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## The Struggle to Unite Diaspora Alevi and the Working Class: Alevism in the Kavga/Kervan Magazine

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### Abstract

Kavga/Kervan is a magazine published by the London chapter of the Turkish Communist Party between 1991 and 1998. Rıza Yürükoğlu, the editor is credited as the main architect of the magazine's intellectual structure. This article will use discourse analysis to examine the relationship between Alevism and socialism as postulated by the magazine and its editor. It aims to analyse the efforts of the magazine as a platform to unite Alevi and socialists in Turkish socialist history even if the magazine may not have had as much impact on the Alevi and socialist collectives in Turkey and abroad.

**Keywords:** Kavga/Kervan Magazine; Rıza Yürükoğlu; Alevism.

### Abstract in Kurmanji

**Têkoşîna gihandina Elewîyên dîasporayê û çîna karkeran: Elewîzm di kovara Kavga/Kervanê de**

Kervan/Kavga kovareke e ku ji teref beşa Londonê ya Partiya Komunîst a Tirkiyeyê di navbera salên 1991 û 1998an de hatiye çapkirin. Rıza Yürükoğlu, edîtor, weke avakerê esasî ya pêkhatiya entelektuel a kovarê hatiye nîşandan. Ev xebat, wê tehlîla vegotinê bi kar bîne bo nirxandina tîkiliya di nav Elewîzm û sosyalîzmê de, weke ji teref kovar û edîtorê wê hatiye ferzkirin. Ev gotar armanc dîke ku hewlên vê kovarê tehlîl bike, ya ku weke platformeke Elewî û sosyalîstên di dîroka sosyalîst a Tirkiyeyê de bigihîne hev, digel ku kovar xwedî vê tesîrê nebe jî li ser Elewî û kolektîfên sosyalîst ên li Tirkiyeyê û derve.

### Abstract in Sorani

**Xebat bo yekgirtinê 'elewîyekanî dayespora legell çînî krêkar: 'Elewîzm le govarî kavga/karvan**

Karvan/kavga govarêke le lenden lelayan lqî lendenî partî komonîstî turkî le nêwan sallekanî 1991 we 1998 derdekra. Rıza Yürükoğlu sernuser krêdîtî endazyarî serekî sitraktorî roşnîbîrî govarekey pêdedrêt. Em twêjîneweye ravey gutarî bekar dênêt bo hellsengandinî peywendî nêwan 'elewîzm û soşyalîzm bew şêweyey ke govareke û

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sernuserkeley daynawe. Em wtare deyewêt ew hewllaney govareke wek sekoyek bo yekgirtî 'elewyekan û soşyalîstekan le mêjuy soşalîstî turkî rave bkat tenanet eger govarekêş hênde karîgerî leser têkrray 'elewî û soşyalîstekan le Turkyaya û derewe nebûbêt.

### **Abstract in Zazaki**

#### **Lebata yewkerdişê elewîyanê dîyaspora û sinifa karkeran: kovara Kavga/Kervan de elewîyîye**

Kervan/Kavga kovarek a ke mabênê serranê 1991 û 1998î de hetê beşê Londra yê Partîya Komunîstan a Tirkîya ra weşaniyaye. Edîtorê ci, Riza Yurukoglu, sey mîmarê bingeyênî yê awaniya kovara a zîhniye hesabiyeno. No cigêrayîş do pê analizê dîskûrsî têkiliya mabênê elewîyîye û sosyalîzmî de ke hetê kovare û edîtorê ci ra ferz bena, aye tehlîl bikero. Hedefê na meqale yo ke lebata kovare ke a tarîxê sosyalîzmê Tirkîya de bibo platformê yewbîyayîşê elewîyan û sosyalîstan, aye analiz bikero - herçiqas ke elewî û sosyalîstanê zere û teberê Tirkîya ser o tesîrê kovare zaf çin bî zî.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a boom in studies of Alevism within the social sciences, with many political and international reasons to explain this increasing interest. Even though the discourse on the ontology of Alevism is beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to examine and provide a brief overview of the literature. There are many classifications of the Alevi faith within the literature.<sup>2</sup> In addition to considering Alevism/Alevis as a sect within Islam, others interpret it as an un-Islamic, self-proclaimed religion. This is because Alevism expresses an ethnic, political and sometimes diasporic identity that is too broad to be contained by religious discussions alone. Massicard (2013: 18) aptly describes this complicated case: “we are facing an identity movement with an unknown identity, which is full of contradiction!” Alevism is an identity crosscutting ethnic origin, language and other identities (Hopkins, 2011: 448; Ertan, 2015). This multi-layered identity is a result of the history of the Alevi movement. While Sunni theology has been formed by religious and doctrinal jurisprudence, Alevi cosmology has been shaped by political revolts. Thus, a discussion of

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<sup>2</sup> For example Tekdemir (2017: 7) divides Alevism into four forms: traditional religious Alevism, modernist secular Alevism, opponent leftist Alevism and dissociative ethnical Alevism. Erman and Göker (2000: 105) also divide it into four: Leftist-Alevism interpreting it as a “liberation theology” like the Marxists influenced by Catholicism in Latin America; Mystical-Islam Alevism organised around the Haji Bektash Veli Foundations which emphasise love; Central Alevism represented by the Cem Foundation and Shia-Oriented Alevism interpreting Alevism within the 12 Imam Doctrine. For Shankland (1993: 85-86) “The Sunni define Islam mainly by literal belief in the Koran, praying in the mosque, and the “five pillars”. The Alevi minimise the importance of these criteria, saying that they possess 'Alevi conditions' of Islam. (...) 'Be master of your hands, tongue and loins!' These conditions are not exclusively Alevi; they are present throughout Turkish culture as a whole, in the mystical or Sufi side of Islam, where they are known as *edep*. But the Alevi have raised them to a jural level, so that they are the defining characteristic of their form of Islam, at the expense of, rather than as an accompaniment to the 'five pillars'.”

