

Dr. Fatma KURTTEKİN

# Effects of Alevi-Sunni Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations

Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerin Çocukların Din  
Eğitimine ve Aile İlişkilerine Etkisi



# Effects of Alevi-Sunni Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations

Fatma KURTTEKİN

Oku Okut Yayınları  
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## SUMMARY

### **Effects of Alevi-Sunni Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations**

In this study, the views of parents in Alevi-Sunni marriages on the phenomenon of religion and their children's religious education are examined. While there has been a growing body of research on the role and significance of religion in Alevi-Sunni families, limited attention has been paid to their attitudes towards their children's religious education, particularly within the context of cross-religious marriages. Based on this, this study aims to fill this research gap by examining the perspectives of parents in Alevi-Sunni marriages on their children's religious education and family dynamics, using qualitative methods to provide in-depth insights. Ten families living in Sivas, Ankara and Tunceli, who were contacted through snowball and purposive sampling, participated in the study, in which qualitative research techniques were used. The data used in the study were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interview forms. The data was analyzed with the content analysis. It was determined that the Alevi-Sunni difference did not have a significant impact on the participants' religious attitudes or their children's religious education. Almost all parents stated that they wanted their children to choose their own path by acquiring experience and knowledge about both religious interpretations/ understandings.

The study identified two primary areas of difficulty in Alevi-Sunni families: familial opposition to the participants' decision to marry and conflicts surrounding the children's religious education. These tensions may stem from societal pressures to conform to sectarian norms and the fear of losing religious identity through cross/mixed (intrafaith) marriages. Such pressures highlight the need for open dialogue and acceptance within families, which many participants reported as key to resolving conflicts. The provision of religious education in the family and the religious identity of children have been discussed in a separate study. Therefore, in this study, participants' views on "compulsory" religious education activities, which are also a subject of debate in society, were evaluated. In parallel with the findings in the literature, the participants' opinions were grouped in three categories, namely "abolishing the courses", "making the courses optional", and "improving the courses along with preserving their compulsory status". Following the interviews, it was seen that the participants could have arguments mostly due to external factors, and that their own religious understanding did not have any impact on family life, religious attitudes or child rearing. Attention was drawn to the need for freedom from prejudices, acceptance of the other as he/she is, honesty, trust and a communicative environment of dialogue in order to reduce the tension in these two areas.

#### **Subject Categories**

BIC: HRAM2 Islam Studies

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THEMA: QRAM Islam: Alevism, Shia, Sunni

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#### **Keywords**

Religious education; Alevi-Sunni families; Children; Religious identity; Family relations

## ÖZET

### **Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerin Çocukların Din Eğitime ve Aile İlişkilerine Etkileri**

Bu çalışmada dinî anlayış farklılığına dayalı evliliklerde ebeveynlerin din olgusu ve çocukların din eğitimine dair görüşleri incelenmektedir. Son yıllarda dinî anlayış farklılığına dayalı karma evliliklerde dinin yeri ve önemi üzerine yapılan çalışmalar artsa da çocukların din eğitimine yönelik tutumlarıyla ilgili araştırmaların yeterli düzeyde olduğu söylenememektedir. Dolayısıyla bu araştırma ile var olan literatüre katkı sağlamak ve alandan bir kesit sunmak amaçlanmıştır. Nitel araştırma teknikleri kullanılan çalışmaya Sivas, Ankara ve Tunceli’de yaşayan kartopu ve amaçlı örnek yoluyla ulaşılan on aile katılmıştır. Araştırmada kullanılan veriler anket ve yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formları ile toplanmıştır. Veriler içerik analizi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Dinî anlayış farklılıklarının din olgusuna ve çocukların din eğitimine çok belirgin bir etkisinin olmadığı saptanmıştır. Ebeveynlerin neredeyse tamamı çocukların her iki dinî anlayışa dair deneyim ve bilgi edinerek kendi yollarını tercih etmelerini arzu ettiklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Alevi-Sünni geleneği barındıran ailelerde temelde iki konunun problemlere yol açabileceği görülmüştür. Bu konulardan ilki katılımcıların evlilik arzusuna çeşitli sebeplerle ailenin ve yakın çevrenin karşı çıkmasıdır. İkincisi ise çocukların din eğitimidir. Ailede din eğitim verilmesi ve çocukların dinî kimliği ayrı bir çalışma olarak ele alınmıştır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmada toplumda da tartışılabilen “zorunlu” din eğitimi faaliyetleri ile ilgili katılımcıların düşünceleri değerlendirilmiştir. Katılımcıların görüşleri literatürdeki bulgulara paralel olarak “derslerin kaldırılması, seçmeli hâle getirilmesi, zorunlu statüsün korunmasıyla birlikte derslerin iyileştirilmesi” şeklinde üç kategoride toplanmıştır. Yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda katılımcıların çoğunlukla dışsal faktörlerden dolayı tartışmalar yaşanabildiği, kendi dinî anlayışlarının aile hayatında, dinî tutum ve çocuk yetiştirmede herhangi bir etkisinin olmadığı görülmüştür. Söz konusu iki alandaki gerilimin azalması için önyargılardan sıyrılmak, diğerini olduğu gibi kabul, dürüstlük, güven ve iletişime açık diyalog ortamının gerekliliğine parmak basılmıştır.

### **Konu Kategorileri**

BIC: HRAM2 İslam Çalışmaları  
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THEMA: QRAM İslamiyet: Alevilik, Şiilik, Sünnilik  
LC: BP173 İslam ve Sosyal Konular  
DEWEY: 297.4 İslam ve Din Eğitimi

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Din Eğitimi; Alevi-Sünni Evlilikler; Çocuklar; Dinî Kimlik; Aile İlişkileri

## About the Author

Dr. Fatma Kurttekin, graduated from Uludağ University, Faculty of Education (in 2011). She completed her master's degree at the same university (2013) and her doctoral studies at Cumhuriyet University (in 2017). Kurttekin worked as a Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge teacher at the Ministry of National Education for a while (2011-2012). Between 2012 and 2023, she was associated with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Sivas Cumhuriyet. Since 2023, she has been a staff member of the Faculty of Theology at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University.

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## PREFACE

This book is the product of a study examining the thoughts and experiences related to how sectarian/religious understanding differences impact child-rearing and family relations, specifically in the context of Alevi-Sunni families. The family is a fundamental institution that shapes children's lives. Religion, as a reflection of family values and beliefs, often forms an integral part of the daily lives of families. However, differences in parents' religious understandings can sometimes lead to discord in family dynamics.

First published in 2023 by İlahiyat Yayınları under the title "*Effects of Alevi-Sunni Intra-Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations*," this revised and updated edition consists of an introduction and three chapters. The *Introduction* provides information about the research problem and purpose, study group, method, and existing literature on the subject. The *First Chapter* discusses the theoretical framework, focusing on topics such as cross/mixed marriage, identity, and religious education. The *Second Chapter* addresses participants' perspectives on the concept of religion and approaches to religious education in the family. The *Third Chapter* explores potential challenges faced by families encompassing both Alevi and Sunni traditions. The conclusion and recommendations section offers a detailed evaluation of the findings. I sincerely thank all those who contributed to this study and wish you an engaging and insightful reading experience.

Fatma Kurttekin  
Zonguldak 2024



## INTRODUCTION

This section consists of four headings. The section presents the research's problem and aim, method and study group, conceptual and theoretical framework, and existing literature studies.

### 1. Research Problem and Aim

One of the biggest questions of humanity is knowledge, understanding and recognition of oneself. The fact that humans are both individual and social beings plays a role in this self-recognition process. When a person is born, gender, name, gender roles, religion, culture and ethnicity take their place among the bases of the identification process.<sup>1</sup> In Türkiye, which constitutes the universe of this study, especially religion<sup>2</sup> and ethnicity are the focal point of people's identities, to such an extent that these two basic axes are closely related to spouse selection and family relations at the micro level, and social harmony and conflicts at the macro level.<sup>3</sup> From this point of view, in this study, the religious perceptions of individuals with different religious interpretations/ understandings and their views on their children's religious education are examined.

While Islamic doctrine does not impose strict prohibitions on marriages between different religious groups, the social dynamics surrounding Alevi-Sunni marriages are often shaped by deep-rooted prejudices, exclusionary practices, and marginalization, complicating family relations and children's religious education. These marriages are approached with caution, negatively received, or may even be considered illicit, based on the meanings attributed to the other in the name of preserving group identity<sup>4</sup> and sometimes because of parents' idea that they have lost their children by acting emotionally.<sup>5</sup> This attitude may affect individuals' approaches to religion and the importance of religion in family life and raising children. It is because religion influences and shapes all areas of life, and together with the choice of spouse, affects the happiness

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<sup>1</sup> Muhittin Aşkın, "Kimlik ve Giydirilmiş Kimlikler [Identity and Dressed Identities]", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 10/2 (2007), 213–220.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Köse, "XXI. Yüzyıl Türkiye'sinde Gelenekle Modernite Arasında Din Algıları ve Dindarlık Formları: Sosyolojik Bir Bakış [Forms of Religiosity between Tradition and Modernity in 21st Century Turkey: A Sociological Analysis]", *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 49/49 (2015), 5–27; Asım Yapıcı, "Modernleşme-Sekülerleşme Sürecinde Türk Gençliğinde Dinî Hayat: Meta-Analitik Bir Değerlendirme [Religious Life in Turkish Youth in the Process of Modernization-Secularization: A Meta-Analytic Evaluation]", *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/2 (2012), 1–40.

<sup>3</sup> Robert K. Merton, "Intermarriage and The Social Structure: Fact and Theory", *Psychiatry* 4/3 (1941), 361–374; Kingsley Davis, "Intermarriage in Caste Societies", *American Anthropologist* 43/3 (1941), 376–395; Matthijs Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends", *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 395–421.

<sup>4</sup> Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends".

<sup>5</sup> Mehmet Ali Balkanhoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage on the Spouses' Religious Affiliation, Family Relations, and Social Environment: A Qualitative Study of Turkish Couples* (Denton: University of North Texas, PhD Thesis, 2011).

of the family, the way of raising children, the set of family values, and relations with the extended family.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, differences in understanding based on religion can sometimes easily turn into conflicts and tensions in family life.<sup>7</sup> Based on this point of view, answers to the following questions were sought within the scope of the purpose of the study:

- ✓ What are the participants' views on the phenomenon of religion and differences in religious interpretation/understanding? Does religion have any influence on family life?
- ✓ Do the participants include religious education in the family in order to guide their children's religious feelings? What do they do as parents for the development of their children's religious identity?
- ✓ In which areas can spouses in Alevi-Sunni marriages have difficulties and conflicts?
- ✓ How do the participants overcome the difficulties they face?

Marriages made by individuals belonging to Alevi-Sunni groups can also be considered as mixed/cross marriages.<sup>8</sup> The subject of mixed marriage is closely related to the phenomenon of internal phobia and identity in society.<sup>9</sup> The number of studies on mixed or cross marriages<sup>10</sup>, identity perception and development, family relations and child rearing in mixed marriages in the population of Türkiye is gradually increasing. However, there are hardly any studies on mixed families' viewpoint on internal phobia caused by rejection, marginalisation, and exclusion<sup>11</sup>, and on non-formal and formal religious education activities such as the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge (RCMK) course. It is hoped that this study will contribute to filling this perceived gap.

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Arweck - Eleanor Nesbitt, "Young People's Identity Formation in Mixed-Faith Families: Continuity or Discontinuity of Religious Traditions?", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25/1 (2010), 67-87; Rebecca M. Bustamante et al., "Intercultural Couples: Coping with Culture-Related Stressors", *The Family Journal* 19/2 (2011), 154-164; Kristen Taylor Curtis - Christopher G. Ellison, "Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict: Findings from the National Survey of Families and Households", *Journal of Family Issues* 23/4 (2002), 551-576.

<sup>7</sup> Tim B. Heaton- Edith L. Pratt, "The Effects of Religious Homogamy on Marital Satisfaction and Stability", *Journal of Family Issues* 11/2 (1990), 191-207; Naomi Schaefer Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriage Is Transforming America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends".

<sup>9</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage*; Gül Özateşler Ülkücan et al., "Gruplar Arası Temas ve Çapraz Evlilikler: İzmir'de Alevi-Sünni Evlilikleri [Intergroup Contact and Intermarriages: Alevi-Sunni Marriages in İzmir]", *Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 23/1 (2019), 1-24; Mehtap Tekelioğlu, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerindeki Çocukların Din Eğitimi: Malatya Örneği [Religious Education of Children in the Alevi-Sunni Marriages: Malatya Case]* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage*; Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*.

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Ali Balkanlıoğlu, "Duvar Toplumu, İslamofobyaya ve İç-Fobyaya: Alevi-Sünni Evlilikleri İç-Fobyanın Kırılması İçin Bir Fırsat Olabilir Mi? [Walled Society, Islamophobia and Domestic-Phobia: Could Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage be an opportunity to Fight against Domestic-Phobia?]", *Hünkâr Alevilik Bektaşılık Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1/2 (2014), 27-39; Haydar Gölbaşı- Ahmet Mazlum, "Çatışma Odağında Alevi-Sünni İlişkileri ve 'Öteki' Algısı [Alevi-Sunni Relationship Focused on Conflict and the Percept of the Other]", *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 7/2 (2010), 320-345.

## 2. Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study approach, chosen for its ability to capture the nuanced perspectives of parents in Alevi-Sunni marriages.<sup>12</sup> Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which allow for a flexible exploration of participants' personal experiences and attitudes. Studies in the literature were utilized for the creation of the questionnaire and interview forms. After obtaining expert opinions, the forms were given their final shape. The research was conducted with the permission of Sivas Cumhuriyet University Research Ethics Committee, decree no: E-60263016-050.06.04-103751, 6.12.2021.

Demographic information was obtained through survey form, and the interview questions were as follows:

- What is the role of religion in your family life? What is the source of your religious knowledge?
- How did you decide on your child's name?
- What are the religious responsibilities of parents towards their children?
- What steps are you taking to meet this need?
- What would you say about your children's religious and cultural identities?
- Have you visited places like mosques, djem houses<sup>13</sup> with your children?
- How do you evaluate the religious education in schools, mosques, or djem houses?
- Which religious days and festivals do you celebrate within your family? How do you celebrate them?
- What kinds of cultural or religious problems do you encounter within your family? How do you overcome the difficulties you face?

