result.

The interruption of education period

Ümit and Salih, as mentioned, interrupted and postponed their spiritual trainings. This means that the most important part of their initiations was not completed: They left their teachers' homes without having completely learnt the religious prayers. Ümit reported that he brought his education to a halt until he traveled back to Germany and then resumed it in his parents' home. There, he finally entirely memorised all of the religious prayers.

In an attempt to explain to me why he could not finish learning the prayers in the house of his religious teacher, where he only could stay for five days, he said that it was because his stay was during the summer holiday. He said this is his only opportunity to spend time with all of his family members together in the summer house. Later in our conversation, he told me that he is always overjoyed to go to Turkey and see his relatives. He described having looked forward to spending time with his aunts whom he had not seen for a year, lamenting the fact that he only had limited time to share his school holidays with his family. Instead, in the height of summer, when the temperatures reached above 35°C, he "had to sit at home and memorise hardly understandable Arabic prayers."

I perceived in his changing tone of voice an increasing rejection of the situation in which he found himself during that time and a corresponding restlessness. As a result, he talked about having difficulties in concentrating on memorising the prayers. According to his father, one problem was that Ümit did not know his religious mentor, in whose house he was staying, very well because they had not met very often before. This, his father proposed, contributed to him feeling less comfortable staying there. These external challenges, apparently, prevented him from keeping his focus on studying.

The agreement between Ümit, his father and his teacher to interrupt Ümit's religious education is a deviation from the normal procedure of initiation. This, however, did not prevent the eventual completion of the initiation. Ümit's father told me that they carried out the last phase: a small feast was organised to announce the successful conclusion of the initiation. Following tradition, the family of the teacher and that of Ümit gathered together to celebrate the official ending of Ümit's initiation.

The initiation of Ümit into the community went on to conclusion unaffected by the interruption of his education. It is interesting to note that breaking off the education phase did not harm the success of his initiation. Although it almost led to a failure, neither Ümit nor his father addressed the interruption of initiation in such terms. However, since it is considered to be a misfortune and an unforeseen contingency, Ümit said he usually prefers to keep silent about what happened for fear of this being made known to others. This is probably motivated by the consequence that, just like forgoing an initiation, interrupting it is considered a shameful situation for the initiate and his family in question. Ümit may avoid talking about the interruption of his education in order to protect his family's respect and their social position as *proper ʿAlawis* in the community. One can suppose that there may be a number of initiates who interrupted their initiation and choose not to disclose this to others.

When asked to reflect on the efficacy of his initiation, Ümit remarked that he did not experience any spiritual development as a result of his studies. On one occasion, he said he found it impossible to agree with the ʿAlawi religion's traditional rhetoric for explaining certain worldly phenomena. The mythological stories, he said, told to him by his religious mentor during his education, became a source of controversy within him. The religious worldview of ʿAlawi culture holding the authority of the past, he remarked, challenges what he has already learned in the modern Western education system in Germany. He argued that today's scientific developments as well as the modern way of life in Germany mitigate his ability to relate to the content of his studies:

> It was difficult, how should I put it, to internalise it [the prayers] or share the feelings of other believers. I think the problem is that I simply live in Germany, and I am not confronted with it [ʿAlawism] that intensely, I also have the problem to really get involved with it.

Not being confronted with ʿAlawism, as Ümit explained, refers to his infrequent attendance at religious rituals. Importantly, he reported having very little opportunities to participate in religious rituals in Germany, adding that he attended rituals a couple of times in Germany and up to three times in Turkey in total. According to Ümit, his initiation did not help him much to enhance his religious knowledge or to strengthen his faith in ʿAlawism. He did, however, claim it to have brought him one step closer to his community.

When I talked to Salih about his experiences during his education, it became clear that the memorisation of the collection of obligatory prayers was a great challenge for him.

Salih was still struggling to motivate himself to continue learning at the time when I interviewed him. He remarked that he stayed for one and a half weeks in the home of his religious teacher, which is usually enough to memorise the prayers. Speaking on having interrupted his education period, he explicitly emphasised that it was too difficult to memorise what he was reading.

While already overwhelmed by the task of memorising these prayers, he added that he also has difficulty remembering some of the basic Islamic prayers. Unlike Ümit, Salih did not attribute his interruption to any external circumstances but rather to internal factors, namely his lack of motivation and inability to memorise prayers. Additionally, during our several interviews and personal conversations, Salih gave me the impression that he generally had little interest in religious matters.

This particular situation raises the question as to whether Salih's initiation can be considered a failure. In seeking to answer this question, the writings of the eleventh century ʿAlawi religious leader, scholar and ritual expert al-Tabarani are of relevance. In the course of an initiation, he prescribes, if "a student rejects the religious truths disclosed to him by his sayyid [religious teacher]," his initiation is to be cancelled and his spiritual journey ends (as cited in Tendler, 2012, p. 61). In the quotation below, Al-Tabarani highlights the vital necessity of obtaining religious knowledge:

> Death is not the demise of the body according to what we have testified, it is the demise of the soul. Its life is its establishment in the sanctity of [religious] knowledge and its death is its denial and rejection. (as cited in Tendler, 2012, p. 61)

"I didn't feel more like a man, nor did I feel more of a sense of belonging to the community, I just simply did not feel so," Salih remarked concerning the efficacy of his initiation. The conferral of manhood which, among the ʿAlawis, should ideally be achieved through initiation, was simply missing in his experience of the process. It seems that his initiation failed to provide a sense of belonging to his religious community. He strongly voiced his discontent with his initiation, stating that it had no effect on his social status and it made no change in his life.