Alevism naturally includes politics as much as culture and religion. Referring to the Alevi in Turkey, Kehl-Bodrogi (1996: 52) asserts that they comprise the second biggest community after the Sunnis, approximately 15 to 20% of the population. He further explains that although most of them are ethnically Turkish, there is a large group of Alevi Kurds speaking the Zazaki (also Kirmanjki) language and a small community of Kurmanji speakers. Since Alevi have had an isolated existence, being marginalised both geographically and politically, they have been characterised by endogamy (intra-family marriage), which, along with discrimination and exclusion, forced them to live as an “invisible community” for a long time. Thus, the preservation of their traditional values and the social solidarity typical of their belief system enabled them to protect their Alevi identity (Soner and Toktaş, 2011: 421). According to van Bruinessen (1996: 47), migration to the cities and the political polarisation of the 1970s made the Alevi more visible in Turkey. Here, we need to consider the transitivity between Kurdish ethnic identity and Alevism. Çamuroğlu (2010: 105) associates the rise of Alevism with the collapse of real socialism, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the Kurdish revival. Some Alevi emphasise their identity and belonging as Alevi against a rising tide of Kurdish nationalism.

Alevism as a political identity emerged simultaneously in Turkey and Europe in the late 1980s. Here, the rise of Alevi-Leftist reaction against the combined Turkish-Islamic doctrine of the 1980 military coup and the prominence of cultural, ethnic and religious identities following the end of the Cold War played a crucial role. After keeping their identities and religious rituals secret for a long time, the fact that Alevi began to proactively self-organise can be interpreted as a reaction to the rise of Sunni Islam in Turkish politics and increasing religious Sunni events being held in Germany. The Alevi were uniting against a perceived threat during a period that witnessed a rise in identity politics and ensured that this increasing level of Alevi organisation would eventually become an independent movement (Bora, 2017: 712). Alevi concerns about the predominantly Sunni-Islam discourse in Turkish politics led to the development of the Alevi movement both inside and outside the country:

Alevi organisations were established, and these organisations attracted many young people which had formerly participated in the forefront of various leftist and Kurdish organisations. The members of some small leftist organisations were Alevi; and after that time, they, along with their Marxist-Leninist identities, started to emphasise their Alevi identity and demonstrated a tendency of considering Alevi as a nation by mentioning Alevistan as their own country. These movements abroad have evoked the Alevi revival in Turkey where the religious and social

establishment of Alevi organisations was possible thanks to a gradual political liberalisation (van Bruinessen, 1996: 47).

For Shankland (1998), the discourse on Alevism remained on the agenda during the 1990s due to Alevis migrating from isolated rural areas to the cities, as a result of Turkey's industrialisation and modernisation coupled with an eagerness to learn about their own roots. During this period, cultural studies focused on the essence of Alevism; *cemevis*<sup>3</sup> were opened in Alevi areas in Turkey and the diaspora, whilst the number of religious and intellectual publications increased. Erol (2012: 836) states that Alevism has become visible thanks to the associations, foundations and *cemevis* established by Alevis living abroad. Considering the formation and size of the Alevi diaspora, one can easily claim that their tendency to migrate outside Turkey is significantly higher when compared to Sunni Turks. The *dede*<sup>4</sup> had an important role in establishing Alevi associations in Germany, and in 1990, the European Alevi Communities Federation was established there. The recognition of Alevi identity in Germany, which later expanded to other European countries, enabled Alevi immigrants to rediscover their identities.<sup>5</sup> The Alevi associations in Europe provided financial support for the Alevi associations in Turkey and, as a diasporic power, made the resolution of the Alevi question a condition of Turkey's accession to the EU (Soner and Toktaş, 2011: 422). Moreover, the European Union progress reports and the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) contributed to greater international recognition of Alevism. The EU reports have drawn attention to the Alevi question since 1998 (Massicard, 2013: 348) and in its 2004 report, Alevis were, for the first time, defined as a "non-Sunni Muslim minority" (Zırh, 2015: 83). In 2014, the ECHR ruled that compulsory religious education lessons in Turkey discriminated against Alevis (Massicard, 2013; Coşan Eke, 2015: 93). As a result, the Alevi question has become a case with political ramifications, monitored by international institutions.

The *Kavga/Kervan*<sup>6</sup> magazine published 71 issues in Turkish between 1991–1998, at the height of the Alevi revival. It was published by the oppositional wing within the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) in London which published the newspaper *İşçinin Sesi*<sup>7</sup> under the leadership of Nihat

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<sup>3</sup> Prayer hall of the Alevis.

<sup>4</sup> Religious community leaders are called "dede" in the Alevi tradition.

<sup>5</sup> Gül (1999: 92) suggests that Alevis from Turkey living in Germany perhaps had the opportunity to experience a *cem* for the first time in their lives thanks to this rapid organisation.

<sup>6</sup> Started publication as *Kavga* and from 22nd issue and thereafter published as *Kervan*.

<sup>7</sup> The *İşçinin Sesi* magazine, which published 473 issues between 1974–2000 under the leadership of Rıza Yürükoğlu, brought the issue of Alevism onto the agenda of socialist discussions especially at the beginning of 1990s. After the publication of the book *Okunacak En Büyük Kitap İnsandır* (The Greatest Book to Be Read Is Man) in which Yürükoğlu established historical bonds between Alevism and socialism, Alevism featured in almost every issue of *İşçinin Sesi*. The book *Okunacak En büyük Kitap İnsandır* was first introduced in the 388th

Akseymen also known as Rıza Yürükoğlu.<sup>8</sup> *Kavga/ Kervan*, having begun during the Alevi revival, aimed at bridging the gap between Alevism and socialism by claiming that these religious and political movements are not intrinsically separate. Adapting Alevism to socialism with an assertion of an “indigenoussness and cultural element” was the main purpose of the magazine. At this point, the Turkish left was criticised by the magazine in two ways: firstly for ignoring the Alevi question and humiliating it as traditionalism; secondly for ignoring a historical movement with revolutionary roots native to Turkey. According to the magazine, incorporating Alevism into Turkish socialist ideology and encouraging Alevis to participate in the struggle was a historical, dialectical and class necessity.

### **Alevism in the *Kavga/Kervan* magazine: Where does Alevism fit in Islam?**

From its very first issue, the magazine published articles discussing Alevism, covering a broad range of subjects such as news on community organisations, festivals and commemorations, interviews with notable people and dedes and analyses of important actors in the history of Alevism. Whilst many articles mentioned the problems faced by Alevis in Turkey and abroad, others attempted to define Alevism. Interestingly, the articles offer different perspectives on the history, culture and politics of Alevism, rather than a single discursive unity. From this, one can deduce that various positions on Alevism are present in the journal, that some authors might have changed their positions over time, and that the journal’s position on Alevism as a whole was unsystematic and dependent on social conjuncture.