In this revised edition, originally published in 2023 by İlahiyat Yayınları under the title *Effect of Alevi-Sunni Interfaith Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations*, descriptive analysis and phenomenological content analysis were employed. Descriptive analysis is primarily concerned with organising and summarizing the data to reflect patterns, themes, and relationships. This technique allows researchers to present the findings in a straightforward manner, highlighting the salient features of the data without necessarily delving deeply into the underlying meanings. The technique typically involves the following steps:

- ◆ **Data Organisation:** Initially, the collected data—such as interview transcripts, observational notes, or textual content—is meticulously transcribed, reviewed, and organised for systematic analysis.
- ◆ **Thematic Coding:** Researchers carefully examine the data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or categories that emerge from the participants' responses.

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<sup>12</sup> Sharan B. Merriam- Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2016); John W. Creswell- Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Djem and djem houses were explained in Table 4. Unit and Learning Outcome in the 7th Grade

- ◆ **Classification:** These themes are then categorized and classified, enabling researchers to draw meaningful connections and insights related to the research objectives.
- ◆ **Interpretation:** The findings are interpreted to construct a comprehensive and detailed description of the phenomenon being studied.
- ◆ **Illustration with Direct Quotations:** To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, direct quotations from participants are often included, providing an authentic representation of their perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, phenomenological content analysis is a more nuanced qualitative method rooted in the principles of phenomenology, a philosophical approach that seeks to explore how individuals perceive and experience their world. This method aims to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences by interpreting the meanings they ascribe to those experiences.<sup>15</sup> While descriptive analysis, which focuses on presenting the data as it is, phenomenological analysis strives to interpret the deeper, subjective experiences of participants, revealing the core essence of phenomena.<sup>16</sup> As Van Manen<sup>17</sup> suggests, phenomenological research goes beyond mere description to reveal the underlying structures of meaning, providing insights into how individuals make sense of their world.

The interview data, initially collected as audio recordings, were transcribed for analysis. The data were then organised, classified, and interpreted using the descriptive analysis technique, with themes developed to highlight key insights.<sup>18</sup> Direct quotations from participants were included to illustrate their perspectives.<sup>19</sup> The interpretation of participants' shared experiences on common issues was carried out using phenomenological content analysis.<sup>20</sup> The researcher carefully read and re-read the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. Then key statements or phrases that encapsulate essential aspects of participants' perceptions and experiences was extracted. These significant statements are grouped into units. The units are further interpreted to develop broader themes that represent the shared experiences of participants. This synthesis helps in revealing the underlying essence of the phenomenon under investigation. In qualitative research, various strategies are employed to establish validity, such as "prolonged engagement, member

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (California: SAGE Publications, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2016); Jonathan A. Smith et al., *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Creswell - Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

<sup>17</sup> van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*.

<sup>18</sup> Virginia Braun- Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis", *Qualitative Research In Sport, Exercise and Health* 11/4 (2019), 589-597.

<sup>19</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Essex: Pearson Education, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Creswell- Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

checking, triangulation”.<sup>21</sup> In this study, the triangulation strategy, which involves utilising multiple and diverse sources to ensure validity, was explicitly chosen.<sup>22</sup> Academic studies focusing on the religious education of children in Alevi-Sunni marriages were compared with this study’s findings. The results and discussion section delineated supporting data, findings, and interpretations. Additionally, the “member checking” approach involved conducting follow-up interviews with four randomly selected participants using the same questions after initial discussions with all participants. It was observed that there was consistency between the initial and subsequent interviews, confirming the validity of the initial interview comments. As for reliability, Coolican<sup>23</sup> suggests that reliability can be established through data analysis conducted by an independent researcher and subsequent comparison of results. Conversely, validity pertains to the consistency of interpretations derived by researchers from the data. In this study, two researchers independently reviewed documents to enhance precision and mitigate personal biases and errors, generating separate lists of learning outcomes and environmental activities. Subsequently, the findings underwent comparison, revealing no discrepancies.

### 3. Study Group

The study group of the research comprises ten families residing in Sivas, Ankara and Tunceli, who define themselves as Alevi-Sunni in terms of cultural or religious understanding. Participants were selected using snowball sampling, where initial respondents helped identify further participants, and purposive sampling, which allowed for the intentional selection of families that met specific criteria related to the study’s focus on cross/mixed marriages.<sup>24</sup> The recruitment process took place between December 7, 2021, and August 1, 2022. During the recruitment process, families were initially identified, and upon identification, they assisted in suggesting suitable couples and facilitating introductory meetings between the researcher and the new potential participants. Because of the issue’s sensitive nature and the security concerns stemming from previous conflicts that led to fatal incidents, only ten couples out of the fifty eligible couples who met the criteria of being married and having children aged four and above volunteered to take part in the study. The interviews were conducted one-on-one in public locations like restaurants and cafes, ensuring a comfortable and private setting for the participants. During the recruitment process, families were initially identified, and upon identification, they assisted in suggesting suitable couples and facilitating introductory meetings between the researcher and the new potential

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<sup>21</sup> Hatice Başkale, “Nitel Araştırmalarda Geçerlik, Güvenirlik ve Örneklem Büyüklüğünün Belirlenmesi [Determination of Validity, Reliability and Sample Size in Qualitative Studies]”, *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Hemşirelik Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi* 9/1 (2016), 23–28.

<sup>22</sup> Creswell- Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.

<sup>23</sup> H. Coolican, *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Melissa A. Valerio et al., “Comparing Two Sampling Methods to Engage Hard-to-Reach Communities in Research Priority Setting”, *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 16/146 (2016), 1–11.



participants. While the common views of the families are reported as family 1: F1, family 2: F2, etc., the participant codes and demographic characteristics of the individual participants can be summarized as below. As for socio-economic status (SES), five families (1, 5, 7, 8 and 10) have a middle, while five families (2, 3, 4, 6, and 9) have a high SES.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

ID		Age	Gender	Level of Education	Level of Religiosity <sup>25</sup>	Length of marriage	Number of children
Family 1 (F1)	P1MS (Participant 1 Male Sunni)	44	Male (M)	Elementary School	Sunni-Non-Practicing Believer (NPB)	20	2
	P1FA (Participant 1 Female Alevi)	36	Female (F)	High school	Alevi-NPB		
F2	P2MA	46	M	University	Alevi-NPB	17	1
	P2FS	42	F	Uni.	Sunni-Practicing Believer (PB)		
F3	P3MA	52	M	Master's	Alevi-Atheist	29	4
	P3FS	51	F	Uni.	Sunni-Skeptical NPB		

<sup>25</sup> Participant 2 stated that he did not fast during Muharram, but went to Eid prayers and fasted during Ramadan. In terms of religious identity, he described himself as "closer to Sunni belief because I experience Alevism in a philosophical dimension." Participants P6FA and P8FA stated that they wore the hijab and that in the dimension of religious identity, they saw themselves in a Sunni understanding, performing prayers, observing the fast, paying zakat and going on the pilgrimage, and not participating in the *djem* ceremonies. Participants P1FA, P6FA, P9MA stated that they did not keep the fast for Muharram. Muharram is the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar and holds significant importance in the Islamic tradition, particularly for Alevis. It is considered a sacred month and is observed with various religious and commemorative events. One of the most notable events in Muharram is the remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in the Battle of Karbala. Mourning ceremonies and processions mark it. The tenth day of Muharram, known as Ashura, is a day of particular significance and is observed with fasting, prayer, and reflection. P5FA stated that she belonged to the Ağıuçen clan, while P6FA reported that her father belonged to the Pirzenk tribe and her mother to the Abasam tribe; P7FA stated that she was a member of the Anan and Alan tribes, while P10FA stated that they were not a family that practiced tribalism but that her mother was from the Cemalhanlı tribe and that her father was from the Yusufhanlı tribe. The other Alevi participants, on the other hand, had no affiliation with a tribe or clan.

F4	P4MA	57	M	Uni.	Alewi-NPB	32	1
	P4FS	56	F	Uni.	Sunni-Irregularly PB		
F5	P5MS	38	M	Uni	Sunni-PB	8	1
	P5FA	31	F	Uni	Alewi-PB		
F6	P6MS	60	M	Uni. (Assoc.Degree)	Sunni-PB	35	2
	P6FA	56	F	High school	Alewi-PB		
F7	P7MS	38	M	Uni	Sunni-PB	7	1
	P7FA	35	F	Uni	Alewi-PB		
F8	P8MS	38	M	Uni. (Assoc.Degree)	Sunni-PB	8	2
	P8FA	34	F	Uni	Alewi-PB		
F9	P9MA	53	M	PhD	Alewi-NPB	28	2
	P9FS	50	F	Master's	Sunni-NPB		
F10	P10MS	40	M	High school	Sunni-PB	10	1
	P10FA	36	F	High school	Alewi-NPB		

The reserach was limited to ten families living in Sivas, Ankara and Tunceli. The research results were presented and interpreted within the mentioned sample group, data collection tools, and data collection dates, and these aspects have constituted the study's limitations.

#### 4. Literature Review

In the literature, marriages based on religious, ethnic or cultural differences are described as cross or mixed marriages.<sup>26</sup> In the international literature, there are studies that investigate religious education of the next generation in interfaith/intrafaith marriages.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Judson T. Landis, "Marriages of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith", *American Sociological Review* 14/3 (1949), 401–407; W. Seward Salisbury, "Religious Identity and Religious Behavior of the Sons and Daughters of Religious Inter-marriage", *Review of Religious Research* 11/2 (1970), 128–135.

<sup>27</sup> Elisabeth Arweck, "Social and Religious Dimensions of Mixed-Faith Families: The Case of a Muslim-Christian Family", *Social Compass* 69/3 (2022), 386–403; Catherine Therrien et al., "Above and Beyond Social Boundaries: Everyday Life of Mixed Muslim-Non-Muslim Families in Contemporary Societies", *Social Compass* 69/3 (2022), 263–294; Francesco Cerchiaro, "Fighting for What? Couples' Communication, Parenting and Social Activism: The Case Study of a "Christian-Muslim" Families' Association in Brussels

The literature in this field, as indicated by Arweck<sup>28</sup>, encompasses a wide range of themes. These themes include discussions on identity, especially in the context of dual/mixed identities, identity formation influenced by parents and broader societal factors over time (across life cycles and stages), and the level of individual religiosity. These discussions also relate to issues surrounding parenting styles and strategies, as well as family influences on the transmission of culture, language, and religion. Researchers have explored aspects like “active” and “passive”<sup>29</sup> parental nurture, family closeness, flexibility, and rigidity in religious practices, as well as the concept of “identity projects”<sup>30</sup>, which impact choices such as children's names, schooling, peer connections, and broader social networks. These factors also have implications for the well-being of individuals (explored by scholars like Dollahite, Yuri, Le Gall, Smith, Cerchiaro, Therrien, Edwards, and others). In summary, the literature covers a diverse array of topics related to the interplay between identity, family, religion, and society, with a focus on how these elements are transmitted and experienced in various contexts.<sup>31</sup>

While studies on mixed marriages in Türkiye have increased in recent years, it is one of the developing research topics. Previous studies on interfaith/intrafaith marriages indicate that individuals' perspective on the phenomenon of religion and their attitudes towards religiosity can be a source of various problems.<sup>32</sup> While findings on the potential benefits of interfaith/intrafaith marriages can be found in the international literature<sup>33</sup>, it has been observed that couples can encounter specific challenges and struggles in their marriages.<sup>34</sup> Due to the scope of this study, the

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(Belgium)”, *Religions* 10/4 (2019), 270; Christian Smith et al., *Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020); Francesco Cerchiaro et al., “Christian-Muslim Couples in the Veneto Region, Northeastern Italy: Dealing with Religious Pluralism in Everyday Family Life”, *Social Compass* 62/1 (2015), 43–60; Arweck - Nesbitt, “Young People's Identity Formation”.

<sup>28</sup> Arweck, “Social and Religious Dimensions of Mixed-Faith Families”.

<sup>29</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, “Young People's Identity Formation”.

<sup>30</sup> Josiane Le Gall - Deirdre Meintel, “Cultural and Identity Transmission in Mixed Couples in Quebec, Canada: Normalizing Plural Identities as A Path to Social Integration”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 662/1 (2015), 112–128.

<sup>31</sup> Arweck, “Social and Religious Dimensions of Mixed-Faith Families”.

<sup>32</sup> Annette Mahoney et al., “Sanctification of Diverse Aspects of Life and Psychosocial Functioning: A Meta-Analysis of Studies from 1999 to 2019”, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 14/4 (2022), 585–598; David C. Dollahite et al., “Why Religion Helps and Harms Families: A Conceptual Model of a System of Dualities at the Nexus of Faith and Family Life”, *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 10/1 (2018), 219–241; Robert D. Putnam - David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Noryamin Aini, “Inter-Religious Marriage from Socio-Historical Islamic Perspectives”, *Brigham Young University Law Review* 3 (2008), 669–706.

<sup>33</sup> Cerchiaro et al., “Christian-Muslim Couples”; Loren D. Marks et al., “Struggles Experienced by Religious Minority Families in the United States”, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11/3 (2019), 247–256; Riley, *'Til Faith Do Us Part*.

<sup>34</sup> Riley, *'Til Faith Do Us Part*; Siham Yahya - Simon Boag, ““My Family Would Crucify Me!”: The Perceived Influence of Social Pressure on Cross-Cultural and Interfaith Dating and Marriage”, *Sexuality & Culture* 18

literature review is limited to studies discussing child rearing and religious education, and family relations in Alevi-Sunni marriages.

In this respect, the first of the studies conducted in Türkiye is Çatlı's<sup>35</sup> master's thesis. Çatlı stated that just as there were families who experienced problems in their marriages, on the contrary, there were also families whose marriages were extremely harmonious. The researcher based the differentiation between spouses on "socio-cultural origin". As a problem area in the study, attention was drawn to two issues: the reaction of the extended family and parents' attitudes regarding their children's religious education. Half of the individuals participating in Çatlı's study stated that they received negative reactions from their families at the first stage and that they experienced problems in their marriages due to the attitude of the extended family.<sup>36</sup> In cases where understanding, tolerance and open-mindedness did not solve the problems, some participants ceased contact with the extended family.<sup>37</sup> Regarding religious education, Çatlı limited the issue to religious education given in the family.<sup>38</sup> It is stated that the "dominant religious understanding"<sup>39</sup> has an effect on children's religious education, which sometimes causes disputes in family life. The thoughts and attitudes of the participants towards religious education in formal and non-formal education institutions, which is one of the main topics of this study, were not included.