Leaving the education course unfinished can be problematic from a theological point of view because it precludes Salih from achieving rebirth (as a man) and salvation. In his analysis of al-Tabarani's *Kitāb al-ḥāwī* (which is already referred to in Chapter 1) Friedman (2010) explicitly describes the importance of the stage of religious education, "Already at this stage he [an initiate] is considered to have *najwā* (salvation), since he is saved from

eternal transmigrations and is at the beginning of his journey to the world of light" (p. 214). He suggests that transmigration (*tanāsukh*) is considered negative in ʿAlawism because it pertains to "merely a means of retribution" (p. 110). Contrary to this view, he points to the fact that "the gnosis … [is taken as] the path to paradise" (p. 118). It is important to bear in mind that only by acquiring the gnosis (esoteric knowledge) one can escape from the transmigration of soul and ascend "to the world of light" (Friedman, 2010, p. 105). From this theological viewpoint, it can be interpreted that Salih is condemned to transmigration.

As we have seen in the previous subsection, attending religious rituals can facilitate the emergence of positive sentiments towards one's own religious community. These are very meaningful occasions for an initiated boy, who can experience the recognition of his full-fledged membership by other co-religionists. Attending a ritual is a major step for a newly initiated boy in becoming a real part of his community. Equally significant is the role of the community membership in producing the feelings of manhood. The lack of these positive social effects in the case of Salih results from his not completing the education period because without memorising the esoteric truths he is not allowed to participate in religious activities.

Salih's and Ümit's initiations were interrupted for different reasons. Both internal and external circumstances, which have a bearing on each other, were at play. For example, the lengthy learning period necessary for Salih to memorise the prayers caused him extreme discontent. Likewise, his difficulty in memorising and his lack of belief in religion reduced his perseverance to learn. What cannot be ignored is that the high temperatures in the Mediterranean cities during summer time made the learning of prayers for Ümit unbearable. It is equally worth noting that the education stage overlapping with the start of the school holiday impaired his motivation and enthusiasm. One important last point is that although the interruption of the education period marks a deviation from the approved norms, this does not imply its immediate failure. However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken to understand the further reasons for the interruption of an initiation. It may also prove valuable to explore the point of views of the community's religious leaders on the interruption of initiation.

The insufficient transmission of religious secrets

The number of ʿAlawis from various age groups who do not possess Arabic as their first language has increased over the last two decades in İskenderun. The same applies to

ʿAlawis living in Çukurova (Procházka-Eisl & Procházka, 2010, 2018).[25] For many, Turkish has become the primary language for communication whilst Arabic has remained the language employed in religious contexts. As already stated in Chapter 1, the ʿAlawi community has undergone a second linguistic change as a result of immigration to Germany: German eclipsed Turkish as the first language. In the course of my fieldwork in Germany, the extent of this transition has become very clear to me. All ʿAlawi boys and girls I interviewed speak German as the first language.

Limited proficiency in the Turkish language can be very problematic for those young boys who go to Turkey for their initiations. This is because Turkish is the language in which their religious teachers usually explain the deeper meanings of the prayers and the religious history as well as the social and cultural norms of the ʿAlawi community. However, the lack of Arabic language skills among the youths remains the essential problem in the process of initiation. This issue seems to have a great negative impact on initiates' attachment to religion and the continuity of the tradition of initiation.

A considerable number of initiated interviewees are not proficient in Arabic language, yet they received the religious prayers, which they had to memorise during the period of education, in Arabic. Some of the difficulties which arose from this language barrier have become apparent in the course of interviews with several of them. A common statement on the part of the interviewees was that they did not understand what they had memorised. I was told that learning the secret prayers in Arabic was very difficult. As Emre described, every sentence of each prayer had to be, "read over and over again until it was completely memorised."

The quotes below are excerpts from a group discussion in which two interviewees, Hakan and Ekrem, expressed their frustration and discontent with the religious educations they underwent. In their passage narratives, a criticism of the way in which prayers are taught became central to their experience of being initiated. Their criticisms were, however, not attacks on the entire tradition of initiation but only on its certain features that were for them personally problematic, as Hakan put it:

> I felt like I was thrown in at the deep end because my Arabic wasn't very good during the time I went to learn the religious knowledge … and then I had to learn something

[25] For more details about the dynamics of linguistic change among the ʿAlawi community in Çukurova see the contribution of Procházka-Eisl and Procházka in the book entitled *Linguistic minorities in Turkey and Turkic-speaking minorities of the periphery* edited by Christiane Bulut (2018, pp. 309–328).