In the first issue of the magazine, the differences between Alevism and Sunnism were clearly explained in an interview with Ali Özsoy Dede. He explained why Alevis do not fast, pray or go on pilgrimages, with the core difference being that Sunnism is based on the five pillars of Islam whereas Alevism is more focused on controlling human physicality; or the debasing impulses defining human existence. At its core, Alevism is based on an

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issue of *İşçinin Sesi*, dated 5 February 1990. This book was then kept on the agenda constantly. Kerim Bal, a writer for *İşçinin Sesi*, expressed at the Haji Bekhtash Veli Festival in 1990 that Rıza Yürükoğlu’s book had the same effect on the Alevis as the effect of Lenin’s *What’s to be Done?* in Russia and that this book can be used as a guide for the organisation of Alevis with socialists.

<sup>8</sup> Nihat Akseymen became a TKP member after participating in the 1968 students’ movement and moved to London as a result of political conflicts. Although he joined the Central Committee (CC) of TKP in 1974, his membership was dismissed due to lack of discipline (Babalık, 2003). He later formed a splinter group named “TKP-İşçinin Sesi” (Bora, 2017: 644) which declared itself as an independent body, claiming that they were “the party” in 1979. The party’s agenda was to democratise Turkey, bringing peace and equality. After the significant influx of migration of political refugees from Turkey in the late 1980s, Akseyman realised the importance of Kurdish/Alevi’s participation in the socialist movement and therefore started to publish magazines that targeted these groups in London.

individual's control over their 'hands' (i.e. not to steal), 'tongue' (i.e. not to lie) and 'loins' (i.e. not to fornicate). Regarding his point of view on the subject of Alevism as a philosophy or religion, Özsoy Dede (1991[1]: 14), argued that Alevism is a major philosophy, containing a significant number of Sufi beliefs while using Ali as the vessel of this philosophy in the region.<sup>9</sup> The editor, Yürükoğlu, separated Alevism from Islam completely. According to Yürükoğlu, Alevism exists within the sphere of Islam but is independent of its rules and expectations. Haji Bektash and Alevism try to enhance people's insights and help them to reach the truth of existence and consciousness at higher spiritual levels (1992[1]: V).

Yürükoğlu highlighted the Sufi aspects of Alevism while separating it from Islam. He gave many examples that emphasise this separation.

Which ones of you goes to the mosque? I think you do not go. Because your Kaaba and mosque are human. You sit head to head and that's enough... Music is actually forbidden in Islam. (...) However, in Alevism, it is everything. Painting is also forbidden in Islam. But it is not in Alevism. Women cannot pray with men in the mosques. But in the *cem*<sup>10</sup> it is not forbidden for women to pray (Yürükoğlu, 1992[11]: V).

We can say that the magazine consistently separated Alevism from Islam: "Until quite recently, the ones giving fatwas saying 'Alevi are not Muslim; it is obligatory to kill them', today say, after some political manoeuvring, 'Alevi are Muslim; they are our brothers'" (1992[19]: 19). Though Alevism is considered a branch of Islam, there are different interpretations too. According to Pehlivan (1992[19]: 17) there are some Islamic traces in Alevism; but it is actually an original philosophy, worldview and way of life. It is a synthesis of Central Asian and Anatolian cultures.

According to the magazine, the most important difference between Alevism and Islam, in addition to their diverging rituals, is the human perception of Alevism. The primary reason for this is that Alevism has become integrated in Anatolian philosophy. In fact, Anatolian Alevism is a modern amalgamation of Islam with the traditions of central Asia and the civilisations of Anatolia. That is to say, although Alevism is not at the core of Islam, they both mutually affect one another to the extent that they cannot be perceived as two completely discrete belief systems (1993[26]: 17).

While drawing a distinct line between Alevism and Sunni Islam, there were also many articles putting some distance between Shia beliefs and Alevism.

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<sup>9</sup> To remove confusion, references to the magazine will be given by firstly indicating the date and then the issue number.

<sup>10</sup> Praying ritual of the Alevi.

Most notably Gazioğlu (1994[44]: 19), in his article for *14 Masum Magazine* published by a group of Shias, claims that Alevism cannot be conceived without *dergâh*<sup>11</sup>, *dede*, *cem*, *saz*<sup>12</sup>, song and *semah*<sup>13</sup>. He adds that it is impossible to force Anatolian Alevi to follow the Shia mollah mosque prayers.

In the magazine, the philosophy of Alevism was associated with materialism, especially in the articles by Ismail Kaygusuz (1996[58]: 14; 1998[70]: 3-4). The magazine had, from time to time, a modernist and positivist attitude in the definition of Alevism, whereby Alevism was no longer a religion but a scientific truth beyond a philosophy. In his article "Real Walls Do Not Fall", Ali Haydar Dede spoke about the necessity of establishing a scientific institution of Alevism (1992[20]: 15). Many titles of the articles reflected this preoccupation with science, including: "We are the ones to marry science" or "Only the stars are in the sky" (1991[10]). For example, in an interview, Aşık Nezir Erdal says: "Alevism is not a religion. It is an institution having emerged within Islam. It is a product of thought, a philosophy and school of thought" (1993[27]: 18). This materialist definition of Alevism also reveals its historical and class revolutionary character, which is fed by the mythological history of Alevism. According to Cem Aydın: "Alevism is unique and special for the land of Anatolia. It has always been on the opposition side, and therefore, has always been regarded as progressive and revolutionist" (1991[2]: 2).

The influence of Yürükoğlu on the Alevi attracted the attention of the contemporary popular press in Turkey. For example, the magazine *Aktüel*, published an interview with him. It was featured on the cover of the 44th issue of the magazine with the heading "Alevism is within Islam". Here Yürükoğlu defined Alevism "as a mystical thought and belief system affiliated to the sectarian Imam Cafer; represented by Bektashism, which has appeared by combining the Shia thoughts of Islam with esoterism and as a Sufi interpretation of Islam", adding that "I absolutely refute that Alevism is non-Islamic." (1994[44]: 4). These quotes featuring in the popular press of that period demonstrate the occasionally ambiguous attitude of magazine writers, with many other articles classifying Alevism as distinct from Islam.