Balkanlıoğlu<sup>40</sup>, on the other hand, conducted studies on the issues of harmony, child rearing, relations with the extended family and social stigma in Alevi-Sunni marriages. Ultimately, it was found that the difference in religious interpretation/understanding had no effect on child rearing, but caused serious problems in relations with the extended family. Balkanlıoğlu<sup>41</sup> also argued that the perspective on the phenomenon of religion, and the religious understanding and attitudes of individuals may cause problems in relations with the extended family before and after marriage, and in child rearing, lifestyle and communication. It was stated that in cases where families reacted to their children's desire to marry and did not give their consent, some of the participants (4 out of 10 couples) eloped or abducted a girl.<sup>42</sup> The researcher determined that three factors, namely the fact that spouses did not see any difference

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(2014), 759–772; Hannah K. Shoaf et al., "Strengths and Strategies in Interfaith Marriages", *Marriage & Family Review* 58/8 (2022), 657–701.

<sup>35</sup> Gökçen Çatlı, *İstanbul ve Nevşehir'de Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açından İncelenmesi [An Anthropological Analysis of Alevi-Sunni Marriage in Istanbul and Nevşehir]* (İstanbul: Yeditepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açından İncelenmesi*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açından İncelenmesi*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açından İncelenmesi*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açından İncelenmesi*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*; Mehmet Ali Balkanlıoğlu, "Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri ile Çocuk Yetiştirme Üzerine Etkileri ve Sosyal Damgalama [Impacts of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage on the Familial Relationships and Child-Rearing, and Social Stigma]", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi* 62 (2012), 163–182.

<sup>41</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*; Balkanlıoğlu, "Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri".

<sup>42</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*, 75–78.

in terms of religious attitudes and understanding, weakness in religious knowledge and attitudes, and an attitude based on respect and tolerance, prevented differences from turning into areas of conflict.<sup>43</sup>

Another study is Çatak's<sup>44</sup> master's thesis, which discusses Alevi-Sunni marriages from a sociological point of view. Çatak<sup>45</sup>, stated that the perspective on the phenomenon of religion generally caused problems together with the decision to marry. Participants stated that both their own families (46.7%) and their spouses' families (51%) opposed their decision to marry<sup>46</sup>, while 35% of the participants had problems in meeting families. Regarding the approach to children's religious education in the family, which was a problem area, the majority of the participants (60%) preferred not to give any religious education. Some families decided to provide education in one or both traditions.<sup>47</sup> It is stated that some of the participants decided before getting married on which religious interpretation/ understanding they would raise their children with so that this issue would not become a problem area. In terms of decisions related to religious education, it is stated that males are brought up as the dominant figure and that children are brought up based on the Sunni/ dominant understanding.

In Tekelioğlu's<sup>48</sup> study, the effects of Alevi-Sunni marriages on children's religious education, living together and the religious-cultural structure of society are discussed. While some families, who considered religious education necessary, adopted a holistic approach to their child's religious education, some said that it would be sufficient to focus on the moral dimension. Among the thirty two participants, twenty had a positive approach towards their children's receiving religious education in various institutions because they believed that religion should be known about, and they thought that children given religious education in the family environment were not provided with the right information.<sup>49</sup> Most families stated that activities that would shape children's religious feelings were not included in the family, but that their children were free to choose and follow the path they wanted.

In Kalender's<sup>50</sup> study, the percentages of participants who provided (21.7%) and did not provide (25%) religious education for their children in the family were similar. However, it was found that little attention was paid to religious days, which are opportunities for socialization and education, and that religious duties were generally not fulfilled by the participants. In parallel with the other findings in the literature,

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<sup>43</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*, 58, 107.

<sup>44</sup> Bilge Deniz Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri [The Effects of the Sectarian Differences on the Relations of Married Couples]* (Antalya: Akdeniz Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri*.

<sup>46</sup> Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri*, 59–65.

<sup>47</sup> Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri*, 71–73.

<sup>48</sup> Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*.

<sup>49</sup> Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> Sevinç Kalender, *İzmir'de Kültürler Arası Evlilikler ve Kimlik Sorunu [Intercultural Marriages and Identity Problem In İzmir]* (Aydın: Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2021), 64–65.

Kalender also found that 80% of the participant group encountered a negative reaction when they expressed the idea of marriage to their families.<sup>51</sup> As stated in other studies, apprehension about losing their children and future generations, in other words the identity problem, lay at the root of families' reaction. In support of Çatak's findings, this negative attitude created problems for participants while meeting families and during the wedding. As a solution, families preferred to keep the frequency of meeting each other at a minimum level.<sup>52</sup> In the aforementioned studies, participants' views on formal and non-formal religious education activities were not focused on, while it was concluded that Alevi-Sunni identities did not have a significant effect on individuals' lifestyle, parental attitudes or ideas about child rearing.<sup>53</sup>

In her study focusing on the strengths and challenges of Alevi-Sunni marriages, Kızılcak<sup>54</sup> asked participants the question, "Has being in an Alevi-Sunni marriage affected how you raise your children? If so, how?". The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with six couples (a total of 12 participants) and concluded that differences in religious understanding did not affect their relationships. The findings were categorized under five themes: "The sect is not a salient issue", "Everyone can live their faith as they wish", "Parents' change in the process", "Different groups not influencing one another", and "Difference of sect as a source of richness".<sup>55</sup> Under the theme "Everyone can live their faith as they wish", it was found that all participants agreed on allowing their children to make their own choices regarding their beliefs.<sup>56</sup>

Küçük's<sup>57</sup> PhD thesis investigated the impact of Alevi-Sunni marriages on intergroup relations through the lens of "otherness" and tendencies toward othering in three phases: pre-marriage, marriage, and post-marriage. The study involved 37 participants, including 15 Alevi-Sunni families, and analyzed both relational and familial dynamics in these mixed marriages. Findings indicated that while intrafaith marriages posed no issues between spouses, the participant faced negative reactions from family and social circles especially during pre-marital stages. These reactions varied significantly based on factors such as the family's religious devotion, lifestyle, education level, age, and occupation. The study also revealed that individuals in these marriages often adopted a secular lifestyle, reducing religious conflicts; however, challenges might arise due to extended family interventions. Regarding "the role of

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<sup>51</sup> Kalender, *Kültürler Arası Evlilikler*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> Kalender, *Kültürler Arası Evlilikler*, 54–57.

<sup>53</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, "Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri"; Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri*; Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açıdan İncelenmesi*; Kalender, *Kültürler Arası Evlilikler*.

<sup>54</sup> Berivan Kızılcak, *Strengths and Challenges of Alevi-Sunni Marriages in Turkey: A Qualitative Study* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Institute of Graduate Programs, Master's Thesis, 2022).

<sup>55</sup> Kızılcak, *Strengths and Challenges of Alevi-Sunni Marriages*, 61–89.

<sup>56</sup> Kızılcak, *Strengths and Challenges of Alevi-Sunni Marriages*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Tahir Küçük, *Gruplar Arası İlişkiler Açısından Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Öteki'yi Algılama Bağlamındaki Yeri [The Role of Alevi-Sunni Marriages in the Context of Perceiving the "Other" in Terms of Intergroup Relations]* (Çorum: Hitit Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2023).

religious identity in child-rearing” in the post-marriage phase, most participants expressed support for exposing their children to both religious interpretation/understanding. However, among participants with a strong religious affiliation, tensions could arise potentially leading to familial discord. Additionally, the expectations and demands of extended family members were noted as potential sources of conflict in child-rearing practices.<sup>58</sup>

In their study, Eraslan-İngeç et al.<sup>59</sup> conducted in-depth interviews with 43 Alevi-Sunni intermarried couples to investigate the familial and social dynamics in Türkiye. Findings suggest that, while reactions from family members, friends, and the broader community were generally more accepting than anticipated, issues arise, particularly in the marriage's initial stages. Couples reported that societal and familial expectations often imposed pressures requiring various coping strategies, particularly regarding religious practices and identity conflicts. The study further highlighted that many couples adopted a secular lifestyle, which helped to alleviate religious friction but did not entirely remove external family pressures. This research underscored the resilience and adaptability required for navigating Alevi-Sunni marriages, illustrating the importance of adaptive strategies in fostering cohesion across religious divides.

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<sup>58</sup> Küçük, *Gruplar Arası İlişkiler*, 116–122.

<sup>59</sup> Özge Ersaslan-İngeç et al., “Effects of Family and Social Group Reactions to Inter-marriage Decisions in Turkey”, *Marriage & Family Review* 59/5 (2023), 351–377.

## CHAPTER I

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section focuses on three main topics: marriage, identity and religious education. Under the *Cross/Mixed Marriage* heading, the concept of cross/mixed marriage, identified in the literature as interfaith and intrafaith depending on the nature of religious differences, is examined. In the *Identity* heading, the definition of identity, its various types, and specifically the topic of religious identity are scrutinized. *Religious education* heading covers the relationship between religious education and identity formation.

#### 1. Cross/Mixed Marriage

Studies on the family have been approached from various disciplinary perspectives, covering a range of topics. Researchers such as George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Ernest Watson Burgess examined issues including partner selection, marriage, intra-family relationships, child-rearing, and identity. Marriage, in its diverse forms, is often categorized based on factors such as social milieu and the number of spouses involved, reflecting broader sociocultural and religious influences.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, two primary types of marriage are discussed: endogamy, where spouses are selected from within the same social group based on criteria such as kinship, social status, religion, or ethnicity, and exogamy, where spouses are chosen from outside the immediate group.<sup>2</sup> The wide spectrum of marital unions has led to the emergence of terms such as cross or mixed marriages. Cross/mixed marriages, often referred to as unions between individuals from different cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, represent a growing phenomenon in an increasingly globalized world.<sup>3</sup> According to Barron<sup>4</sup>, they were longstanding views that cross/mixed marriages could dilute cultural values and traditions. Studies on the subject have indicated that families and

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Sosyoloji [Sociology]*, trans. Cemal Güzel (İstanbul: Kırmızı Yay., 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Gülcan Güleç, "Aile ve Evlilik [Family and Marriage]", *Aile Yapısı ve İlişkileri*, ed. Çınar Yenilmez (Eskişehir: Anadolu Yayınları, 2012), 62-79; Ruth Shonle Cavan, "Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 9/4 (1970), 311-320.

<sup>3</sup> Cavan, "Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage"; Debra A. Henderson, "Racial/Ethnic Intermarried Couples and Marital Interaction: Marital Issues and Problem Solving", *Sociological Focus* 33/4 (2000), 421-438; J. Milton Yinger, "On the Definition of Interfaith Marriage", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 7/1 (1968), 104-107; Merton, "Intermarriage and The Social Structure: Fact and Theory"; Davis, "Intermarriage in Caste Societies"; Kate H. Choi - Marta Tienda, "Marriage-market Constraints and Mate-selection Behavior: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in Intermarriage", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79/2 (2017), 301-317; Landis, "Marriages of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith".

<sup>4</sup> Milton L. Barron, "Research on Intermarriage: A Survey of Accomplishments and Prospects", *American Journal of Sociology* 57/3 (1951), 249-255.



communities can oppose individuals' marriages due to reasons such as concerns over cultural continuity, fear of losing religious identity, or perceived incompatibility.<sup>5</sup> The social environment significantly impacts family dynamics. Understanding the broader societal context and its impact on familial interactions is essential for comprehensively analyzing marital dynamics. Factors such as parental acceptance or rejection of a spouse, interference from parents in the family's affairs, and the absence of mutual affection between parents can all impact family relationships and contribute to conflicts between spouses.<sup>6</sup> However, globalization, urbanization, and shifts toward secularization have contributed to the increased prevalence and acceptance of mixed marriages. As society becomes more interconnected, individuals have more opportunities to form relationships outside their traditional cultural or religious circles.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding the dynamics of cross/mixed marriages provides valuable insights into how religious identity, practices, and community influence marital relationships. In cross/mixed marriages, the differences in religious understanding and identity are often framed through the concepts of interfaith and intrafaith.<sup>8</sup>

The term "interfaith" broadly refers to the interaction, dialogue, and coexistence between individuals or groups from different religious backgrounds. In the context of marital relationships, interfaith marriage typically involves partners who maintain distinct religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Scholarly analyses of interfaith marriages in Türkiye have focused on the religious and socio-cultural dimensions, particularly examining marriages between Muslims and people of the Book (Ahl al-Kitab) from the perspective of Islamic law.<sup>9</sup> These studies emphasize the complex

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<sup>5</sup> Cavan, "Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage"; Henderson, "Racial/Ethnic Intermarried Couples and Marital Interaction"; Yinger, "On the Definition of Interfaith Marriage"; Merton, "Intermarriage and The Social Structure: Fact and Theory"; Davis, "Intermarriage in Caste Societies"; Choi - Tienda, "Marriage-market Constraints and Mate-selection Behavior: Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in Intermarriage"; Landis, "Marriages of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith".

<sup>6</sup> Arzu Şener - Günsel Terzioğlu, *Ailede Eşler Arası Uyuşma Etki Eden Faktörlerin Araştırılması [An Investigation of Factors Affecting Spousal Harmony in the Family]* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends"; Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do about It* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Raya Muttarak - Antony Heath, "Who Intermarries in Britain? Explaining Ethnic Diversity in Intermarriage Patterns", *The British Journal of Sociology* 61/2 (2010), 275-305; *America's Changing Religious Landscape* (Pew Research Centre, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends"; Cavan, "Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage"; Landis, "Marriages of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith".

<sup>9</sup> Selahattin Açar, *İslam Aile Hukukunda Müslümanlarla Gayri Müslimler Arasında Nikah Akdi [The Marriage Contract between Muslims and Non Muslims in Islamic Law]* (Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2000); Ş. Dağcı, "İslam Aile Hukukunda Evlenme Engelleri II" [Diriment Impediment in Islamic Family Law], *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 41/1 (Accessed 21 October 2024), 137-194; Nihat Dalgın, *İslam Hukukuna Göre Müslim - Gayrimüslim Evliliği [Marriage between Muslims and Non-Muslims According to Islam]*. (Samsun: Etüt Yay., 2005); Selma Eşkan, *İslam Aile Hukukunda Evlilik Engeli Olarak Din Farkı Problemi [The Religious Differentiation of Couple as A Prohibitive in Islamic Marriage]* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2007).

dynamics of interfaith marriages, considering not only the legal aspects but also socio-cultural and educational challenges. Challenges may arise from navigating religious rituals during wedding ceremonies to deciding on the religious upbringing of their children.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, social pressures or stigmas within certain communities can present additional challenges, as interfaith unions may be perceived as challenging traditional norms.<sup>11</sup> Understanding how these couples navigate these pressures and sustain family harmony is a crucial part of studying interfaith marriage dynamics. This is especially evident among Turkish Muslim individuals living abroad, where issues such as child-rearing, religious practices, and integration into the host culture are discussed.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, intrafaith marriages occur between individuals who share the same religious background. The distinction between interfaith and intrafaith marriages lies

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<sup>10</sup> Kalmijn, “Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends”; Curtis - Ellison, “Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict”; Annette Mahoney et al., “Religion in the Home in the 1980s and 1990s: A Meta-Analytic Review and Conceptual Analysis of Links between Religion, Marriage, and Parenting”, *Journal of Family Psychology* 15/4 (2001), 559–596.