> that I didn't understand. I am not the only one who felt this way, I know many other initiates at my age who made the same experience. In general, we [initiates] are handed a booklet in which the prayers are written in Arabic and then asked to memorise them. But in school this is not the way we are taught when learning something in another language. When you learn something in English, for example, you receive the German translation of the text. It was not like that when I was learning the prayers in Arabic [there was no translation of the texts handed]. I felt during that time rather insecure because I was suddenly confronted with the requirement to learn the prayers. This makes someone feel somehow fear. Especially, the feeling of insecurity followed me throughout the initiation process. After I finished memorising all of the prayers, this feeling didn't disappear right away because I still haven't understood what I have memorised during my education period. This is for those youths, who are grown up in Germany, just like me, who can only speak or understand little Arabic, difficult because ʿAlawism is a demanding religion, when it comes to learn.

Hakan argued that he was made to begin the process of initiation without being prepared for it—due to his poor Arabic, he did not feel ready for his initiation. Besides, he considers his religious mentor's method of teaching the Arabic prayers without Turkish translation to be ineffective. As he expresses above, his sense of insecurity first appeared in the course of initiation rituals and then continued during the education period and remained after completion of the initiation process. The state of insecurity, which according to Hakan prevailed when progressing through all of the three initiation rituals, is because he could not understand the ritual performances and liturgical phrases in Arabic.

Similar criticisms about the way initiation is conducted can also be found in the following excerpt in which Ekrem questions the conveyance of religious knowledge during the education period. He also points to the explanation that even though one does not understand the substance of the prayers and has a limited amount of religious knowledge after his initiation, he is still able to practice the ʿAlawi religion: He may attend the rituals or pray alone at home:

> It was a mechanical learning of the prayers, exactly just as he [Hakan] said, one understands maybe the half of what was taught, maybe a little more than half, and actually even after education period, as he [Hakan] said, one still suffers from the ineffective understanding of the prayers. You can cite the prayers but you don't know what you are exactly saying … But anyway you know that in the eyes of your parents, "You made it"

> even though you learned it mechanically … You know, the whole system is a bit anyway…with the age of fifteen or sixteen … you find yourself carrying the burden of such a great responsibility. This is the problem of the religious system … But maybe, the religious prayers should be taught to young boys in a different way.

One point worth noting here is that Ekrem criticises the age at which the initiation is undertaken and questions the appropriateness of this practice. According to Ekrem, ʿAlawi youths initiated at the onset of their adolescence can easily be overwhelmed with memorising the religious teachings.

When he suggests that the current teaching model should better be changed, he touches upon a crucial aspect of rituals, namely that they are not static or changeless (Hüsken, 2007, p. 338), although they do resist change (Grimes, 2000, p. 190). Ekrem holds the view that this is the ritual system that forces the initiates to employ a mechanical memorisation method without necessarily understanding the prayers. What is interesting to note here is that from the point of view of his parents he successfully completed his initiation. At the same time, from his point of view, his initiation has failed to introduce him to religious doctrine. Ultimately, for him, it was not a proper entrance into the religious community.

Towards the end of our discussion, Hakan and Ekrem were unanimous in the view that they received little to no information at all about the meanings of the prayers. This may be a problem from the theological perspective that one needs to possess the esoteric knowledge to attain his salvation (Friedman, 2010, p. 216). According to the way the religious doctrine is conveyed today it can be interpreted that the memorisation of the prayers is more important than understanding them. At this point, once again, I would like to draw attention to the book *Kitāb al-ḥāwī* written by the prominent ʿAlawi religious scholar al-Tabarani who explains the process of initiation in detail. In his book, he provides an interesting detail about the memorisation of the prayers, stating that it is of higher importance to memorise correctly one's religious descent. According to him, under certain circumstances, it is not necessary for an initiate to memorise all of the prayers. Learning only their meanings is sufficient as well (as cited in Tendler, 2012, p. 77).

Both interviewees stated critically that their religious teachers could not help them to better understand the prayers. One possible explanation of this is that the religious teachers themselves may have had insufficient understanding and expertise about the prayers they taught. Some of the initiated youths I had previously interviewed had expressed dis-

satisfaction with their mentors' teaching of the prayers. They stated that their teachers could not answer their questions relating to the meanings of the prayers.

Overall, the successful passing of religious doctrines to subsequent generations seems to be possible only among those young boys who are proficient in Arabic. The disadvantage for those youths without Arabic proficiency is not only that they complete their initiations without recognising the essential nature of their religion, but they may be considered by their co-religionists to be unsuited to learn the secret knowledge at all, as exemplified in the following excerpt from my interview with Burak:

> When I went to Turkey to learn our religion, I stayed for a week at my uncle's [religious teacher] house. It was a small village. Once I went to a kiosk to buy something to eat. And there was a guy who asked me whether I come from Germany. After I said "yes," he said "so you are now learning namaz here with your uncle," and then he asked me, "can you speak Arabic?" I replied, "no." This guy was of Arab ʿAlawi origin. But he put me down [with verbal assaults] by saying, "You can't even speak Arabic, you can't even say *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*[26], how do you want to learn this [namaz]?