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<sup>11</sup> Religious lodge.

<sup>12</sup> A musical instrument used in cem ceremonies.

<sup>13</sup> The semah performed during the service (cem) as required by Alevi and Bektashi belief is a means of reaching God through mystical and aesthetic movements executed in harmony with the rhythm of music and song accompanied by a saz.

## **The relationship between Alevi and official ideology according to Kavga/Kervan**

The Alevi tragedies in Turkey strengthened Alevi solidarity and were very influential in creating a political consciousness and will to self-organise based on a common purpose. The incidents in Maraş (1978), Çorum (1980), Sivas (1993) and Gazi (1995) were the turning points for Alevi organisations both inside and outside Turkey (Gül, 1999: 111; Ata, 2015: 133, Zorlu, 2015: 150; Massicard, 2013; Coşan Eke, 2015: 94). As the magazine was continuing circulation during the period of the Alevi revival, it bore witness to many acts of social violence targeting Alevi. The magazine published commentaries on them and took every opportunity to remind its readership of former Alevi traumas and encourage the establishment of an identity around common sorrows with an ultimate solution proffered in the class struggle. In regular interviews with Alevi dedes under the heading “Dedes Speaking”, the historical massacres targeting the Alevi were frequently mentioned. Bringing up the continuous oppression of the qizilbash<sup>14</sup>, the conclusion is drawn that these struggles must be communicated broadly and that Alevi should be educated about them if a positive outcome was to be reached in Turkey (1991[10]: 19).

The Alevi massacres were mentioned in nearly every issue of Kavga/Kervan: “Ottoman inquisition showed one of its mass and extensive cruelties against Alevi-Bektashi belief during the period of extermination of Bektashi Dergahs. Hundreds of unarmed and unguarded people were investigated, oppressed and killed just because of their beliefs not complying with sharia” (Yıldırım, [61]: 9). In this respect, the magazine defined Ottoman history as a history of cruelty against the Alevi. By reminding readers of the execution of Sheikh Bedreddin, Pir Sultan Abdal and the massacre of Alevi during the Jalali Revolts, this narration established a sorrowful narrative of Alevi identity.

Although the magazine’s attitude towards the Ottoman period is clear, it is indecisive about Republican Turkey. The writers of the magazine predominantly maintained the status quo of supporting Kemalism against “fundamentalists”. However, they also emphasised that Kemalism did harm Alevi and claimed that responsibility for the injustices and massacres during the Republican period lay with a state dedicated to Kemalist ideology. Though it appears contradictory, this narrative emphasised that

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<sup>14</sup> Kizilbash, (“Red Head”), any member of the seven Turkmen tribes who wore red caps to signify their support of the founders of the Şafavid dynasty (1501–1736) in Iran. The name was given to them by Sunni Turks and was applied later to the followers of a Shia sect in eastern Asia Minor as a term of abuse.



the Alevis are not historically aligned with the state but reluctantly supported the Kemalist state for adopting secularism.

In the first issue of the magazine, the noted Article 163<sup>15</sup> of the Turkish Penal Code on reaction was opposed. The heading of the magazine article proclaimed "Article 163 should not be retracted" (1991[1]: 8) with the sub-heading reading "163 is perhaps the most democratic article". In the article, the author claimed that the "abrogation of Article 163 will be a death blow for more than 20 million Alevi citizens<sup>16</sup> living in Turkey. Governing the state by religious laws means being governed by Sunnism. If this happens, it is not difficult to estimate the extent of cruelty against Alevi citizens". Then the author raised the question whether "we are at the same point with the Kemalists on some aspects of secularism" to which the answer was: "There is no reason for us to take offence at this. Our attitude is a part of an integrated truth and it is possible for it to coincide with the attitudes of other groups on various subjects. We, without hesitation, can say that we are in agreement with the Kemalists on the secular nature of the state and the attitude against religious fundamentalism" (1991[1]: 8). Yürükoğlu, the author of this article reiterated these opinions in an interview featured in *Aktüel* magazine:

We take no offence. Whether Kemalist, social democrat or democrat. What is important is to be secular; to support democracy, that much or this much. One's perception of democracy and secularism can be more limited or extensive than ours, which is not a matter of separation. All powers supporting democracy, secularity, republicanism should come together (Yürükoğlu, 1994[44]: 5).

The same subject was emphasised in Birgül Değirmenci's article "Neither Reconciliation nor Fight!" in the 4th issue of the magazine (1991[4]: 4): "The abrogation of Article 163 aims at institutionalising and thus increasing the religious-reactionary oppression and the reactionary attacks against Alevi society." Another example of the magazine's alignment with the "status quo" was revealed in the articles pertinent to the closure of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party). A title in the 36th issue of the magazine even proclaimed: "Sharia follower party should be closed". The heading of another article was "Closure or 'bite the hand that feeds you'?" (Turan, 1994[41]: 15). Yürükoğlu (1994[36]: 5), in his article entitled "Why nobody says the sharia follower party should be closed?" said: "We are addressing the secular majority of

<sup>15</sup> Article 163 had outlawed politically motivated religious activity and prohibited the establishment of religious organizations or political parties aimed at creating an Islamic republic.

<sup>16</sup> Although it is not clear from where this number was taken, the magazine writers always wrote about an Alevi population of 20 million; and at times even claimed more than this.

Turkey. Isn't the definition of a secular state the separation of religion and state affairs?" And he added: "The party supporting sharia contradicts the principle of secularism. It should be SHUT DOWN!"<sup>17</sup>

According to Soner and Toktaş (2011: 421) the secular reforms introduced by the Kemalist state have transformed Alevis into one of the most loyal groups of the Kemalist modernisation project. The magazine writers, adopting the secularity principle of Kemalism to a large extent, had no doubt on the Turkish Republic being organised around Sunni-Islamic beliefs. Yürükoğlu aptly summarised this matter stating that the history of Alevism is full of sorrow. Underlining the lack of education on Alevism, Yürükoğlu (1992[11]: 17) suggests that Sunnism prevented peace within the country whilst Alevis faced persecution by the state. Whereas Sunnis received education in both schools and mosques, Alevis were regarded as "illegal". This prevented a large number of them from familiarising themselves with their own beliefs.