<sup>11</sup> Kyle D. Killian, “Reconstituting Racial Histories and Identities: The Narratives of Interracial Couples”, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 27/1 (2001), 27–42; Paula M. Usita - Shruti Poulsen, “Interracial Relationships in Hawaii: Issues, Benefits, and Therapeutic Interventions”, *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy* 2/2–3 (2003), 73–83; Gita Seshadri - Carmen Knudson-Martin, “How Couples Manage Interracial and Intercultural Differences: Implications for Clinical Practice”, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 39/1 (2013), 43–58.

<sup>12</sup> Fatma Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families: The British Case* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2020); Ayşe Elmalı-Karakaya, “Interfaith Marriage in Islam: Classical Islamic Resources and Contemporary Debates on Muslim Women’s Interfaith Marriages”, *Religions* 13/8 (2022), 726; Abdulmuttalip Baycar, *Türk-Alman Evliliklerinde Dini Aidiyetin Rolü [The Role of Religious Belonging among Turkish-German Marriages]* (Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2013); Ayla Deniz, *Rusya-Türkiye Göç Sistemi: İstanbul’da Karma Evlilikler ve Uluslaşırın Pratikleri [Russia-Turkey Migration System: Mixed Marriages and Transnational Practices in Istanbul]* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2018); Sidret Özmüş, *Türk-Alman Evlilikleri Üzerine Toplumsal Algı ve Deneyim Biçimleri [Social Perceptions and Experiences on Turkish-German Intermarriages]* (İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2020); Yeliz Ahmet, *Makedonya’da Yaşayan Türklerde Karma Evliliklerin Yol Açtığı Sosyolojik ve Eğitimsel Sorunlar (Üsküp Örneği) [Sociological and Educational Difficulties That Are Encountered by Turks Who Are in Marriages in Macedonia]* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2006); Nurşen Doğan, *Türk-Kırgız Karma Evliliklerinde Çiftlerin Uyumunu [Harmony of Couple in Turkish-Kyrgyz Mixed Marriages]* (Kırgızistan-Türkiye Manas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2022); Bürin Yıldıztekin, *The Jewish-Muslim Mixed Marriages: Self-Identifications and Experiences of Jewish-Muslim Mixed Couples and Their Children in Contemporary Turkey* (Ankara: Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans, 2010); Belgizar Özbek, “Göçmen Türklerde Karma Evlilik Modeli ABD (DMV Bölgesi) Örneği [Turkish Family Structure and the Mixed Model: The Case of the USA (DMV Area)]”, *Aile Dergisi* 2/1 (2024), 6–35; Özcan Güngör, *Türk-Amerikan Evlilikleri [Turkish-American Marriages]* (Ankara: Akasya Yayınları, 2013); Özcan Güngör, “1.5 ve 2. Nesil Türk Gençlerinin Ailede Dinî Sosyalleşmeleri: New Jersey, USA Örneği” [Religious Socialization of 1.5th and 2nd Generation Turkish Youth within Family: The Case of New Jersey, USA], *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 53/2 (2012), 85–119; Ayşe Elmalı-Karakaya, “Being Married to a Non-Muslim Husband: Religious Identity in Muslim Women’s Interfaith Marriage”, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. Ralph W. Hood - Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Vol. 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 388–410.

in the shared or differing religious backgrounds of the partners involved. Within the Turkish context, studies on intrafaith marriages have predominantly focused on Alevi-Sunni marriages, which reveal specific dynamics and challenges that arise from variations in religious practices and interpretations within the broader Muslim community. A thorough review of national-level research on this topic is included in the Literature Review section, providing insights into how even subtle differences within a shared religious tradition can affect aspects of family life, such as religious observance, attitudes toward faith-based activities, and child-rearing practices.<sup>13</sup> Studies by researchers such as Curtis and Ellison<sup>14</sup>, Vaaler et al.<sup>15</sup>, and Balkanlıoğlu<sup>16</sup> highlighted that these families face challenges, particularly in child-rearing and family relationships. Although there may be an assumption that shared faith inherently fosters marital stability, variations in religious beliefs and practices can create friction, necessitating strategies to manage these differences. Both interfaith and intrafaith couples employ various coping mechanisms, such as negotiation, compromise, and values like respect, tolerance, and open-mindedness to sustain harmony.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, non-formal and formal religious education is significant in shaping individuals' perspectives on religious diversity, tolerance, and social integration. From this perspective, spouses can have diverse approaches to religious education within their families. These approaches can depend on spouses' religious interpretations/understandings. Some may actively include religious education in their children's upbringing, while others may adopt more secular or inclusive approaches, potentially reflecting the influence of differing religious understanding. Ultimately, whether in interfaith or intrafaith marriages<sup>18</sup>, open dialogue, mutual understanding, and a willingness to accommodate each other's beliefs and values are indispensable for nurturing a successful and harmonious family life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harold T. Christensen - Kenneth E. Barber, "Interfaith versus Intrafaith Marriage in Indiana", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 29/3 (1967), 461-469; Constance L. Shehan et al., "Religious Heterogamy, Religiosity, and Marital Happiness: The Case of Catholics", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52/1 (1990), 73-79; Kalmijn, "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends"; Patrice E. Heller - Beatrice Wood, "The Influence of Religious and Ethnic Differences on Marital Intimacy: Intermarriage versus Intramarriage", *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 26/2 (2000), 241-252; Lee M. Williams - Michael G. Lawler, "Marital Satisfaction and Religious Heterogamy: A Comparison of Interchurch and Same-Church Individuals", *Journal of Family Issues* 24/8 (2003), 1070-1092; Christopher G. Ellison et al., "The Couple That Prays Together: Race and Ethnicity, Religion and Relationship Quality Among Working- Age Adults", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72/4 (2010), 963-975.

<sup>14</sup> Curtis - Ellison, "Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict".

<sup>15</sup> Margaret L. Vaaler et al., "Religious Influences on the Risk of Marital Dissolution", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71/4 (2009), 917-934.

<sup>16</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Intermarriage*; Balkanlıoğlu, "Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri".

<sup>17</sup> Seshadri - Knudson-Martin, "How Couples Manage Interracial and Intercultural Differences".

<sup>18</sup> David M. Pettersen, "Husband-Wife Communication and Family Problems", *Sociology & Social Research* 53/3 (1969), 375-384.

<sup>19</sup> Şener - Terzioğlu, *Ailede Eşler Arası Uyuma Etki Eden Faktörlerin Araştırılması*; Pettersen, "Husband-Wife Communication and Family Problems; Cerchiaro et al., "Christian-Muslim Couples"; Michael J. Reiter -

From the perspective of Islamic law, or *fiqh*, outlines specific rules concerning whom Muslims are permitted to marry, focusing on maintaining religious identity and unity. Traditionally, Islamic law permits Muslim men to marry women from the “People of the Book” (*Ahl al-Kitab*), which includes Jews and Christians, as especially indicated in Surah Al-Ma’idah (5:5). Scholars emphasize that Muslim men can marry chaste women from these communities. However, the prohibition against Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men is widely accepted among Islamic scholars<sup>20</sup>, supported by interpretations of both the Qur’ān and Sunna.<sup>21</sup> Scholars argue that this restriction serves to ensure the family’s Islamic character, particularly regarding the religious upbringing of children.<sup>22</sup> The husband, seen as the head of the family in Islamic teachings, is responsible for maintaining religious practices within the household, and a marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man could complicate this dynamic.<sup>23</sup> The restriction on Muslim women’s marriage to non-Muslim men is also understood as a form of *sadd al-dhara’i* (blocking the means), aimed at preventing situations that might compromise the faith or social status of the Muslim community. For intrafaith marriages, *fiqh* principles allow unions between Muslim partners, emphasizing the unity of the *ummah* (Muslim community). By encouraging endogamy-marriage within the same religious community-Islamic law aims to sustain religious cohesion and stability within families.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Identity

The concept of identity is a multifaceted and dynamic construct that has been extensively studied across various disciplines, including sociology, psychology,

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Christina B. Gee, “Open Communication and Partner Support in Intercultural and Interfaith Romantic Relationships: A Relational Maintenance Approach”, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 25/4 (2008), 539–559; Shoaf et al., “Strengths and Strategies in Interfaith Marriages”.

<sup>20</sup> AbuBakr Kāsāni, *Bedā’i’u’s-Sanā’i’ Fī Tertībī’ş-Şerā’i’ [The Wonders of Crafts in the Arrangement of Legal Rulings]* (Beirut: Darul Kitabi’l-Arabi, 1997); Muhammed Ali Sabuni, *Ravaiu’l-Beyan Tefsiru Ayati’l-Ahkam Mine’l-Kur’an [The Splendors of Elucidation: Commentary on the Verses of Legal Ruling in the Qur’an]* (Damascus: Maktaba al-Ghazali, 1980); Muhammad Izzat Darwaza, *Al-Tafsir Al-Hadith* (Cairo: Dar’al-Kutub al-ilmiyyah, 1963); Nihat Dalgın, “İslam Hukuku Açısından Müslüman Bayanın Ehl-i Kitap Erkeklerle Evliliği [The Marriage of Muslim Woman with a Non-Muslim Man According to the Islamic Law]”, *İslam Hukuku Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (2003), 131–156; Eşkan, *İslam Aile Hukukunda Evlilik Engeli Olarak Din Farkı Problemi [The Religious Differentiation of Couple as A Prohibitive in Islamic Marriage]*; Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Heather Al-Yousuf, “Negotiating Faith and Identity in Muslim-Christian Marriages in Britain”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17/3 (2006), 317–329.

<sup>21</sup> 2:221; 5:5; 60:10 “Al-Qur’an al-Kareem”, *Quran.Com* (Accessed 14 August 2023); Muhammad Munir, “Marriage in Islam: A Civil Contract or a Sacrosanct? ”, *Hamdard-Islamicus* XXXI,/1 (March 2008), 77–84.

<sup>22</sup> H. İbrahim Acar, “Evllenme Engeli Olarak Din Farkı [Religion Difference as a Barrier to Marriage]”, *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 17 (2002), 21–46; Mohammad H. Kamali, *Shari’ah Law: An Introduction* (New York: Oneworld Publications, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Acar, “Evllenme Engeli Olarak Din Farkı”; Kamali, *Shari’ah Law*.

<sup>24</sup> Eşkan, *İslam Aile Hukukunda Evlilik Engeli Olarak Din Farkı Problemi*; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam (Al-Ḥalāl Wal-Ḥarām Fī Islām)*, trans. Kamal El-Helbawy et al. (Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1994).

anthropology, and cultural studies. Broadly, identity can be understood as the characteristics, traits, and attributes that define an individual or group, influencing self-perception and how one is perceived by others. It encompasses a sense of self, belonging, and continuity, shaped by both personal and social factors.

Identity is not a static construct but rather evolves over time, influenced by experiences, social interactions, and the cultural context. As Giddens<sup>25</sup> noted, identity involves a continuous process of self-reflection and redefinition, making it both a personal and social phenomenon. Theoretical contributions from psychoanalysts such as Erikson and Marcia, delved into various dimensions including personal, relational, and collective identity, employing diverse methodological approaches from quantitative to qualitative analyses.<sup>26</sup> Psychological perspectives centre on individual self-perception, while cultural-anthropological inquiries underscore the socio-cultural dynamics inherent in identity formation, emphasizing its fluid nature.<sup>27</sup> From this perspective symbolic interactionism, on which this research is founded, underscores the reciprocal relationship between society and the individual, spotlighting society's pivotal role in shaping personal identities.<sup>28</sup> Symbolic interactionism is an approach that posits social interactions and communication are constructed through meanings. This theory focuses on how individuals interpret the social world and how these interpretations lead to the construction of their identities. Its contribution to identity studies lies in its ability to address identity from both individual and social perspectives. Rather than viewing identity as a fixed and unchanging trait, the theory considers it as a continuously redefined and negotiated process.

A key concept within this theoretical framework is Cooley's<sup>29</sup> "looking-glass self," which encapsulates the idea that individuals form their identities based on their perceptions of how others see them. In other words, identity is concerned with how individuals perceive themselves and others, and how these meanings are formed through interactions. This perspective suggests that individuals can adopt different identities in different contexts, and these identities are constantly negotiated through

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Hasan Atak, "Kimlik Gelişimi ve Kimlik Biçimlenmesi: Kuramsal Bir Değerlendirme [Development of Identity and Formation of Identity: A Theoretical Evaluation]", *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar* 3/1 (2011), 163-213.

<sup>27</sup> Ali Kuşat, "Bir Değerler Sistemi Olarak "Kimlik" Duygusu ve Atatürk ["Identity" Feeling as a System of Values and Atatürk]", *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1/15 (2003), 45-61; Eylem Özdemir, "Kimlik Kavramı ve Teorik Yaklaşımlar [The Concept of Identity and Theoretical Approaches]", *Eğitim Bilim Toplum* 8/32 (2010), 9-29.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey A. Farberman, "The Foundations of Symbolic Interaction: James, Cooley, and Mead", *Studies in Symbolic Interaction Supplement* 1, (1985), 13-27.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 151-153.

social interactions. Individuals assume various roles in different social situations, and these roles continuously reshape their identities.<sup>30</sup>

This ongoing negotiation of identity underscores the complexity of how individuals construct their sense of self, shaped by multiple factors, including social, cultural, and religious influences. As individuals navigate these diverse influences, it becomes clear that identity can be understood through distinct categories, each reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of self-conception. These categories are as follows:

*Personal identity* refers to the unique qualities, traits, and personal values that define an individual. This type of identity emerges prominently in the process of self-understanding and is shaped by personal experiences. Psychologists like Erikson<sup>31</sup> suggested that personal identity develops particularly during adolescence, a period marked by exploring questions about who one is and what they aspire to achieve.

*Social identity*, on the other hand, is shaped by the groups and social environments to which individuals belong. According to social identity theory<sup>32</sup>, people perceive themselves as part of certain social groups (e.g., a professional group, community, or social class) and define themselves through these affiliations. Social identity plays a role in strengthening the sense of belonging and increasing in-group cohesion.