To conclude, command of Arabic is crucial not only for the proper learning and internalisation of the secret religious teachings but also for an active attendance in the calendrical rites, including those of initiation. It is important to bear in mind that the successful education of the novices is essential for the perpetuation of the ʿAlawi community's religious existence, as it is dependent on the recruitment of new members. In my view, the preservation of the use of Arabic in the ʿAlawi rituals as well as in the religious education is vitally important because it is a means of resisting Turkification. In the broader sense, the reduced use of Arabic among the new generations can accelerate the loss of ʿAlawi religious identity. A final point worth repeating is that, without proficiency in Arabic, one's full integration into the religious community appears to be difficult to succeed.

The question of efficacy

The concept of efficacy, addressed in various studies focusing on rituals (Hüsken, 2007; Moore & Myerhoff, 1977; Podemann Sørensen, 2006; Sax et al., 2010), may help us to ap-

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[26] In Arabic, it is a formula called *Basmala.* Authors Carra de Vaux & Gardet (2012), in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, describe it as "In the name of God, the Clement, the Merciful" (p. 1). Muslims commonly recite basmala before starting an important act to ask for Allah's blessings on their conduct.

proach the social and theological effects of the previously presented initiations from a different angle.

Here the term *efficacy* is used, as in Hüsken's definition of the word, to describe "the ability to produce an effect, but not only a specifically desired effect" (2007, p. 350). In his article entitled *Efficacy*, Podemann Sørensen (2006) demonstrated how the term efficacy has been used in various ways in religious studies and described the modes of ritual efficacy proposed by different scholars (pp. 523–531). Hüsken (2007), in a similar way, outlined four modes of efficacy of rituals and epitomised their interrelation (pp. 351–353). According to Hüsken, it is useful to note "diverse modes of efficacy" because they indicate "diverse ways a ritual can fail" (p. 352).

It is in the consequences of the failure of a ritual that the various dimensions of efficacy can be discerned. Two different forms of efficacy, presented as "operational" and "doctrinal" efficacy by Moore and Myerhoff, are worth examining here more closely (1977, pp. 12–13). Operational efficacy refers to "physical, psychological or social effects of a ritual" and can be verified by means of observation. Doctrinal efficacy, in contrast, is not empirically verifiable (Hüsken, 2007, p. 351) and is considered to be postulated by the ritual, it is "a matter of postulation" (Moore & Myerhoff, 1977, p. 12).

As inherent in the theological explanations of the ʿAlawism, the initiation confers to the initiates salvation and spiritual rebirth as full-fledged believers. We have also seen that, for the ʿAlawis, the acquisition of the esoteric knowledge is the only way of escaping from the never-ending transmigration. This is something that is empirically impossible to ascertain. These effects on one's spiritual wellbeing can be expressed in terms of the postulated (doctrinal) efficacy of the initiation but only when it is completed successfully.

The preceding analysis of passage narratives has described how two initiates, by virtue of different reasons, had to interrupt their religious educations. While Ümit succeeded to continue to memorise the prayers at a later point in time, Salih was still having difficulties in finding the enthusiasm to conclude his study of religious knowledge. Because he did not completely memorise the esoteric knowledge, Salih is not considered to be a full-fledged member of the religious community and this has some negative social consequences for him. These can be understood as "operational efficacy" and can be summarised in three points:

- prohibition of attending the religious rituals
- failure to rise in the religious hierarchy
- he and his family experiencing blame for the failed education

Hakan and Ekrem, as described previously, successfully completed their initiations through the memorisation of the prayers. For them, due to their lack of Arabic and the inefficient teaching methods of their religious teachers, the "operational efficacy" of their initiations is rather negative: They are unable to understand the esoteric knowledge given to them. This may limit their spiritual and ritual experiences when attending religious rituals and citing religious prayers.

3.4.4.Conclusions

In this section, the descriptions of abstract concepts of the initiation largely faded into the background and the primary focus was placed upon the interactional experience of initiated individuals. The analysis of initiates' personal experiences of their initiations reveals relevant aspects of the periods before initiation process. For example, the influence of family on the decision to be initiated became noticeable in the passage narratives provided by the youths. Of course, this is not to say that the youths were themselves unwilling to undergo initiation. On the contrary, some initiates' recollections of their adolescent years demonstrate how enthusiastic they were to undergo initiation.

The accounts of the experiences after completing initiation indicate that the manhood of the initiates does not evolve naturally but is produced culturally. Their experience of transition into male adulthood is closely connected to their external recognition as a man by the community. The affirmation of one's manhood and his admission into the spiritual elite, which consists only of men, are directly related because an initiated boy perceives the status of manhood especially whilst socialising with other initiated men during religious gatherings.

However, the passage narratives of some initiates indicate that initiations do not always proceed as usual and might follow different trajectories depending on individual circumstances. On some occasions, the decision is made to interrupt the process of initiation, as in the case of Ümit. However, his interruption did not preclude the successful completion of his initiation because he went on to memorise all the religious prayers at a later time.