For example, the Kemalist closure of dervish lodges and *zawiyas* was widely regarded as adversely affecting Alevis (Yürükoğlu, 1993[23]: 12) with the magazine later calling for the law in question to be repealed (1993[29]: 21). According to the magazine, Sunnis could pray in their mosques, transfer their knowledge via the compulsory religious education lessons and reach even the most remote villages through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı*). However, the wounded Alevi identity could not find any channel to express itself because of the law, prejudice and oppression.

Another subject that was consistently covered by Kavga/Kervan during its publication was the necessity of closing the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The fact that some Alevi organisations were affiliated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, receiving economic assistance, including salaries for *dedes*, was strongly criticised by the magazine. Those organisations were accused of discrediting the history of Alevism and were labelled as disgraceful traitors and the "Hizir Pashas among us". The authors who defined the inclusion of Alevis in the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a "state trap", defended the abrogation of this institution and repeatedly demanded the cancellation of religious education lessons.<sup>18</sup> It can be said that the magazine followed a radical secular line, for it not only refuted the

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<sup>17</sup> During this period, the psychology of the Sivas massacre and the discontent of Alevi society after the triumph of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) in Ankara and Istanbul in the local elections were also reflected in the magazine, which organized campaigns under the "Secular Front on Duty! Sharia Party must be Closed" slogan. Articles on this subject were entitled, for instance, "The Shariah-follower RP must be closed", (Erdilek, 1994[37]: 5) or "Call for secular-democratic front" (1994 [39]: 5).

<sup>18</sup> In an announcement advertised by Alevi organisations in the 26th issue of the magazine, the announcement of Alevi federations and associations organised in Turkey and Europe, which came together on 27-28 March 1993 in Ankara, was published. The first article of the announcement was about the need for the abrogation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs ([26]: 18).

inclusion of Alevis in the Directorate of Religious Affairs but also argued that all religious matters must be separated from the state.

The murder of Alevi intellectuals and artists during an arson attack on the Madımak Hotel in Sivas on 2 July 1993 alerted Alevis both in Turkey and abroad. The events following this massacre were very influential in the creation of a diasporic Alevi identity. A traumatic exit from the homeland (Safran, 1991: 83-84; Griffiths, 1999: 33; Cohen 2008) is one of the characteristics widely referred to in the literature on Alevi diaspora. The past experiences of Alevi/Kurdish communities who had to leave Turkey via regular and irregular migrations and the incidents experienced abroad have led to more intense relationships with their homeland, which has contributed to the formation of diasporic communities (Bilecen, 2016).

Such traumatic incidents coupled with the social indignation caused by the assassinations of journalists and writers such as Metin Göktepe, Uğur Mumcu, Onat Kutlar and Turan Dursun were also influential in creating awareness and the will to self-organise. In this regard, the magazine focused greatly on the Sivas massacre, defining a “group within the state” as the “mastermind, the executor and the chief actor of the massacre”. Yıldırım, (1993[30]: 14-15) wrote that “sharia and state are one within the Turkish Republic in a fake secularism” and supported the idea that “without holding the state to account, it is not possible to reveal those responsible for the massacre and to learn from it”. The same writer drew attention to the responsibility of the state the massacre in his article “Planned and Programmed Massacre” (Yıldırım, 1993[31]: 14). The Gazi Incidents were evaluated similarly by the magazine contributors. In the article “Gazi massacre was countered by the power of people” (Güven, 1995[47]: 2), the author stated: “The sharia-follower Islamist movement responsible for the massacre is one of the arms of the fascist state. This is very clear in people’s minds. Shouting the ‘murderer state, murderer sharia’ slogan is the proof of it”.<sup>19</sup>

The massacres and murders of notable Alevis during the publication life of the magazine caused the relationship between Alevism and official ideology to be questioned and there were numerous articles challenging the religious and oppressive actions of the state. However, despite the longstanding articulation of Sunni-Islamic beliefs within official state ideology, the

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<sup>19</sup>Following the Gazi protests, the magazine faced increasing legal pressure for its clearly anti-governmental editorial line. The magazine was heavily fined, its editor-in-chief was imprisoned for two years and numerous issues were forcibly withdrawn from sale, which eventually forced the magazine to cease publication altogether. When the magazine started to be published again, their new focus was on presenting the historical, mythological and belief-related dimension of Alevism after the 67th issue, but had to finish its publication life after a short time.

magazine did not abstain from supporting the secular implementations of Kemalist ideology.

Despite its ambivalent position on Kemalism, the magazine writers differ from the official ideology regarding the Kurdish issue. The Kurdish issue, like Alevism, was discussed within the context of the struggle of oppressed nations in the publications and congress resolutions of the TKP. The magazine *İşçinin Sesi* approached the Kurdish movement from this perspective and supported the independence struggle of Kurdish people. For example, in an article "The Working Class is with the Kurdish People", it was stated that "the working class advocates the self-determination of Kurdish people including their right of separation and supports the Kurdish people" (Can, 1986: 3). Also, at the fifth party congress, the Kurdish issue was evaluated within the context of "the self-determination of nations".

Respect for the self-determination of nations is obligatory for the democratisation of society. (...) Turkish Kurdistan is the internal colony of Turkey. (...) The Kurdish problem is the key problem for a revolution in Turkey. The enemy is common. The only option is to unite the powers in a revolutionist movement (*İşçinin Sesi*, 1986: 8).

Yürükoğlu (1996: 5-6) perceived the Kurdish people as a vanguard preparing Turkey for a revolutionary state. In this respect, according to him what the revolutionists had to do was to support the struggle of the oppressed people whilst avoiding any nationalist behaviour. Therefore, the Kurdish problem could only be solved with a socialist revolution. However, there was no consistency within the magazine on the Kurdish issue due to the changing political agenda and the different ideas of different writers.