*Ethnic identity* involves a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group, constructed on shared language, culture, traditions, and history. Ethnic identity particularly pronounced in contexts such as migration, diaspora communities, and multicultural societies, playing a central role in studies that explore how individuals identify within ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup>

*Gender identity* pertains to how individuals perceive their own gender, which may not always align with their biological sex. It involves a person's internal experience of gender and their relationship to socially defined gender roles.<sup>34</sup>

*Cultural identity* denotes an individual's sense of belonging to a specific cultural community or tradition. This identity is shaped by elements such as language, beliefs, traditions, and cultural practices. Hall<sup>35</sup> argued that cultural identity is not a fixed or

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<sup>30</sup> Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*; George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society From Standpoint of A Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press., 1934); Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism, Perspective and Method* (California: University of California Press, 1969); Sheldon Stryker - Peter J. Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory", *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63/4 (2000), 284–297.

<sup>31</sup> E. H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968).

<sup>32</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978); Henri Tajfel - John Turner, "The Social Theory of Intergroup Behaviour", *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. William G. Austin - Stephen Worchel (California: Wadsworth, 1979), 33–47.

<sup>33</sup> J. S. Phinney, "Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults: Review of Research", *Psychological Bulletin* 108/3 (1990), 499–514.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?", *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall - Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 1–17.

unchanging construct but a dynamic process that is continuously reconstructed. It is also linked to the individual's historical, social, and political positioning.

As for *religious identity* expresses an individual's affiliation with a religion or belief system. Various religions can guide individuals on how to define themselves and influence how this identity manifests in interpersonal relationships.<sup>36</sup> Religious identity can significantly impact an individual's worldview, moral values, and social relationships.

Culture and religion share a symbiotic relationship, mutually influencing and shaping individual identities. Culture offers a framework for identity construction through processes of socialization, the instillation of values, and shared communal experiences. Conversely, religion serves as a guiding force, aiding individuals in navigating identity crises by providing answers to existential questions and fostering a sense of belonging, even among those who may not actively practice.<sup>37</sup>

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between religiosity and identity, often based on Marcia's identity status approach. Building on Erikson's theory, Marcia developed a four-part categorization based on two key concepts: exploration and decision-making/commitment. Exploration involves deliberation on alternative roles, values, and goals, while commitment refers to the consolidation and enactment of these considerations into concrete actions.<sup>38</sup> This comprehensive perspective on identity illustrates its dynamic, evolving nature, highlighting the intricate interplay between personal attributes and broader social, cultural, and religious influences.

### 3. Religious Education

Religious education serves as a means of imparting values, beliefs, and practices that shape not only spiritual understanding but also broader aspects of self-concept and social behaviour. This educational process can occur in multiple contexts, with the family and school serving as two primary environments for religious socialization.

Parental involvement in religious education typically begins in early childhood, with parents acting as role models and guides. Through engagement in religious rituals, teaching prayers, and explaining religious doctrines, parents play a critical role in influencing their children's understanding and internalization of religious values. Boyatzis and Janicki<sup>39</sup> highlighted that parents' active participation in religious

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<sup>36</sup> Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity", *Sociology of Religion* 66/3 (2005), 215-242.

<sup>37</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity Vol. 2, the Information Age: Society, Economy, and Culture* (Blackwell-Wiley, 2010); Halis Adnan Arslantaş, "Kültür-Kişilik ve Kimlik [Culture-Personality and Identity]", *Fırat Üniversitesi Doğu Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7/1 (2008), 105-112; Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families*.

<sup>38</sup> Ali Ayten, "Kimlik ve Din: İngiltere'deki Türk Gençleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma [Identity and Religion: A Study on Turkish Youth in the UK]", *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/2 (2012), 106.

<sup>39</sup> Chris J. Boyatzis - Denise L. Janicki, "Parent-Child Communication about Religion: Survey and Diary Data on Unilateral Transmission and Bi-Directional Reciprocity Styles", *Review of Religious Research* 44/3 (2003), 252-270.

practices strongly impacts the child's sense of belonging to their religious community, fostering both identity and behaviour. Children learn by observing and imitating their parents' actions, such as attending religious services, celebrating religious holidays, and following dietary or moral guidelines. This process of observation and participation helps children develop a sense of belonging to their religious community and understand their place within it. Religious education in the family also impacts the development of a child's religious identity.

Erikson's<sup>40</sup> theory of psychosocial development underscores that early childhood is a crucial period for forming a sense of identity, and consistent religious practices can reinforce this process. Ozorak's<sup>41</sup> study demonstrated that parental involvement in religious practices strongly correlates with the development of religious identity in children and adolescents. Families that openly discuss beliefs, encourage questions, and integrate faith into daily activities are more likely to see their children maintain those beliefs into adulthood. In this sense, parents act not only as educators but as facilitators, helping children navigate their own spiritual journeys. According to Smith and Denton<sup>42</sup> and Bengtson et al.<sup>43</sup>, parents who engage in open, dialogical approaches to religious education are more successful in fostering genuine religious commitment in their children.

Despite their essential role, parents often encounter challenges in religious education, especially when there are differing levels of religious commitment within the family and in multicultural and secular societies. These challenges can lead to confusion for children about the consistency and significance of religious practices. For multicultural families, the differences in parental religious backgrounds may result in struggles over teaching their children about faith, sometimes leading to mixed messages or conflicts over which practices to prioritize. Such stress can be compounded by extended family members who impose their expectations or beliefs, creating additional tension for the couple.<sup>44</sup> Petersen<sup>45</sup> noted that children of parents from different religious traditions often develop weaker religious affiliations due to the inherent religious incompatibility, which makes it difficult for children to fully identify with a single religious group. Differing rituals, such as dietary rules, prayer customs, or

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<sup>40</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth W. Ozorak, "Social and Cognitive Influences on the Development of Religious Beliefs and Commitment in Adolescence", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28/4 (1989), 448–463.

<sup>42</sup> Christian Smith - Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Vern L. Bengtson et al., *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families*; Ralph W. Hood Jr et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2018); Bengtson et al., *Families and Faith*; Arweck - Nesbitt, "Young People's Identity Formation"; Vaaler et al., "Religious Influences on the Risk of Marital Dissolution"; Curtis - Ellison, "Religious Heterogamy and Marital Conflict".

<sup>45</sup> Larry R. Petersen, "Interfaith Marriage and Religious Commitment among Catholics", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48/4 (1986), 725–735.



holiday observances, can become sources of confusion if not adequately addressed by parents.

While the family provides the foundational layer of religious education, schools serve as a secondary, more formal environment where children and adolescents can deepen their understanding of religion. The structure of religious education in schools varies depending on cultural and legal frameworks but generally aims to introduce students to diverse religious traditions, ethical systems, and moral values. According to Barnes<sup>46</sup>, religious education in schools can promote critical thinking and interfaith understanding by exposing students to diverse religious perspectives. Furthermore, religious education in schools provides a structured learning environment where students can ask questions, engage in discussions, and explore the philosophical and ethical dimensions of their faith. This setting can reinforce or even challenge the teachings they receive at home, providing a broader perspective on religious issues.<sup>47</sup>

Both familial and educational environments are vital in shaping an individual's religious identity, which in turn affects their overall self-concept and social identity. Family provides the foundation for initial identity formation, where religious beliefs and practices are first introduced and modeled. According to Fowler<sup>48</sup>, early exposure within the family is crucial, as it often determines how children internalize their faith and understand their place within the community. Phinney<sup>49</sup> also suggested that familial support for religious practices enhances children's commitment to their faith, thereby solidifying their religious identity. On the other hand, schools act as secondary socialization agents, offering a formal context for learning about religious beliefs, often promoting a more critical understanding of faith and its role in society. The interplay between family and school experiences can either support or challenge a child's understanding of their religious identity. Consistent validation of beliefs at home and in school can strengthen a child's religious identity, while contradictions between the two may lead to questioning and re-evaluation.<sup>50</sup>

From this point of view, this research specifically examines the impact of religion and religious education on an individual's identity acquisition process. The research delves into key concepts such as Alevism and Sunnism, pivotal in understanding the dynamics of religious education and family relations. However, given the direct impact of participants' perceptions and interpretations of these concepts on the discussions, they have been thoroughly explored in the Chapter II under the heading of *Parents'*

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<sup>46</sup> L. Philip Barnes, "Religious Education: Taking Religious Difference Seriously", *Impact* 2009/17 (2009), 9–56.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Wanda Alberts, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe: A Study of Religious Approach* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); Trevor Cooling, *Doing God in Education* (London: Theos, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and The Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> Phinney, "Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults: Review of Research".

<sup>50</sup> Tajfel - Turner, "The Social Theory of Intergroup Behaviour".

*Perspective on Religiosity and the Difference in Religious Interpretation/Understanding.* The views of participants regarding formal religious education within the official educational system are evaluated in the Chapter III, under the heading *Participants' View about Formal Religious Education.*



## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ALEVI-SUNNI FAMILIES

This section consists of two headings. Under the *Parents' Perspective on Religiosity and the Difference in Religious Interpretation/Understanding* title, the participants' views on religion and differences in religious understanding are examined. Under the *Religious Education in the Family* title, a close look is taken at how families provide religious education to their children.

#### 1. Parents' Perspective on Religiosity and the Difference in Religious Interpretation/ Understanding

Before moving on to the participants' views on the Alevi-Sunni concepts, it is important in terms of objective evaluation of the subject to examine how Alevism and Sunnism are defined in scientific studies. Historically, depending on their transition to a settled life, the formation of which was completed around the 15th century, and on their relations with the central authority, Alevism came to be called by different names such as Babailik, Qizilbash, and Bektashism, and to be evaluated in different categories and defined differently.<sup>1</sup> Just as Alevism has been regarded as a non-Islamic entity<sup>2</sup>, it has generally been evaluated within Islam as a mystic interpretation rather than as a sectarian denomination.<sup>3</sup> In the Encyclopedia of Islam of the Turkish Religious Foundation, it is stated that the term "Alevi" is used to mean the descendants of Hazrat Ali in the history of Islamic culture, as well as in a political, mystic and theological sense. In another definition included in the encyclopedia, it is stated that Alevism is a term used for various religious and political groups that converge at the point of loyalty to Hazrat Ali.<sup>4</sup> The basic elements of Alevism, which can be regarded as a culture, a

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<sup>1</sup> *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor [Alevi Workshops Final Report]* (Ankara: T.C. Devlet Bakanlığı, 2010); Erdi Aksakal, "Kültürel Kimliğin İnşa Sürecinde Melez Bir Kavram Olarak Alevilik [Being Alevi As A Hybrid Notion in the Construction Process of Cultural Identity] ", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 53 (2014), 215–231; Cenksu Üçer, "Aleviliğin Neliği ve Şiilik (Caferilik) ile İlişkinin Çerçevesi [Alevism and the Frame of Relations between Alevism and Shi'a (Ca'Feriyya)]", *Marife Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 8/3 (2008), 205–238; Cenksu Üçer, "Aleviliğin Yanlış Algılanması: Muharrem Uygulamaları Örneği [Misperception of Alevism: In Reference to the Muharram Month Activities]", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi* 74 (2015), 45–76.

<sup>2</sup> Esat Korkmaz, *Anadolu Aleviliği: (Felsefesi-İnanç-Öğretisi-Erkanı) [Anatolian Alevism: (Philosophy-Beliefs-Teachings)]* (İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Hasan Onat, "Alevilik-Bektaşilik, Din Kültürü Ahlak Bilgisi Dersleri ve Diyanet [Alevism-Bektashism, Religious Culture and Ethics Lessons, and Diyanet] ", *Türk Yurdu* 25/210 (2005), 8–19.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Alevî [Alevi]", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi [The Encyclopedia of Islam of the Turkish Religious Foundation]* (Ankara: TDV, 1989).

community, a political movement and a tradition<sup>5</sup>, are the *djem* ritual with the love of the Ahl al-Bayt<sup>6</sup> and the 12 imams<sup>7</sup> on the axis of Hazrat Ali, in which divinity, prophethood and guardianship are reflected in languages as “Haqq-Muhammad-Ali”<sup>8</sup>. Sunnism, on the other hand, is defined in the Encyclopedia of Islam as “those who adopt the path followed by the Holy Prophet and his companions on the fundamental issues of religion”<sup>9</sup>. Those who wish to obtain detailed information about Sunnism are directed to the Ahl as-Sunnah article in the encyclopedia. Considering the meanings of the Sunni-Alevi concepts in the words of the participants, Sunnism is evaluated as a “sect/tariqa”, and even described as the “sect that lives the Ahl as-Sunnah in the best way” (P8MS, P7MS). On the other hand, although Alevism is predominantly defined as a “philosophy of life/culture”, it is also regarded as a sect/tariqa path like Sunnism.

While defining Alevism, the participants (P2MA, P3MA, P4MA, P9MA) who described themselves as Alevis drew attention to the historical process and the troubles and problems experienced in the process by citizens who identified with Alevism. P7FA and P6MS summarized the tensions in the Alevism-Sunnism dichotomy and the fact that this distinction has become a social problem rooted in ignorance, lack of communication (P6MS) due to terrorist incidents, and prejudices arising from allegations like “inedible (food)”, “without ablution”, “irreligious” and “the candle is out”<sup>10</sup> (P2FS, P3FS, P4MA, P9MA). The intensity of this tension has fluctuated over time depending on the role of political and ideological actors.<sup>11</sup> The question of whether not

<sup>5</sup> E. Ruhi Fıçlalı, *Türkiye’de Alevilik ve Bektâşilik [Alevism and Bektashism in Turkey]* (Ankara: Selçuk Yay., 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Ahl al-Bayt, which means “People of the House” in Arabic, is a term used in Islam to refer to the family and descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Mustafa Öz, “Ehl-i Beyt [Ahl al-Bayt]”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi [The Encyclopedia of Islam of the Turkish Religious Foundation]* (Ankara: TDV, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> The concept of the Twelve Imams is primarily associated with Shia Islam, particularly the Twelver Shia branch, which is the largest Shia Muslim community. The Twelve Imams are believed to be divinely appointed and spiritually and morally impeccable leaders who are considered the rightful successors to the Prophet Muhammad. E. Ruhi Fıçlalı, “İsnâaşeriyye [Twelve Imams]”, *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi [The Encyclopedia of Islam of the Turkish Religious Foundation]* (Ankara: TDV, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> It reflects the interconnectedness of the divine, the prophet, and the spiritual guide within Alevi thought. **Haqq** represents God, the source of all existence. **Muhammad** represents the spiritual reality of Prophet Muhammad, who is seen as a manifestation of divine truth and an exemplar of ethical and spiritual values. **Ali** represents Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad. Ali is highly revered in Alevism and is considered a spiritual guide and a symbol of justice, courage, and righteousness. *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor*, 91; Üçer, “Aleviliğin Neliği ve Şiilik (Caferîlik)”.