Today, a widespread problem among ʿAlawi communities teaching their religion to new generations is that many initiates lack the Arabic language proficiency. As the prayers and rituals are conducted in Arabic, most initiates have great difficulty in memorising and understanding them. To manage this problem, ʿAlawi religious leaders, intellectuals and community functionaries may have to reconstruct and reimagine the tradition of initiation

and therefore the ritual system of the ʿAlawism. There can, of course, be conflicts and disagreements arising between various people, as Grimes concludes: “Every tradition is marked by a perennial tension between those who would keep things the same (and thus connected to sacred origins) and those who would update them (thus making them relevant to participants)” (2000, p. 190).

The passage narratives discussed in this section demonstrate the variety in empirically detectable positive effects of the initiation. Listed below is a selection, not exhaustive, of the most noticeable actual effects of the ʿAlawi initiation on the interviewees:

- admission into the ranks of the spiritual elite
- affirmation of social manhood
- maintenance of the hierarchical social structures of the community
- establishment of the metaphorical kinship ties between the initiated boy and his religious teacher
- enhanced solidarity among the community members
- enhanced loyalty of members to those in religious authority

4. Secrecy and being ʿAlawi: concluding remarks

The main goal of this research was to determine the effects of secrecy on ʿAlawi youths' religious identifications and religious practices. To do so, this book has addressed four research objectives that focus on (1) the ways in which the ʿAlawi youths keep their religious identity hidden from non-ʿAlawis; (2) how the ʿAlawi youths negotiate their Muslim and ʿAlawi identities (which are constructed by the practice of secrecy) vis-à-vis their Turkish Sunni and Alevi counterparts; (3) the ways in which ʿAlawi women, excluded from the religious training, practice their faith; (4) and the individual experiences of ʿAlawi initiates that arise from their initiation rituals, which are conducted under the veil of secrecy. Each of these objectives is directly related to the findings presented in Chapter 3 entitled *The multifaceted experiences of youth's ʿAlawiness*. This concluding chapter first presents a summary of the main findings of the study and focuses on resulting conclusions. The chapter next outlines recommendations for future researchers who intend to study ʿAlawi communities. The chapter ends by highlighting the contributions this book has attempted to make, namely to the study of ʿAlawis and secrecy.

This study discussed the situations in which ʿAlawi youths of Germany carefully attempt to erase their religious difference. By focusing on a set of strategies of secrecy, which ʿAlawi youths of Germany have adopted, I have demonstrated that their cultural differences can remain invisible when entering various social spaces and interactions with others. One of the popular strategies of secrecy, widely and unconsciously used among the ʿAlawi youths, is quieting down. Through this strategy, it is possible for ʿAlawis to communicate sensitive subjects related to ʿAlawi identity without raising the awareness of others. For some ʿAlawis, the easiest way to keep their religious affiliation hidden from the outsiders is simply to deny its existence. Another effective way to maintain invisibility for those who wear a zülfikar (a pendant in the form of imam ʿAli's sword, indicating Shiʿi belief) while sharing social spaces with others is to hide it under their garments.

The strategy of passing as Turkish, I argue, is the most effective and protective strategy of secrecy that is widely applied by the members of ʿAlawi community in Germany as German citizens. Passing as Turkish means, first of all, the (near-) total embracement of the Turkish language and living a life according to Turkish social and cultural practices. The new generations of ʿAlawis living in Germany have been greatly encouraged by the old generations of ʿAlawis to learn how to pass as Turkish. The successful passing of contemporary ʿAlawi youths in Germany as Turkish has obliterated some of the major cultural differences between the ʿAlawi community and Turkish Sunni society. As a case in point, the

use of the Arabic language has lost significance among the 21st century ʿAlawi youths living in Germany. Similarly, today ʿAlawi youths are less interested in participating in religious rituals or undergoing initiations, which is unsurprising, considering the fact that ʿAlawism is practiced in Arabic.

Drawing on remarks by Bellman on the Poro secret societies in West Africa (1984), this book argues that the ʿAlawi community has maintained its existence as an organised religion for centuries "not because of the secrets that it protects but because it is the very embodiment of the procedures necessary for 'doing' secrecy" (p. 140). The practice of initiation certainly serves as the most substantial means of doing secrecy; the backbone of the religious organisation.

The ʿAlawi practice of secrecy has two general functions. First, it aims to prevent the uninitiated from accessing the community's religious doctrines; second, it is a means of concealing one's affiliation with ʿAlawism. The religious elites of the ʿAlawi community have attempted to strengthen their community's invisibility through imposing censorship, as Urban (2001) puts it, "Tactics of secrecy … almost always go hand in hand with tactics of *censorship*—both from within and from without the esoteric community" (p. 215). The extensive, unquestionable, and collective use of self-censorship among contemporary ʿAlawis has resulted in the insufficient transmission of ʿAlawi cultural heritage to the new generations. The female members of the community in particular have suffered the most negative consequences of secrecy, if we are to judge it from today's perspective. During my fieldwork among young ʿAlawi women, their lack of knowledge about the ethno-religious history of their community of faith and the basic principles of their religion became repeatedly apparent to me. This study has also shown that the use of secrecy has become subject to criticism from today's ʿAlawi youths, and particularly from ʿAlawi women.