### **The religious organisation of Alevis in the Kervan/Kavga magazine: Dede, cemevi, dergâh**

Kavga/Kervan magazine was also a channel for discussing the religious organisation problems of Alevism. In a period of rapid increase in the number of Alevi associations in Turkey and abroad, the primary agenda of the magazine was to attract the attention of those associations with a Leftist-Alevi line. In this regard, the three main goals of the magazine were to attach importance to and modernise the dede institution; gathering around the holy dergâh and to increase the number of cemevis.

The viewpoint that the dede institution was outdated was popular amongst young Alevis who participated in the socialist movement during the migration period to the cities in the 1960s and 1970s, and caused such religious dignitaries to lose most of their authority. "The young generations considering the dedes as the ones 'stupefying' and 'exploiting' the people,

rejected following them” (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1996: 54). In this respect, rehabilitating the dede institution and adapting it to a modern context was given special importance in Kavga/Kervan. For this reason, from the start, the dede institution was highlighted on every possible occasion and a regular feature called “Dedes Speaking” featured interviews with dedes living in Turkey and abroad.

The magazine’s drive to revive the dede institution was underpinned by what they regarded as the loss of traditional Alevi values during the urbanisation process of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Yürükoğlu (1990: 274), Sunnism is institutionally present in even the most remote villages due to its historic inseparability from official state ideology. However, Alevism has no such official presence. With the progress of urbanisation in Turkey, the dede institution regressed and lost its main function of uniting and connecting Alevi society.

In his article “Today the dede institution requires modernisation” (1991[4]: 20) Yürükoğlu outlined the importance of the dedes’ role, but added that it had not kept up with the times. Yürükoğlu idealised the dede as a religious leader, guide and fully equipped intellectual. This approach of the magazine writers was both romantic and modernist. According to Yürükoğlu, “An Alevi dede should know about Bach, listen to Negro spirituals, watch opera and learn about other cultures in the world.” “A dede should be equipped with literature, saz, music, philosophy, economy etc., which contributes not only to Alevi but also to the whole of humanity” (1991[4]: 20). In one of the “Dedes Speaking” interviews with Ali Haydar Celasun (1991[6]: 11), Celasun presented an intellectual dede profile as knowledgeable about history, medicine, music and law: “Each dede should read at least 3-4 newspapers a day and 1-2 books in a month. If someone comes and asks ‘Dede, who is that?’, ‘Dede, what is feminism’ etc., and if the dede cannot give a satisfactory answer, then, he/she will go and learn it from somewhere/one else.”

The positivist approach taken by the magazine led to content suggesting moves that could potentially revive the dede role, which included the initiation of specific programmes in universities and establishing a Dede Training Institution. Another subject discussed in the magazine was whether the dede title should follow a line of descent. Initially, Yürükoğlu suggested that there was no need for this, nor indeed was there any need to have Alevi heritage to be an Alevi (Yürükoğlu, 1993[24]: 11).

One of the prerequisites for adapting the dede institution to modern times were the cemevis. Yürükoğlu stated in a conference hosted by the Alevi-Bektashi Association in the Netherlands that Alevi cannot only be organised through associations: “If cemevis are opened everywhere around

Turkey and in Europe, the dede institution will adapt to the conditions of the century" (1992[21]: 13). According to this idea, there is no Alevism without dedes and there will be no Alevi organisation without cemevis. The cemevis will provide the civil organisation function for Alevis in terms of being a place not only for fulfilling religious rituals but also for socialising and holding cultural events.<sup>20</sup>

The magazine published the news of the foundation of cemevis in Turkey and abroad, emphasising that they are a necessity for the Alevi community with article titles such as "We will found our cemevis everywhere" (1993[27]: 23), "Let's found our cemevis wherever Alevis are" (1994[36]: 13), "A cemevi in every district and a cem every week" (1995[45]: 16), "Let's bring our youths to the cem and to the cultural centre" (1994[36]: 14). The development of Alevi organisations after the second half of 1990s made the Alevis more visible in public and political arenas. In his article entitled "Cemevis and Alevi Organisations" Aslan (1998[67]: 14) claimed that "Alevi associations etc. have been organised in many regions during the last five years and the foundation of cemevis has accelerated". "Cemevis are important for the Alevis and also historically important in ensuring Alevism is perpetuated in future associations and foundations. What Alevis need is to 'unite'".

According to Yürükoğlu, gathering Alevis around the dergâh is the way to revive the dede institution and to ensure that cemevis are at the centre of Alevi life. This is a necessity for the centralisation of Alevis and for transferring their values to the next generation. He pondered how best to revive and organise Alevism for the Alevi working class and ultimately for the whole of society. He found the solution in the Haji Bektash Veli dergâh and went on to suggest a holy bureaucratic mechanism similar to the vilayat-i faqih<sup>21</sup> in Iran (1992[21]: 13).

Yürükoğlu continued to promote his ideas on dergâh consistently in his speeches abroad. For example, at a conference in Australia he increased the number of his conditions on the organisation around dergâh from three to ten. Among these conditions he included opening cemevis, modernising the dede institution, not giving a salary to the dedes, ratifying the dede position

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<sup>20</sup> With the initiative of the Workers' Union in London in January 1993, the Alevi Society performed their first cem with the participation of Dertli Divani, a Turkish Alevi troubadour, born in 1962. This event was greatly appreciated by the magazine and regarded as an opportunity for opening a cemevi in London. The magazine proudly presented the news about the first cem: "Brothers! Together; to God! Let's take our gloves off and have a cemevi in London. And pave the way with cem in our cemevi!" (1993[24]: 17).

<sup>21</sup> Rule or guardianship by a jurist. The concept gained wide currency in the Shia world when it was used as the title of a published series of lectures given by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1969. It became the form of Islamic government in Iran when Khomeini came to power in 1979 and became the supreme arbiter of all matters of government in Iran. The concept derives from the historical understanding that the exclusive right of interpretation of Islamic law belongs to religious scholars (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com>).

through an education institute affiliated to the dergâh and gathering all associations in Turkey and Europe under a general coordination board (Yürükoğlu, 1993[23]: 14).