<sup>9</sup> Yusuf Ş. Yavuz, “Ehli- Sünnet [Ahl Sunnah]” (Ankara: TDV, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> This allegation, commonly known as ‘the candle is out’, is an allegation of sexual perversion. It is stated that this claim was given the name of ‘orgies’ in the literature after the 16th century. In the *djem* rituals, three candles are lit for the representation of ‘awakening the evidence’, which is one of the 12 services. It is related, both orally and in writing, that the perversion in question is thought to be committed after the candles are extinguished. For detailed information on the subject, see Doğan Kaplan, “Alevilere Atılan ‘Mum Söndü’ İftirasının Tarihsel Kökenleri Üzerine [On the Historical Origins of the Slander of ‘The Candle Is Out’ Attributable to the Alevis]”, *Hünkâr Alevilik Bektâşilik Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1/2 (2014), 41–53.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Balcer - Joerg Forbrig, *The Awakening of Societies in Turkey and Ukraine How Germany and Poland Can Shape European Responses* (Washington DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2016); Martin Van Bruinessen, “Kurds, Turks and the Alevi Revival in Turkey”, *Middle East Report No.200*, (1996), 7–10.

only Alevism but also Sunnism is sufficiently known in society (P9FS) and the exhaustion of Alevi citizens at having to explain themselves every time (P4MA, P7FA, P9MA) are also issues of concern. This resentment stems from regional changes in Alevi understanding and practices, which can lead to in-group marginalization, as was pointed out by some participants (P2FS, P5FA, P6MS, P8FS). Ultimately, in the definitions given by Alevi participants, Alevism was associated with the importance attached to women, education, the Turkish language, equality, freedom and human values based on Central Asian traditions (P4MA, P7FA, P8FA, P9MA). This aspect of Alevism was also expressed by some Sunni participants (P3FS, P4FS, P9FS) with laudatory statements. Another section of the Sunni participants stated that Alevism is different from atheism (P4FS) and that it has similar aspects to different religions such as Shamanism (P6MS) and Christianity (P9FS). This perspective is also encountered in the field studies of researchers such as Ocak<sup>12</sup>, Melikoff<sup>13</sup>, Kehl-Bodrogi<sup>14</sup>, Birdoğan<sup>15</sup> and Bilici<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, the emergence of interpretation differences in religion was also associated with interaction with non-Islamic beliefs. On the other hand, there were also participants who were unable to place Alevism fully within the Islamic framework (P8MS) and regarded it as “cold” (P7MS). Karolewski<sup>17</sup> argues that Alevism was initially viewed as distinct from Islam due to its secretive nature. And “Heterodoxy” still carries negative connotations, contributing to the discrimination.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the comments made, it would not be wrong to say that Alevism constitutes the modern, democratic, humane and livable aspect of Islam, while Sunnism is perceived as more worship-based, authoritarian, prescriptive and closed.<sup>19</sup> Definitions of Sunni-Alevi concepts were expressed by focusing on what each one is not in terms

<sup>12</sup> Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Alevî ve Bektaşî İnançlarının İslâm Öncesi Temelleri [the Pre-Islamic Foundations of the Alevi-Bektashi Faith]* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Irene Melikoff, “Bektashi/Kızılbaş: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences”, *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson et al. (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transaction Vol. 8, 1998), 1–7.

<sup>14</sup> Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, *Die Kızılbaş-Aleviten: Untersuchungen Über Eine Esoterische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Anatolien [The Kızılbaş-Alevi: Studies on an Esoteric Religious Community in Anatolia]* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Veerlag, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Nejat Birdoğan, *Anadolu'nun Gizli Kültürü, Alevilik [Alevism: The Secret Culture of Anatolia]* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yay., 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Faruk Bilici, “The Function of Alevi-Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey”, *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. Tord Olsson et al. (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998), 51–62.

<sup>17</sup> Janina Karolewski, “What Is Heterodox About Alevism? The Development of Anti-Alevi Discrimination and Resentment”, *Die Welt Des Islams* 48/3–4 (2008), 434–456.

<sup>18</sup> Nigar Tuğsuz, “A Two-Dimensional Boundary: Sunnis' Perceptions of Alevi”, *Turkish Studies* 22/4 (2021), 587–602.

<sup>19</sup> Yasin Aktay, “Sosyo-Kültürel ve Politik Yönleriyle Alevilik Üzerine Notlar [Notes on Alevism in Socio-Cultural and Political Aspects]”, *Milel ve Nihal* 4/1 (2007), 57–76; Mustafa Yağbasan - Ali Öztürk, “Kültürlerarası İletişim Bağlamında Alevi-Sünni Dikotomisi: Tunceli ve Elazığ Örneği [Alawi-Sunni Dichotomy with Respect to The Intercultural Communication: The Case of Tunceli and Elazığ]”, *Anemon Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4/2 (2016), 175–195.

of the other.<sup>20</sup> The definitions may include a comparison and based on this comparison, praise, affirmation or partial negation.<sup>21</sup> The point that participants from both groups expressed (P2FS, P4FS, P9MA) as criticism regarding the Alevi-Sunni concepts was that there was no mention of a sect either in the primary sources of the religion or in the time of the Holy Prophet. In a broader perspective on the concept of a kind of sect, all kinds of discrimination and marginalization based on language, race and ethnicity were criticized (P3FS, P4FS, P6MS, P9FS). It was emphasized that individuals should be recognized as human beings by opposing definitions of identity based on language, religion and race.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, there were some (F1, P3FS, P5MS, P7FA, F10) who said that their lifestyles were similar and even that there is no difference between Alevism and Sunnism in terms of their starting-destination point and that they are the same. Participant P9FS pointed out that there was no difference between her and her husband in terms of religion: "... Actually, when my husband asked me if we could support your study, I wondered whether we would be suitable ...".

While defining Alevism and Sunnism, the participants acted on their common denominators of Allah, the Prophet and the Qur'an. A minimal difference was seen in the perception and practice of worship.

Interpretations of the phenomenon of religion differ due to insufficient or incorrect information and the diversity of manifestations of religion in human life. While the parents emphasized the strong relationships of religion based on the creed and especially the moral dimension rather than the worship dimension, they criticized the misunderstanding of religion and radicalization based on formalism (P2MA, F3, P4MA, P6MS, F9). No matter how the phenomenon of religion is understood, it has the power to change and transform the perception of identity as a passive or active actor. Considering the place of this actor in family life, some of the participants stated that religion occupied an important or very important place in their family life, while a small number of them (F3, P9MA) stated that it had almost no place. A noteworthy point was that with an approach that can be considered secular, some participants (P2MA, F4, P5FA, K9FS) stated that religion may have a role in individual lives, rather than in

<sup>20</sup> Rıza Yıldırım, "Geleneksel Alevilikten Modern Aleviliğe: Tarihsel Bir Dönüşümün Ana Eksenleri (From Traditional Alevism to Modern Alevism: Main Axes of a Historical Transformation)", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi* 62 (2012), 135-162; Nuri Bilgin, *Kimlik İnşası [Identity Construction]* (Ankara: Aşına Kitaplar, 2007); Orhan Türkdöğün, *Alevi-Bektaşlı Kimliği Sosyo-Antropolojik Araştırma [Alevi-Bektaşlı Identity: A Socio-Anthropological Study]* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Tajfel, *Differentiation Between Social Groups*; Eşref Doğan - Hasan Çelik, "Alevi Sünni Bütünleşmesinin Önündeki Engeller: Tarihsel Yanlış Algılamalar [The Obstacles to the Integration of Alevi - Sunni: The Historical Misperceptions]", *Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 7/1 (2014), 121-138; Asım Yapıcı, "İçimizdeki Öteki: Kimlik ve Ön Yargı Kıskaçında Sünni-Alevi İlişkileri [The Other within Us: Sunni-Alevi Relations in the Grip of Identity and Prejudice]", *DEM Dergi* 6/2 (2009), 52-59; Ali Murat İrat, *Modernizmin Eritikleri: Sunniler, Şiiiler ve Aleviler [The Meltdowns of Modernism: Sunnis, Shiites and Alevis]* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Yay., 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Arpana G. Inman et al., "Cultural Intersections: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Experience of Asian Indian-White Interracial Couples", *Family Process* 50/2 (2011), 248-266.

family life. A point on which all participants agreed was that there should be no coercion in the practice of religious obligations.

The information obtained by individuals in their relationships with religion and the sources of this information play an important role in both their social and individual lives. In this respect, participants stated that as more than one source of their religious knowledge, the information they obtained from the family (10 out of 20), school and environment in childhood (8 out of 20), together with their own research in adulthood (9 out of 20), were effective. As stated in the literature<sup>23</sup>, especially Alevi participants reported that their religious-cultural identities were shaped by their own research. The perception that together with city life, an institutional, systematic educational environment is not possible for Alevism, which continues through oral tradition, and that a Sunni understanding is emphasized in formal religious education curricula, especially pushed the Alevi participants to find answers to their questions based on the knowledge of their elders in the family and on their own research.

Although the existence of compulsory religion classes in formal religious education is criticized, religious knowledge contributes to the individual's own culture and beliefs, as well as to the culture of social peace and coexistence, since one way of overcoming prejudices is that people with this identity have sufficient knowledge and information on the subject. Since institutionalization could not be realised because knowledge was learned in a traditional way from the ancestors and not in a regular, planned, systematic and objective way, it is clear that the knowledge gaps experienced in the past could be filled with false assumptions and speculations. In fact, the reflection of these negative experiences and the feeling of being excluded leads to an emphasis on being a good person, especially in terms of religious identity, when it comes to children's religious education.

Most of the participants who did not have the idea of rivalry between different interpretations of Islam did not consider their own type of belief superior to the others (except for F8), and did not make derogatory or disparaging statements. Therefore, the percentage of participants who had reservations before getting married due to the difference in religious interpretation/understanding was very low (F5, F7, P9FS). However, in 6 participants (P1FA, P2FS, P4FS, F8, P6MS), the voices of objection to their desire to marry were raised in their families.<sup>24</sup> The hesitations of individuals and families arose from the question of whether the difference in religious interpretation/understanding would become a problem in family life and in raising children. This negative attitude was sometimes overcome by the strong stance of the participants and the fact that the families came to know their prospective bride/groom candidates over time and respected their children's decisions. Although it was rare, it

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<sup>23</sup> Ali Aktaş, "Kentsel Alanda Alevi Gençliğinin Kimlik Sorunlarına Sosyolojik Bir Bakış [A Sociological Perspective on Identity Problems of Alevi Youth in Urban Areas]", *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi* 28 (2003), 101-119.

<sup>24</sup> Çatak, *Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri*.



was also the case that contact was cut off with one or both sides of the extended family, in order to preserve the peace of the nuclear family, such as F8. It emerged that families could be exposed to “social stigma”<sup>25</sup> and prejudices in both groups. As stated above, these prejudices arose from the fact that Alevism was regarded as a non-Islamic entity (P4MA, P6MS, P7FA).

The fact that participants had similar rather than divergent stances in lifestyle and religious discourse showed that the difference in religious interpretation/understanding and raising children was not an issue on the agenda before marriage. Only P6MS attended seminars on child-rearing and marriage, while F5 related the decision they took before marriage by discussing what kind of path to follow regarding the upbringing of children and religious education.

## 2. Religious Education in the Family

The second stage of the study consisted of religious education in the family. In this context, the issues of parents' choice of names, provision of religious education in the family, teaching of worship, children's questions related to religious issues and their identities, and the celebration of religious holidays were discussed.

### 2.1. The Participants' Choice of Names

Name-giving is a situation that is given importance in the cultural and religious context in Turkish society. Giving a nice name to a child, which is considered among the duties of parents in the sacred texts and epics, has also been accepted as a symbol that influences his character. These symbols constitute one of the active dynamics in the process from opening one's eyes on life and closing them.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the name is the first indicator of identity that can reveal common and different aspects between individuals. In this regard, the factors that are effective in the participants' name preferences for their children were analyzed. As a result, it was revealed that with the decision of one parent or the joint decision of both parents, the names of family elders (F1, F8), names with religious references (F6, F7, F8), cultural names affected by political views (F2, F4, F9), and melodic names with beautiful meanings (F3, F5, F10) that we can call modern were given. However, sometimes, unilaterally giving children the names of family elders can cause resentment between spouses (F8). All of the participants considered criteria such as meaning, and pleasant and easy pronunciation in their preferences, with the idea that “A person grows with his name”. In the interviews conducted on the subject, it was observed that the majority of the participants cautiously approached the practice of keeping the names of family elders alive through future generations and giving children names with religious references, and that individual wishes and ideals came to the fore. As indicated by

<sup>25</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, “Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri”.

<sup>26</sup> Mavis Himes, *The Power of Names: Uncovering the Mystery of What We Are Called* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

Lieberson and Bell<sup>27</sup>, it is observed that traditional naming practices are diminishing while individual preferences are gaining prominence in naming approaches. The cautious approach towards names with religious references, as mentioned by Edwards and Caballero<sup>28</sup>, Madziva<sup>29</sup>, and Wykes<sup>30</sup>, can be attributed to the desire to protect their children from potential stigmatization and alienation. This is believed to be influenced more by nationalist sentiments triggered by changing demographics due to recent migrations in the Middle East and the impact of political factors rather than religion.

## 2.2. Provision of Religious Education in the Family

Another issue that was discussed after the choice of name was the religious education given to children in the family. Although most parents stated that their children needed religious education, they also stated that this responsibility could not always be properly fulfilled in the family for reasons such as not having enough knowledge of religious issues (F1, P2MA, F9), not having time due to a busy work life (P1MS), and “so as not to bore the children” (P1FA). While F9, who did not propose a planned religious education in the family environment, were cautious and hesitant about guiding children because they did not consider themselves knowledgeable in religious matters, they did consider the transmission of some basic information to children to be among parents’ religious responsibilities, since children initially ask their questions to their parents.

Parents (F3, F4) who thought that the child did not need religious education stated that individuals need moral and values education rather than religious education and that a belief will already be formed when this outcome is achieved. In the interviews, these participants pointed out that children’s religious feelings can be indirectly fed by social learning and modeling. As Sherkat<sup>31</sup> highlighted, the view came to the fore that through social learning and modeling, an education that gains momentum from values in the family will contribute to the development in children of a conscious identity and character through research, just as they did themselves. The values that these participants placed at the centre of education can be seen in the following statements, which are grounded on a humanistic basis in the name of universal values, and on morality rather than religion, even excluding the religious dimension of morality:

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<sup>27</sup> Stanley Lieberson - Eleanor O. Bell, “Children’s First Names: An Empirical Study of Social Taste”, *American Journal of Sociology* 98/3 (1992), 511–554.