In this study I have examined how ʿAlawi youths' individual relationships with their Turkish Sunni peers can be quite complex. For this purpose, I have focused my research on youths' collective self-understanding that underlines their difference from Turkish Sunnis, and their similarity to those within their religious community. Some of the primary differences were uttered by ʿAlawi women. When compared to conservative Turkish Sunni women, their self-images, which have been constituted through their comparison of their similarity and difference to others (Jenkins, 2008a, p. 73), revolve around the beliefs that they have more relaxed clothing styles, more freedom to socialise with men in mixed-gender social occasions, and their community offers more tolerance of alcohol consumption. The research has shown that the ʿAlawi-Sunni difference articulated through women's

gender-based roles and positions in their respective communities can be regarded as a source of conflict in social interactions.

This book has also discussed that ʿAlawis' assertion of being Muslim is often contested by Turkish Sunni Muslims, who in principle place ʿAlawis outside Islam. It seems that ʿAlawis' practice of secrecy casts doubt on their self-assertion of Muslimness, because the trustworthiness of the claim cannot be proved under the veil of secrecy. It is not uncommon that those ʿAlawis whose Muslim identities are questioned or rejected by Sunni Muslims find themselves in a position of vindicating their Muslim faith. This study, by examining the earlier ʿAlawi identity politics in Syria, has concluded that ʿAlawis intensified their attempts to attach their community to Islam only during the first decades of the 20th century.

Another important finding of this research is that because of their community's self-identification as Arap Alevileri (Arab Alevis) some ʿAlawi youths lapsed into thinking that the way they practice their religion has parallels to that of Anatolian Alevis. However, they came to know how different these communities indeed are from one another in the course of social interactions. Having recognised Alevis' anti-Islamic attitude, ʿAlawi youths began to avoid affiliating themselves with Alevis. Yet, this is not to say that ʿAlawis do not establish positive relationships with Alevis. As shown in Chapter 3, ignoring religious difference between both communities helped some ʿAlawis to create a sense of connectedness with other Alevis.

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, because of the misogynistic rhetoric embedded in the traditional ʿAlawi theology and ʿAlawi women's biological difference from ʿAlawi men, ʿAlawi women find themselves blocked from gaining access to the esoteric teachings of their religion. ʿAlawi religious teachings are deemed necessary for believers to practice individual prayers and to participate in communal prayers. Through the strict pedagogy of secrecy, initiated male elites of the community are instructed not to reveal any valued religious knowledge to the female members of the community. As a result of the practice of secrecy, ʿAlawi girls grow up without knowing what their religious community is indeed meant to be and how to practice ʿAlawism, the religion of their fathers and brothers.

In view of ʿAlawi women's strict exclusion from the esoteric religious training, I have aimed to gain a better understanding of the ways in which ʿAlawi women practice and experience their religious faith. Through examining women's personal views about exclusion, their retrospective assessments of their participations in religious rituals, and their accounts of personal ritual acts, I have attempted to demonstrate how women integrate themselves into their community of faith.

In contrast to the majority of previous studies, which have attributed a passive religious life to ʿAlawi women outside ʿAlawism, the research reveals that ʿAlawi women resort to a variety of ways of practicing their religious belief, such as everyday recitations of short prayers or the irregular visitation of pilgrimage sites. For practicing their religion, women can focus on the exoteric knowledge, which can be gained, for example, by reading the Qurʾan. Besides, many of my female interlocutors expressed their religiosity by reference to their cooperation in the organisation of ʿAlawi religious rituals. Many women report to be involved in a ritual insofar as they cook and serve food to the ritual participants. These women regard their cooperation as a way of practicing their religious faith. It helps them to develop a collective sense of *we*. In their eyes, daily profane activities, such as cooking, cleaning and serving food, turn into sacred religious activities when they are practiced for the organisation of rituals. This is why ʿAlawi women have been socialised to place a high value on the profane activities during a ritual.

This book further argues that former academic research has produced a certain ʿAlawi and patriarchal perspective; Because women are excluded from esoteric knowledge necessary for attending the rituals due to the practice of secrecy, they seem to have no valuable knowledge about their religion. Following, it perhaps did not seem relevant in previous work to deal with the position of women within the religious sphere, or with their perspectives. However, this book identifies that women have their own ways of performing their social and religious identity. Since they do not have access to secret knowledge and therefore do not have the task of protecting it, they feel a certain amount of individual freedom regarding their religious and social roles. Ultimately, this means that it is easier for them (compared to other Muslims or other women socialised in Middle Eastern societies) to assume the behaviour and consumption patterns of Western modernity. Sarsilmaz (2017) similarly notes, “Arab Alawite women (those who believe their exclusion benefits them in the long run), argue that exclusion from an oppressive structure in fact empowers them” (p. 99).