Yürükoğlu, in his speech at the 74th foundation anniversary of the TKP (later published in Kavga/Kervan), clarified his thoughts on dergâh:

First of all, let's talk about why unity can only be organised around the dergâh: i) Alevism is a belief system. It has institutions that have developed over centuries. If you ignore them, you eradicate this society. The primary one of these institutions is the dergâh. And then cem, dedes, babas. If there are none of them, there is also no Alevism. ii) A practical reason: today, the dergâh rules over approximately 2/5 of Alevi society. The remaining 3/5 is scattered and separated incomprehensibly" (1994[42]: 12).

To critics who held that he suggested "the 'theocratical' government of the postnişin and wanted to create a clergy in Alevism" he replied: "I think the one saying this does not understand the philosophical practical tendencies of Alevism. Was there any 'theocratical' government during the period of unity of Alevi society around the Dergah?" (1994[42]: 13).

The magazine's dergâh opinion was actually a reply to the "Alevi Party" opinion in that period. Efforts to establish an Alevi party in Turkey were strongly opposed in the magazine. In this respect, raising the Alevi party initiative in an interview with Veliyettin Ulusoy, the representative of the Haji Bektash Veli dergâh, was important. Ulusoy stated that "founding an Alevi party is contrary to the principle of secularism that we believe in and support." (1995[53]: 18). The interview was published under the headings "An Alevi party cannot be founded. I don't approve of it" and "An Alevi party will be the party of the system". The magazine published numerous articles on the issue of an Alevi party being formed, mainly arguing that the initiative was a betrayal and a trap. The magazine's writers also spoke about the issue at the Haji Bektash Veli Festival and distributed a brochure entitled "Yes to the organisation of Alevis; but no to an Alevi Party!"

The arguments used by the magazine writers to promote key concepts of Alevi organisation, summarised as the dede, cemevi and dergâh, are inconsistent and have a problematic relation with reality. The religious and social guide, the dede, was also expected to be an organic intellectual, continually improving himself in every field. Intellectuals interested in Alevism from other nations and societies could become a dede and would need to be educated at the Education Institute. The magazine, on the one hand, tried to combine science and logic with Alevism, emphasising their interconnectedness; on the other hand, it envisaged a holy organisation

model whose framework was set within the strict lines of the *dergâh*. This vision of an organisational structure which included a hierarchical clergy gathering around a holy place was arbitrary and inconsistent. From time to time, Yürükoğlu attached new components to this organisation type and sometimes changed some of them. Moreover, a hierarchical organisation type, supported by the magazine, was contradictory to the core of the Alevi belief. Alevism has not constituted a canonical unity at any time during its history and Alevi religious knowledge has been passed down verbally in specific families considered to be holy (*ocak*). According to Kehl-Bodrogi (1996: 53) “these families gain their legitimacy from their imaginary kinship with Ali or the Twelve Imam paternity.” Therefore, it would be an inconsistent and fruitless initiative to stereotype a structure operating traditionally for hundreds of years into a strict and randomly planned organisation. On the other hand, we can agree with the magazine’s claim that the establishment and dissemination of *cemevis* could ensure the organisation of Alevis as this has been the case when we consider diaspora Alevis. The Alevi societies in both Turkey and abroad have adopted their beliefs and cultural values and sometimes been introduced to these values for the first time. This situation ensures, especially for Alevis living abroad, that they can be a political power (Bilecen, 2016).<sup>22</sup>

### **The fraternity of Alevism and socialism in the Kavga/Kervan magazine**

In his article “Human is both the Subject and the Aim” published in the 405th issue of *İşçinin Sesi*, Yürükoğlu (1990: 4) stated that “for us, the ancestor of communism is Alevism. (...) We have much to learn from Alevism. (...) I can clearly say that we haven’t benefitted sufficiently from Alevism yet. So long as we discuss Alevism, our comrades think about bringing the Alevis who are open to the left into the communist movement”. When the issue of Alevism became part of Turkey’s agenda in the 1990s for various reasons, the TKP’s *İşçinin Sesi* started to give wider coverage to it. At that time, Kavga/Kervan asserted that Alevis and socialists were inherent allies for historical and class reasons. Another reason for their proximity was the organisation of the Alevi population in Europe which the magazine compared to the immigration of Alevis to cities in Turkey. It is no coincidence that during a period in which Yürükoğlu focused on Alevism and published Kavga/Kervan, a wave of Kurdish/Alevi migration from Turkey to England was taking place.

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<sup>22</sup> Particularly the *cemevis* organised by German and English Alevi Federations in various areas of those countries contribute to the religious and cultural gatherings of Alevis and play an important role in their political organisation, the creation of a diasporic identity as well as lobbying activities in Turkey and the countries they live in (Bilecen, 2016).



The most important aim of the magazine was to reunite Alevi and socialists, with the objective of creating a fraternity amongst two groups connected from a historical, dialectical and class perspective. The aim of Kavga/Kervan was to align Alevi and socialists. From the magazine's viewpoint Alevi had witnessed that at its core, Alevism was not inconsistent with socialist ideals and the socialists comprehended the revolutionary side of Alevism, which they had previously shunned as a traditional and feudal religion. Moreover, the history of Alevism has been a leverage for Turkish socialists to surpass the "nativism problem" because the class revolts and revolutionaries of this history are the native source vital to socialism in Turkey.

According to Kavga/Kervan magazine, "Alevism, with its communal values and class sense, has been the philosophy of the oppressed communities revolting against the dominant classes throughout history. Values such as labour, respect, equality and solidarity defended by socialism today have also been defended by the Alevi as early as 1000 years ago" (Ertan, 2015: 54). Yürükoğlu expressed continuously that the TKP became the representative of the Alevi left. "What do we say about Alevism? Alevism is the ancestor of communism in Anatolia. And if Alevism does not approach the working class and its history, it will deny its own honourable place in history. And these are the native roots of the left." Yürükoğlu opposed the claim that Alevi ideology would absorb the socialist ideology. "On the contrary: firstly, the socialist ideology involves the profound heritage, the thought, attitude and wealth of Alevism in the concrete conditions of Turkey, and secondly, it puts it under the microscope of dialectical and historical materialism" (1994[42]: 12). Yürükoğlu received criticism of producing ideas that associate a religious movement with a political one. His response was "in Alevism the value given to people reflects their cultural wealth. Therefore, if we incorporate this understanding into our belief system, we can fulfil a deficient part in ourselves" (Yürükoğlu, 1994[44]: 4).