<sup>28</sup> Rosalind Edwards - Chamion Caballero, “What’s in a Name? An Exploration of the Significance of Personal Naming of “Mixed” Children for Parents from Different Racial, Ethnic and Faith Backgrounds”, *The Sociological Review* 56/1 (2008), 39–60.

<sup>29</sup> Roda Madziva, ““Your Name Does Not Tick the Box”: The Intertwining of Names, Bodies, Religion and Nationality in the Construction of Identity Within the UK Asylum System”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41/5 Themed Issue: Migration and Race in Europe (2018), 938–957.

<sup>30</sup> Emily Jay Wykes, ““What Would It Be Reasonable for The Kid to Be Called?”—Negotiating the Racialised Essentialism of Names”, *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power* 24/2 (2017), 198–215.

<sup>31</sup> Darren E. Sherkat, “Religious Socialization. Sources of Influence and Influences of Agency”, *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. M. Dillon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151–163.

**P4MA:** We have cultural customs and traditions coming from our wonderful past. Respect for elders, love for little ones, tolerance in society... when you provide these, religion follows naturally. I think the essence of religion is to create ethical people, isn't it? Isn't that what all religions have in common? To create an ethical society from individuals who are moral, honest, decent, respectful, estimable and loved. If we want this, let's not restrict it to religion. When you provide this and raise that child with values, then that child will know his worth when he becomes conscious of it. He will choose his own path for himself. If he wishes, let him choose whichever way he wants. In this regard, I don't consider even guidance right, let alone pressure.

P4MA essentially supported and summarized these views, while F3 interpreted this education and guidance as actual interference in children's individual freedom of choice and in the development of their sense of responsibility. Emphasizing that "morality is not a dimension of religion", and that humanistic values should shape a person's character and identity, P3FS stated that as religion affects culture and is affected by culture, it is necessary to acquire religious knowledge, which can be called basic, as general cultural knowledge, so that the individual does not feel isolated in the society he lives in.

Participants stated that the most important element in shaping the child's identity is religious belief (10 out of 20), and that the first religious knowledge they taught was related to moral issues, based on the hadith "Religion is good morals" (15 out of 20). They deemed it appropriate to begin the religious education to be given to children at school age (6 out of 20) and from birth (5 out of 20). Considering the answers given to the question of who is the most important source in shaping the child's religious identity and in religious education, these were expressed as the mother (8 out of 20), the mother-father (5 out of 20), and the father (5 out of 20) in order of importance. Emphasizing the importance of the family, participants (P2FS, F3, P5FA) stressed that children's religious knowledge and identities are shaped through identification in the family.

In mixed families that consider religious education at home essential, several common approaches have been identified in the literature.<sup>32</sup> These approaches reflect the diversity of strategies mixed families employ in addressing religious education within their households.<sup>33</sup> However, Alevi-Sunni marriages are based on different interpretations of the same religious belief, so parents' decisions about religious education have been influenced not by which belief to teach but rather by their general

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<sup>32</sup> Chamion Caballero et al., *Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging in Mixed Race, Ethnicity and Faith Families* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008); Jessica Sarah Jacoby, *Exploring Parents' Perspectives on Their Interfaith Marriage (Jewish and Christian) and The Transmission of Religious Activities to Their Children* (Northridge: California State University, Master's Thesis, 2013); Cerchiaro et al., "Christian-Muslim Couples"; Le Gall - Meintel, "Cultural and Identity Transmission in Mixed Couples"; Smith et al., *Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America*; Arweck, "Social and Religious Dimensions of Mixed-Faith Families".

<sup>33</sup> Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families*.

perspective on an individual's need for religion and religious education. Additionally, unlike most studies in the literature, both participants have undergone their identity development and religious socialization within the same context. This is also one of the triggers for parental alignment in their approach.

### 2.3. Teaching of Worship

It was found that besides moral issues, belief in Allah and prayers were also taught in the family in order to guide children's religious feelings and shape their religious identities. On the point of teaching and performing worship, 13 (F1, F2, F5, F6, F7, F8, P10MS) of participants stated that children should fulfill their religious obligations, while 7 (F3, F4, F9, P10FA) of them who reported that they found worship "unnecessary" stated that if the children had such a tendency, they would not be disturbed by this and they could live their lives in the direction and way they wanted.

Within the scope of religious education given by parents, depending on children's gender, age and developmental periods, it was determined that in addition to methods such as teaching with stories and games and question-answer (F1, F2, F4), parents (F5, F6, F7, F8, F10) not only offered verbal guidance but also set an example with their manner of living and performed some religious duties with their children at the appropriate time. One of the points that parents (F1, F3, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10) stressed about religious education is that it would be unrealistic to expect their children to perform behaviours that they did not perform themselves. This statement supports the conclusions made by Dollahite<sup>34</sup> regarding the flexibility or rigidity of parental practices. A child's approach to worship and religion is directly and closely related to the adopted parenting approach and style, as emphasized by Dollahite.<sup>35</sup>

Worship was not limited to the salat, fasting, etc., and virtues such as not lying, being honest and benevolence, which constitute the moral dimension of religion, were also evaluated under the dimension of worship. Scholars such as Bengtson<sup>36</sup> and Kim-Spoon<sup>37</sup> emphasized the pivotal role of parents in instilling values in the next generations. The supposition that Islam, in which a kind of 'goodness of heart and good intentions' is more important than worship, consists of form and acts of worship, which hinders understanding of the true essence of religion. While parents stated what their religious responsibilities towards their children were and what they did regarding this issue, they also frequently referred to the limits of this area of responsibility and the fact that the desired religious education cannot be carried out through pressure or coercion. In the parents' speeches, directing the child to worship or performing these

<sup>34</sup> Dollahite et al., "Why Religion Helps and Harms Families".

<sup>35</sup> David C. Dollahite et al., "Beyond Religious Rigidities: Religious Firmness and Religious Flexibility as Complementary Loyalties in Faith Transmission", *Religions* 10/2 (2019), 111.

<sup>36</sup> Bengtson et al., *Families and Faith*.

<sup>37</sup> Jungmeen Kim-Spoon et al., "Parent-Adolescent Relationship Quality as a Moderator for the Influences of Parents' Religiousness on Adolescents' Religiousness and Adjustment", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41 (2012), 1576–1587.

acts of worship were sometimes perceived as pressure and coercion on the child. In fact, children's performing acts of worship caused an argument between F10. Indeed, it was generally pointed out that religious education negatively affects mental development because it is based on fear. At this point, especially participants who stated that they had a political orientation brought up the issues of "the increasing deist trend in Imam Hatip schools<sup>38</sup>" (P2MA, P3MA) and "why there are no scientists like Tesla in Muslim societies" (F4).

#### 2.4. Children's Questions Related to Religious Issues and Their Identities

Regarding children's religious identities, all of the parents primarily emphasized the superior identity of being a Muslim. Under this superior identity, it was seen as children's own choice as to whether they should live their lives on the basis of Sunni or Alevi understanding, because the religious identity that children will carry is an issue that belongs to the individual area of responsibility, which they have to decide of their own free will.<sup>39</sup> In studies that have examined identity development in the literature, as explained by Therrien<sup>40</sup>, namely "single identity" and "hybrid identity", have emerged. However, participants' perception of themselves under the banner of Islam, without discerning differences in their views and practices related to religion, has alleviated the potentially painful process of identity development for children. Furthermore, when considering concerns about the adverse reactions children might receive from their surroundings, as mentioned below, this situation indicates that participants are aware of the fluctuating and unstable nature of identity, as articulated by Moulin.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of the obtained data, two categories were created: families with children with established religious identities, and families with children who did not yet have religious identities and allowed their children to make their own choices. F1, F6, and F8, who had adult children with established religious identities, stated that their children had a perception of Islam according to the Sunni understanding, while F4 reported that their children had a perception according to the Alevi understanding, and F3 stated that rather than having a religious identity as below:

My two eldest daughters, who are realists and deal with positive sciences, are doctors and people who have humanistic and conscientious values, are respectful and can adapt to any culture and environment. They are individuals who can adapt to both cultures and even all cultures, show respect for differences, harmonize, and be accepted.

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<sup>38</sup> Imam-Hatip schools are a type of educational institution in Türkiye that focuses on religious education and Islamic studies alongside a regular academic curriculum.

<sup>39</sup> Amin Maalouf, *On Identity*, trans. B. Bray (London: The Harvill Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Therrien et al., "Above and Beyond Social Boundaries"; Le Gall - Meintel, "Cultural and Identity Transmission in Mixed Couples"; Arweck - Nesbitt, "Young People's Identity Formation".

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Moulin, "Negotiating and Constructing Religious Identity", *Religious Education Association Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, November, 2013*.

As F8 pointed out, one of the situations that worry parents regarding the religious identity of their children is pressure from the extended family and the environment, and the ‘vilification’ and bullying stemming from the prejudiced.<sup>42</sup> F6 stated that in their school life, their sons were exposed to bullying with statements such as “You are religious. You perform the salat. You keep the fast”. In fact, P8FA, who was bullied by her family due to her religious sensitivity and decided to marry in order to live her, also explained the tensions her parents experienced regarding both her own and her children’s upbringing.

Education based on pressure, coercion and negative language hinders understanding of what religion is, let alone achieving its intended purpose, and more importantly, it can fuel feelings of hatred towards religious values and elements. It can be said that parents who were aware of this situation sought a way to offer religious education without boring their children and without dulling their religious feelings.

Although it was stated in the attitudes of families who reported that their children had not yet established a religious identity that there would be no compulsion in religion with a democratic approach, it was stated that as much information as possible was provided about both understandings so that children would not be not exposed to false information and learning (F2, F5, F7, F10). This accords with the open approach of Caballero<sup>43</sup>. Although P9FS stated during the interviews that children’s religious education and religious identity were not one of the problem areas in the family, she mentioned how religious identity, which came to the fore after a question asked by their son, could turn into an issue of conflict. P9MA, on the other hand, described his feelings about their children’s religious identity as follows, and stressed that the elements that have meaning for individuals can change:

**P9MA:** It may affect me if my children exclude Alevism. I want them to grow up with an Alevi identity. But we think of each generation as being like ourselves. If it’s not important to them, they won’t ask. He can also identify himself with his name and surname and say that he is a friend of the world. In any case, we have not given the children an education by which they will identify themselves as neither Alevi nor Sunni. I don’t think they will enter into such an identification. If you ask me sincerely, I would be happy if they said they were Alevi. The water will flow and find its course, and they too will find their way. We do not direct them. Rather than our value judgments and what we want, society shapes them.

One of the situations that cause families to put religion on the agenda is that children ask questions under the influence of stimuli in their environment. In this respect, it was found that only P2FS, P6MS, F8, F9 of children asked them questions about religious issues, while others did not ask questions because they were at ages when they were not yet fully aware of the differences, there was not as much difference as had been thought in terms of religion, at least at this point, the religious life of spouses was the same and therefore the differences that might lead to questioning were

<sup>42</sup> Balkanloğlu, “Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri”.

<sup>43</sup> Caballero et al., *Parenting ‘Mixed’ Children*.

not encountered in the family and the environment they lived in, and school-age children could access the answers both through school and via information-communication tools. The participants who stated that children's level of awareness would increase with age thought that they would ask questions about the differences they saw in the family and society. Although the parents stated that they felt inadequate in terms of religious education and that they could not measure up to their children, only three participants (F1, P2MA) considered themselves 'incompetent' in giving adequate and correct answers to religious questions their children might ask. The other participants (F7, P5FA) stated that they could provide answers 'in their own way' by using the various resources available to them.

## 2.5. The Celebration of Religious Holidays

Participants also pointed out the importance of society, religious motifs and places in shaping children's religious identity. Besides religious education, places of worship and religious holidays open up a field of communication, unity, togetherness and solidarity in social and individual life. In this regard, almost all (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F10) of the families visited places of worship and the tombs of important figures such as Rumi, and Haji Bektash Veli together with their children. At the basis of these visits, besides the parents' own curiosity, lay the desire for their children to experience that atmosphere, to connect with those buildings, and for more permanent knowledge to form as a result of their observations about the worship and services held in those places.

Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, which first come to mind when it comes to religious holidays in Turkish society, are celebrated by all participating couples as a cultural tradition (F3, F9) or with a religious understanding (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F10). Apart from Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, Hıdırellez (spring festival) and holy nights (*kandil*) are also celebrated in order to keep the customs alive, to remove resentments and to strengthen family relationships. Only P3MA stated that he was against ritual sacrifice and that there should be no such worship in any religion, and he said that special days belonging to both understandings have a place in family life due to the expectation of family elders and the function of religious holidays in increasing solidarity and giving pleasure. According to the obtained data, there was no decrease in participation in religious holidays and celebrations. However, parents pointed out that since the revitalizing and reinforcing effect of religious holidays on beliefs and values could not be kept alive in family life as before, this awareness and feeling could not be fostered in children.<sup>44</sup>

Based on the data obtained in general, it can be said that an attempt was made to carry out the religious education given in the family environment in a democratic and positive learning environment that allowed for dialogue in which correct information was presented on the axis of a humanistic approach. Children's need of religious

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<sup>44</sup> Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families*.

education was a fact accepted by the participants. However, since the majority of parents defined themselves as individuals “who are believers but do not perform their acts of worship”, they stated that a situation such as setting an example for their children through experience was out of the question. Although the family was seen as the first and most essential source of religious education, it can be stated that parents could not fulfill these responsibilities due to various reasons and that this duty was somehow entrusted to environmental factors. Families’ purpose in raising children was for children to be tolerant, open-minded, respectful, inquiring, productive, moral individuals with a harmonious and understanding character and at peace with themselves and their environment. Therefore, it was considered sufficient in terms of the content of the religious education to be given that children should have a good moral character, have a creative belief, and know how to pray, in order of importance. However, it should not be forgotten that ignorance can create a feeling of hatred in people, because ignorance can trigger people’s fear, anxiety and worries. In people who access correct information, worries give way to the warm feelings of peace and love, because love in fact means mutual trust. In this respect, parents frequently emphasized the creation of a consciousness of tolerance, open-mindedness and love through religious education in a globalizing world, and that the way to do this was not through pressure, fear or coercion. Parents who held the same attitude about children’s religious identity revealed that children should be allowed to construct their religious identity by making choices through free will and reason, regardless of whether they had a religious orientation or not.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, trans. S. Rendall et al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press Chicago, 2005).