One of the most valued religious traditions of ʿAlawism is the initiation of a young man into secret teachings and thus the celebration of his entry into the community of initiated men. ʿAlawi initiation has become a necessary instrument which makes possible the religious secrets to be disseminated among the would-be members of the community. As stated throughout the book, in the past scholarship on this topic has been primarily preoccupied with literary sources describing an idealised picture of the ʿAlawi initiation ritual. Their analyses of initiation as an abstract process outline how the initiations should be, but not how they are in reality. How an initiation is actually practiced among contem-

porary ʿAlawi communities has remained obscure until now. In this sense, this study is the first academic literature on ʿAlawis that has examined the initiations from the perspectives of initiates.

Through turning my research focus on the actual practice of initiation, I have attempted to explore the initiated men's personal accounts about their rites of passage. When analysing the different stages of initiation, it was clear that initiations were individual, dynamic, and sometimes unpredictable. One of the most evident findings to emerge from this research is that it cannot be taken for granted that every young man chooses to undergo initiation of his own accord. Even though parents and the community expect that boys will choose this path, boys' decisions might sometimes be otherwise. However, when it comes to undergoing initiation, boys generally act submissive and are ready to comply with the influence, social pressure, and decision of their parents.

The studies based on religious literature explain that the major function of initiation is to admit a boy into the ʿAlawi community membership. My book, examining personal anecdotes of the initiates and of parents, has shown that actual initiation rituals do not only mark the entry of a boy into his community of faith, but also his transition into manhood. This is a novel contribution of this book to the study of ʿAlawi initiation. I have also argued that it is a socially constructed manhood and not a manhood marked by physical maturation. The reminiscences of the initiates clearly underline the fact that their assertion of social manhood bears on their assignment of membership into their community of faith.

In the 21st century of Turkey and Germany, the ʿAlawi tradition of initiation faces fundamental challenges as a result of ʿAlawi youth's assimilation into Turkish culture, which is primarily fortified by the practice of secrecy. This situation can jeopardise the existence of the practice of initiation. Another key subject that has been discussed in this book is that an initiation can go wrong and fail to achieve its expected results. By focusing on four initiated men's personal narratives about their rites of passage, I have shown that two of them interrupted their initiations without successfully memorising the prayers and the other two completed their initiations without understanding the content of the religious prayers. As this book indicates, unsuccessfully conducted initiations first and foremost interfere with the realisation of theological aspirations, considering the fact that the salvation of an initiated man is only possible when he gains the esoteric knowledge of ʿAlawism. Failing initiations also cause the insufficient transmission of the religious truths to the next generations.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of this book is that some young ʿAlawis living in Germany have begun criticising the collective practice of concea-

ling ʿAlawi identity, the exclusion of women from religious training, and the way initiations are conducted. Given the global rise of identity politics and the outside influences through media and internet, I argue that the 21st century ʿAlawi youths are less inclined to simply mimic the traditional structures of their community. What it means to be an ʿAlawi is accentuated through new ways today. While young ʿAlawis have an understanding of the historical repression of their community as it has been transcribed into a collective memory over time, their lives in Germany are less influenced by this collective trauma, and they are therefore open to criticise aspects of ʿAlawi culture.

Future research areas

This book has highlighted the pervasiveness of the practice of secrecy in various spheres of contemporary ʿAlawi religious life and identification. What is most important about secrecy is that it can serve as the basis for cultural, social and political organisation of the community. Further studies on ʿAlawis should recognise and attempt to identify the impacts of secrecy when examining the community within different contexts. To iterate, the focus of interest should not be the content of secrecy, but rather the doing of secrecy and its forms and strategies. Equally important is to remember that strategies of secrecy are not static but very dynamic. For that reason, it is helpful to conduct fieldwork that enables one to spend enough time among the community members. In this way, it seems to be possible to understand and explain the different dimensions of the practice of secrecy and its multiple impacts on the lives of contemporary ʿAlawis. This is to say that a longitudinal study would be necessary.

Another important point is that in investigating the actual practices of ʿAlawi religion, it would be worthwhile to choose a combination of methodological approaches that includes participant observation, a review of the studies analysing the ʿAlawi religious texts, and interviews with religious practitioners. By doing so, scholars can set venture to acquire a more emic perspective of ʿAlawi religious practices. For example, when a researcher examines an ʿAlawi ritual, through participatory observation it is possible to show how it is practiced under the present-day social and political conditions. To understand the dynamics of ritual, the researcher can make a comparative analysis by looking at the historical theological descriptions of the same ritual. In this way, the researcher can identify contradictions, similarities and possible alterations that take place in the current practice of ritual. Interviewing the practitioners who are involved in the ritual offers a further opportunity to compare the data gained through the researcher's observations and analysis of the

textual sources. According to my own experience, this can be very helpful because one's own observations of the ritual can be different from the experiences of the ritual participants.

As has been stated in the literature review, the cultural and social lives of present-day ʿAlawi communities have been scarcely studied until now. A possible area of future research would be to investigate the further effects of the practice of secrecy on ʿAlawi communities' daily life in different regions. Besides, interesting avenues for future research could also be, for example, to examine the strategies of secrecy that were employed by ʿAlawis in Ottoman Turkey and Syria. Such research could shed light on the nature of the intergroup relations between ʿAlawis and their neighbouring communities, and certainly improve our understanding of the present-day practice of secrecy and ʿAlawi culture. During my fieldwork among ʿAlawis in Germany, I observed that the federation of the community is in the process of establishing an international network with the other ʿAlawi communities living outside of their original regions. The ʿAlawis living in their homelands are included in this network as well. This would be probably a fruitful area for further work. Another interesting area would be to investigate the relationship between the ʿAlawis from Turkey and the ʿAlawis from Syria who came to Germany as refugees due to the Syrian civil war. In short, there are numerous research areas that remain to be investigated.