Yürükoğlu (1990: 265) defined the history of Alevism as a history of revolt against the dominant classes. He anachronistically named it an "anti-feudal, democratic peasant movement". According to Yürükoğlu, the duty of today's working class was to absorb this movement of Anatolian peasants into the revolutionary tradition and to find ways to rely on it. Through this process, native roots would be discovered. Leftists in Turkey, speaking French, performing their revolutionism utilising foreign concepts and not analysing their own history would find the true revolutionary spirit through

a consideration of Alevism's history.<sup>23</sup> According to Yürükoğlu, values such as "companionship, sharing, democracy, women's rights, anti-exploitation movements, social justice etc." which are generally championed by the left, play a crucial role in Alevism (1994[44]: 5). Alevism is, at heart, a communal life plan and for this reason, the understanding of "not yours; not mine; but all wealth belongs to God". Yürükoğlu was insistent that the native source he found for socialist thought, often accused of having foreign roots, played an inseparable part in the history of class struggle. He visited Cuba with such a mindset. In his article "The Unbelievable Cuba" (1997[65]: 12), he claimed that "theory is painted with the colours of its country" and asked whether Alevism was not "the native pattern of Turkey's socialism". For Yürükoğlu the participation of Alevi society in the political struggle with the socialists meant "a politicisation suitable for its core and consistent with the notions created by its own revolutionism in history" (1995[53]: 7). In his article "Marxism, Atheism and Alevism", Sabri Yücel (1998[67]: 32) argued that there has always been a natural alliance between the Marxists and the Alevis claiming that the labour-based history of the Alevi struggle developed the basis of this alliance.

The notion that Alevism and socialism are the same at heart has from time to time caused the depiction of a world that we can say is a leftist-Alevi utopia. For example, in the article "Workers and Alevis, shoulder to shoulder, to establish the city of consent", the "city of consent" in Alevi mythology was, through the ideas of Marx, More and Campenalla, depicted as "an utopia without property where money is not used and everything is made with consent" (1995[55]: 9). Turkish folk music singer Musa Eroğlu in an interview said that "after the law of Alevism is established, there will be no need for borders or passports" (1991[7]: 14). As can be seen, the magazine writers were in a romantic, revolutionary mood while trying to reunite socialism with Alevism.

The ideological affinity between Alevism and socialism was not only emphasised through historical examples but also current political developments. For example, the topic of the panel held by the magazine on 10 September 1993 was "Alevis-workers are together at heart". It proposed that "Alevis and workers are companions" (1991[7]: 4).<sup>24</sup> On many occasions,

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<sup>23</sup> Criticising the alienated leftist intellectual prototype, Yürükoğlu, (1994[42]: 12), wanted to bring the Turkish left and important characters of Alevi's history together: "The Marxist formation of Turkey has mostly been superficial. It has performed socialism with French colours. However, the Marxist movements of every country should be based on their own country, history and society. If a communist in Turkey is not affected when hearing about Hüseyin, Nesimi, Mansur, Haji Bektash Veli, Bedrettin and Pir Sultan, then, what kind of a communist is he or she? When we hear about Luxemburg, we are affected. It's okay. But the former one is similarly obligatory."

<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on making the working class companion (fraternal of the way [what does this mean?]) with Alevis was a slogan frequently reiterated in Kavga/Kervan magazine. It was at such a point that even the

the magazine writers called for Alevi to participate in the socialist struggle, framing this as a historical and dialectical class necessity and an obligation: “Today, the only political platform for the Alevi is the leftist idea” (1998[67]: 7). The *Kavga/Kervan* magazine was criticised both by the leftists and by various Alevi organisations. Among those criticisms were the exploitation of Alevism and instrumentalisation for “gaining men” to the socialist movement. Yürükoğlu, expressing that he found socialism through Alevi songs (1990: 9), replied to those criticisms:

First of all, they should show us which thoughts, suggestions or practical attitudes of ours deserve these criticisms... Whilst many of the intellectuals and progressivists within the Alevi society consider the dedes as a reactionary institution, we were the ones who supported them. While everyone was chasing “modern” dreams of reuniting with this or that association, we were the ones saying, “unity must be created with the descendants of Haji Bektash”. (...) So, I ask, where is our political agenda, here?” (1994[42]: 12).

## Conclusion

The *Kavga/Kervan* magazine began its publication at a time of intensive mobilisation of Alevi in Turkey and abroad, with the aim of unifying Alevi with the socialist struggle, offering examples from the history of Alevi, showing that solidarity, humanitarian values and practices of struggle were hidden in their history. The magazine, through its anachronistic behaviour, tried to reveal the history of Alevism and the revolutionary characters in it.

The *Kavga/Kervan* writers were influential in the organisation of Alevi abroad, especially in London, and affected the Alevi communities living there. In conferences held in England, Germany, Holland and Australia, Yürükoğlu tried to bring the Alevi into the fold of the socialist struggle and supported the idea that Alevi should be organised in the triangle of dede, cemevi and dergâh. He visualised the ideal Alevi organisation as a “modern” basis for the dede institution, an organisation around the cemevis instead of other associations and reuniting these synergies under a holy roof (dergâh). However, the ideas expressed by Yürükoğlu and the magazine writers were not always holistic and consistent. The contributors interpreted Alevi history and Turkish policies with a melancholic and often unrealistic romantic viewpoint. For example, with the rigidity of the magazine after the Gazi incidents, its attitude switched from “there isn’t a revolutionary condition; there is counter-revolution in Turkey” to “there is a revolutionary

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music cassettes advertised in the magazine were promoted as a “humble step for working-class and Alevi brotherhood”.

condition in Turkey", which made it more radical. This radicalisation led to issues of the magazine being pulled from the shelves and writers being imprisoned. Therefore, during its final years, the magazine lost the momentum it had achieved at the beginning of 1990s and was closed because of political pressures and the deterioration of Yürükoğlu's health.

Kavga/Kervan was criticised by Alevi and leftists alike during its publication period. It could address neither the Alevi community living in Turkey and abroad nor the socialists, with the exception of the ones living abroad. Despite having a weak influence, Kavga/Kervan gained a unique place in the socialist tradition and deserves to be remembered for its efforts in bringing socialist thought and Alevi beliefs together.

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