Contributions to the study of ʿAlawis and anthropology of secrecy

My book marks the first attempt in the academic context to describe ʿAlawi religious rituals through practitioners' eyes. This aspect has widely been ignored in the academic literature on ʿAlawis until now. Each chapter in this book touches upon the themes that became apparent through my fieldwork observations, interviews with young ʿAlawis and in the process of writing. This study has attempted to understand the ʿAlawi community through its young members' descriptions, interpretations, and reflections about their religious practices and social experiences.

Through its focus on secrecy, this study contributes to the literature on secret societies and the ethnographic knowledge of secrecy. Secrecy is a remarkably long-lived practice among ʿAlawis. The community's enduring commitment to the practice of secrecy serves as a means of maintaining their existence and transmitting their culture. Through the analysis of the impacts of secrecy on the lives of contemporary ʿAlawis, this study indicates that secrecy does more than simply maintaining the community's invisibility. I argue that

secrecy plays an essential role in constituting social and religious collective identification of ʿAlawis.

My analysis illustrates how secrecy is implicated in ʿAlawis' everyday relationships with the members of the other religious communities. By focusing on the strategy of passing as Turkish, this research argues that the assimilation of the new generations of ʿAlawis into Turkish culture has accelerated. This is an active assimilation, which was started consciously by the older generations of ʿAlawi immigrants in Turkey, and has become an unconscious aspiration of the younger generations of ʿAlawis in Germany. ʿAlawis have not resisted the assimilation through secrecy, but rather it is the practice of secrecy that has gradually facilitated their assimilation as Turks. The best viable way to resist assimilation is the maintenance of the Arabic language, which is already subject to erasure because of the strategy of passing as Turkish. If the loss of the Arabic language among the ʿAlawis of Germany and Turkey continues at today's rate, it is probable that within one or two generations ʿAlawism will become a religion in certain regions of Turkey that is practiced and experienced in Turkish.

Today, the contemporary struggle among ʿAlawis seems to be more about concealing their religious affiliation than their religious beliefs. From the perspective of those who support the continuation of a strict regime of secrecy, the revelation of religious secrets make ʿAlawis more vulnerable to the accusations and condemnations of their rivals. Thus, the commitment to hide one's affiliation with ʿAlawism gains a greater significance. In the book I have demonstrated that the secrets of religious beliefs are only shared between the initiated men, and keeping one's attachment to ʿAlawism a secret is a concern of the entire community. Secrecy creates a life which is implicated in two different worlds.

The findings of this research provide important insights into the role of secrecy in the ʿAlawi women's religious lives. This study enhances our understanding of how concealing the religious teachings from women leads them to reinterpret the mundane daily activities as sacred religious activities. Their cooperation in the labor before, during and after a ritual is just as important as the performance of the ritual, an opinion that was expressed by many of my female interlocutors. In this sense, this book contends that secrecy is a generative tool for both excluding and including the women in the religion. Another important aspect, which this book suggests, is that ʿAlawis' practice of secrecy paved the way for the Sunnification of ʿAlawi women. The colonial aspirations of the Ottoman Empire to Sunnify ʿAlawis seem to have been very successful in the 21st century of Turkey.

One of the strengths of this study is that it represents the first comprehensive examination of the actual practice of ʿAlawi initiation ritual. By doing so, it contributes to the ritual

studies on Shiʿi communities. This book has provided a deeper insight into the passage narratives of the initiated ʿAlawi men. The findings reported here shed light on how the actual rituals are conducted. By drawing on the concept of "ritual criticism" introduced by Grimes (2010), this study has demonstrated, for the first time, that ʿAlawi initiation ritual may not always do what it intends. By focusing on the personal accounts of initiates, I demonstrated that initiations are not always conducted perfectly, as described in the religious books, and not every ʿAlawi boy can successfully complete his initiation. The research shows that initiation can sometimes fail to transform initiates into full-fledged members of the religious community and into adults.

This work contributes to the current literature on (Muslim) minorities in Germany as well. By introducing hitherto first comprehensive data on the life of ʿAlawi youths in Germany, this study offers the potential for other researchers to make comparisons between the children of ʿAlawi immigrants and those of other immigrant groups. It further describes how the young members of the ʿAlawi community negotiate their religious identifications in the course of their intergroup relations with Turkish Sunni Muslims and Anatolian Alevis in Germany. I have documented that ʿAlawis in Germany face a double marginalisation: first because of their Turkish background and second because of their ʿAlawiness. Another important contribution of this study is that it shows how the Syrian civil war since 2011 has catalysed the process of the politicisation of ʿAlawi identity in the diasporic context of Germany.

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