## CHAPTER III

### AREAS OF DIFFICULTY AND ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION

Based on the data obtained, it was determined that participants could basically experience difficulties and arguments in two areas. Under the *Attitudes of the Family and Immediate Circle to the Marriage Decision* heading, the participants' areas of difficulty and the kind of path they followed in coping with these difficulties are included. The second issue is titled Participants' View About Formal Religious Education Activities.

#### 1. Attitudes of the Family and Immediate Circle to the Marriage Decision

One of the indicators of internal phobia in society is difficulties experienced in marginalisation and rejection between groups.<sup>1</sup> This distress can be observed most clearly in the immediate circle when individuals with different religious, cultural or ethnic identities decide to marry. The data obtained from the interviews with the participants and the studies in the field reveal that the families of individuals with two different religious understandings mostly oppose the idea of marriage at the first stage due to social prejudices<sup>2</sup> and falsehoods assumed to be true.<sup>3</sup> In support of various studies in the literature, participants did not consider the Alevi-Sunni difference at the basis of their family structures as a problem area. As Cottrell<sup>4</sup> stated, the main reason for problems that can be experienced in family life is not religion, but how differences in religious interpretation are perceived by couples and the kind of attitude they show towards these differences. In this regard, the participants' approach towards the "other" at the basis of their parents' attitudes, and the guiding effect of the question of what future generations' religious education would be like, were mentioned. Besides the concerns of the extended family about the identity of future generations, it was pointed out that the lack of communication and the prejudices between the two communities were among the biggest obstacles facing marriages as well as social unity and solidarity.

The attitude of family members and the immediate circle towards the "other" is one of the main factors of problems that can be encountered in mixed marriages.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, "İslamofobyası ve İç-Fobyası"; *Alevi Çalışmaları Nihai Rapor*.

<sup>2</sup> Üçer, "Aleviliğin Yanlış Algılanması".

<sup>3</sup> Sema Ağaoglu, *Alevilik ve Sünnilik Algısının Toplumsal Yansımaları Üzerine Bir Araştırma [A Study on Social Reflections about Perception of Alevism and Sunni]* (Niğde: Niğde Ömer Halisdemir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2018); Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*; Hege Irene Markussen, *Alevilik ve Bektaşilik Religion and Identity Formation in Contemporary Turkey* (Bergen: The University of Bergen, Master's Thesis, 2000); Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Baker Cottrell, "Cross-National Marriages: A Review of the Literature", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 21/2 (1990), 151-169.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Future Directions for Intergroup Contact Theory and Research", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 32/3 (2008), 187-199; Jill M. Bystydziński, *Intercultural Couples: Crossing*

parallel with the findings in the literature<sup>6, 7</sup> (F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F8, F9) of participating families faced difficulties before marriage, and albeit very few, after marriage due to their families' attitude. However, none of the participants attempted to marry or elope/abduct a girl without the consent of the family, which is one of the important values in the Turkish family structure. Generally, lack of communication, prejudices, and a closed group identity driving polarisation due to lack of trust can cause communities to marginalise<sup>7</sup> and reject each other.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the attitudes of families in solving problems arising from internal or external factors can be summarised as follows:

In this approach, which we can describe as *tolerance and acceptance of differences*<sup>9</sup>, participants who considered that there could be no single definition of religious and cultural understanding<sup>10</sup> mentioned the role of tolerance and taking individuals as one finds them in breaking social stigma, prejudice and internal phobia (F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9). Indeed, according to Taylor<sup>11</sup> the need for recognition plays the biggest role in intergroup relations in society. In support of Allport's<sup>12</sup> theory of intergroup contact, prejudices and misinformation in society can be resolved through sincerity, respect, open-mindedness and freedom as individuals get to know each other. Participants considered the Alevi-Sunni difference not as a problem area, but as an advantage for themselves and their children. In fact, studies have also shown that the differences in mixed marriages support a climate of tolerance and contribute to a culture of coexistence and respect.<sup>13</sup> It was also pointed out in the studies by Pettigrew<sup>14</sup>, who worked on Allport's theory, that mixed families increase individual and group intimacy, and that as a result, intergroup prejudices and hatred decrease. In this regard, the

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*Boundaries, Negotiating Difference* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); Yahya - Boag, "My Family Would Crucify Me!"; Kris R. Noam, "Intermarriage in the United States", *Encyclopedia of Family Studies* (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, "Alevi-Sünni Evliliklerinin Aile İlişkileri"; Çatak, Mezhep Farklılıklarının Eşler Arası İlişkilere Etkileri; Çatlı, Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açıdan İncelenmesi; Kalender, Kültürler Arası Evlilikler.

<sup>7</sup> *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor*; Fatma Betül Demir - Z. İpek, *Alevilere Yönelik Ayrımcılık: Bir Saha Çalışması [Discrimination against Alevis: A Field Study]* (İstanbul Mazlum Der İstanbul Şubesi, 2015); Ercan Geçgin, "Kimlik Yönelimleri Açısından Alevi Gençlik [Alevi Youth in Terms of Identity Orientations]", *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches* 10/17 (2019), 1030-1075.

<sup>8</sup> Putnam et al., *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*; Riley, *Til Faith Do Us Part*.

<sup>9</sup> Bustamante et al., "Intercultural Couples: Coping with Culture-Related Stressors"; Junhyoung Kim et al., "Exploring Issues and Strengths of Cross-Cultural Marriage among Korean Immigrants", *Health Care for Women International* 38/10 (2017), 1095-1114.

<sup>10</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25-46.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-73.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Willard Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Pub. Comp., 1954).

<sup>13</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, "Young People's Identity Formation"; Caballero et al., *Parenting 'Mixed' Children*; Susan Katz Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Pettigrew, "Future Directions for Intergroup Contact Theory and Research".

participants also stated that for the sake of family happiness, it was important not to include the extended family much in their domestic affairs (P1MS, P2FS, P3FS, P5MS, P6FA, F8).

The *freedom and discovery* approach, which the participants based on respect and open-mindedness, prevents religious issues that might be a problem in the family from turning into an area of conflict. As stated in studies in the literature, it can be said that individuals who come to know themselves and the “other” better can foster a deeper respect and understanding for each other.<sup>15</sup> As Miller<sup>16</sup> emphasises, one of the benefits of this approach is the contribution it offers to future generations to know themselves and the beliefs in society/around the world and to live together in harmony. Parents considered the growth of future generations in the synthesis of values such as respect, love, tolerance and open-mindedness as one of the advantages of a family fabric based on freedom and discovery (F2, F3, F4, F5, F7, F9, F10).

The participants, who stated that they did not experience any problems within the nuclear family, attributed this to a “unity of outlook and lifestyle” and “absence of conservative/extreme ideas”. In our opinion, as well as the similarity/sameness that individuals see in each other, the religious knowledge that they have plays an undeniable role in the continuation of their marriage. Therefore, as Balkanlıoğlu<sup>17</sup> puts it, it can be stated that unknown differences create a positive atmosphere that increases the focus on the common denominator at the basis of the family.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, one of the issues expressed by the participants, as well as in the previous studies<sup>19</sup>, was that individuals with different beliefs and religious understandings gave very little place to religious issues on the family agenda. In short, based on the participants’ statements, it was concluded that a happy marriage is based on respect, love, tolerance, open-mindedness and trust. However, while the tolerant attitude of society and especially that of the extended family can lead children to approach different religious understandings, groups and beliefs positively and inquiringly, on the contrary, it can also lead to antipathy and an attitude distant from both understandings/beliefs. Participants also emphasised that, contrary to their own parents’ concerns, family dynamics provided their children with a rich perspective, a disposition towards a culture of tolerance, and a character development that is more compatible with coexistence. In this context, religious identity was evaluated as a state that individuals construct based on their own preferences rather than on a given element. Being moral

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<sup>15</sup> Caballero et al., *Parenting ‘Mixed’ Children*; Seshadri - Knudson-Martin, “How Couples Manage Interracial and Intercultural Differences”; Shoaf et al., “Strengths and Strategies in Interfaith Marriages”.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family*.

<sup>17</sup> Balkanlıoğlu, *Influence of Alevi-Sunni Inter-marriage*.

<sup>18</sup> Stan Tatkin, *The Science of Psychotherapy*, “PACT: Psychobiological Approach to Couples Therapy Part 1”, (2020); Hale Bolak Boratav et al., ““More Alike than Different”: A Qualitative Exploration of the Relational Experiences of Multicultural Couples in Turkey”, *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 38/4 (2023), 76–779; Shoaf et al., “Strengths and Strategies in Interfaith Marriages”.

<sup>19</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, “Young People’s Identity Formation”.

individuals who are beneficial to humanity was seen as more important than seeing oneself as belonging to a religion or religious understanding.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Participants' View about Formal Religious Education

The second issue that might become a subject of contention in families harbouring Alevi-Sunni traditions is the religious education provided in both formal and non-formal education institutions. Just as the place of religion courses in the education system has been debated in the historical process, the participation of Alevi students in the “compulsory” RCMK courses and how the Alevi-Bektashi tradition is reflected in these courses is an issue that continues to be questioned. In various academic and scientific meetings, and especially in Alevism workshops (the Alevi-Bektashi Federation), the idea of abolishing the “compulsory” status of the RCMK courses and adding an optional religion course related to Alevism alongside the compulsory RCMK course was offered as a solution, but this was not accepted by everyone.<sup>21</sup> This request was also repeated by the Alevi parents.

Before discussing the parents' opinions about compulsory religious education, it is important to discuss the distribution of the topics and learning outcomes related to Alevism within the scope of the RCMK course in order to make accurate assessments.<sup>22</sup> In the RCMK curriculum for primary and secondary education, which was last updated in 2018, Alevi tradition has been included in the content with various aspects and dimensions.

In the principles related to the implementation of the RCMK programmes, by stating that “A factual approach is adopted both in the teaching of different religions and beliefs and in the teaching of interpretations that have emerged within Islamic thought; in this context, religions, beliefs and interpretations within Islamic thought are taught on the basis of their own texts, sources and acceptances”<sup>23</sup>, the aim is to

<sup>20</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, “Young People's Identity Formation”; Kurttekin, *Religious Education of Children in Mixed Marriage Families*.

<sup>21</sup> *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor*.

<sup>22</sup> See also, Cemal Tosun, “Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Derslerinde Alevilik [Alevism in Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Lessons]”, *Türk Yurdu* 25/210 (2005), 37–41; Onat, “Alevilik-Bektaşilik”; Hüseyin Yılmaz, “Alevilik-Sünnilik Açısından Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersleri [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Lessons in Terms of Alevism-Sunnism]”, *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13/2 (2009), 189–209; Halise Kader Zengin, “Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programlarında Devletin Alevilik Algısı (Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz) [State Alevism Perceptions at the Religious Culture and Knowledge Ethic Course Curriculum (A Compared Analysis)]”, *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12/47 (2013), 63–87; Fatma Kurt, *İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretim Sürecinde Alevilik Öğretimi [Alevism Teaching in Religious Culture and Ethics Curriculum in Primary School]* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2016); Cemal Tosun, “Din Eğitimi-Öğretimi ve Mezhep [Sects and Religious Education]”, *İslami Araştırmalar* 29/2 (2018), 257–267; Mahmut Zengin - Yeliz Altuntaş, “Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Derslerinde İslam Düşüncesindeki Yorum Farklılıklarının Öğretimi: Lise Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma [Teaching Interpretation Diversities of Islamic Thought in Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge Courses: A Research on High School Students]”, *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 16/35 (2018), 235–274.

<sup>23</sup> MEB, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi (4-8. Sınıflar) Öğretim Programı [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Lesson (4th-8th Grades Curriculum)]* (Ankara: MEB, 2018), 9; MEB, *Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi (9-12. Sınıflar)*

introduce and discuss each understanding and belief from its own perspective. In addition, by stating that when necessary, different understandings and practices in the teaching of worship in the religion of Islam will be explained by teachers, an area of expansion based on regional characteristics has been opened in the programme.<sup>24</sup> The books, examined in the research, were approved by the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE)'s Board of Education and Discipline on May 28, 2018, with decision number 78 and on April 18, 2019 with decision number 8.

Even though topics and learning outcomes related to Alevism are not included in the 4th grade units, Hazrat Ali's words are included in places<sup>25</sup>, and in the unit "Let's get to know Hazrat Muhammad", the fact that the Holy Prophet took Hazrat Ali with him<sup>26</sup>, the fact that he was one of the first Muslims<sup>27</sup>, and his role in the *Hijrah*<sup>28</sup> are mentioned.

**Table 2.** Unit and Learning Outcome in the 5th Grade

	Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
5th grade	Belief in Allah	Explain the meaning and importance of prayer with examples. Explanation: Care is taken to give examples from the " <i>Nahj al-Balagha</i> " and the stereotyped prayer phrases that have become established in our language. <sup>29</sup>
	Hazrat Muhammad and his Family Life	The moral virtues of Hazrat Hassan (r.a.) and Hazrat Hussein (r.a.) are taken as examples. Explanation: The lives of Hazrat Hassan (r.a.) and Hazrat Hussein (r.a.) are discussed in the light of the narratives in the authentic sources without going into details. <sup>30</sup>

In accordance with the explanation for the relevant learning outcome of the 5th Grade Unit "Belief in Allah", under the heading of "Examples of Prayer in Our Culture", first of all, the work named the *Nahj al-Balagha* is introduced as follows: "Prayer also plays an important role in the Alevi-Bektashi culture created by Muslims who consider themselves loyal to Hazrat Ali (r.a.). There are also many examples of prayer in the work called the *Nahj al-Balagha*, which is one of the main sources of Alevi-Bektashi culture and includes the letters, sermons and aphorisms of Hazrat Ali (r.a.)". According to this, "Muslims who regard themselves as adherents of Hazrat Ali" are members of the Alevi-

Öğretim Programı [Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Lesson (9th-12th Grades) Curriculum] (Ankara: MEB, 2018), 9.

<sup>24</sup> MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8.Sınıflar); MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar).

<sup>25</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı, *İlkokul Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitabı 4 [Primary School Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Textbook 4]* (Ankara: Tutku Yay., 2018), 64,73.

<sup>26</sup> Pınarbaşı, DKAB 4, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Pınarbaşı, DKAB 4, 94.

<sup>28</sup> Pınarbaşı, DKAB 4, 96.

<sup>29</sup> MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8. Sınıflar), 21.

<sup>30</sup> MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8. Sınıflar), 24.

Bektashi tradition. In the continuation of the subject, quotations are given from examples of prayers made by Hazrat Ali found in the work.<sup>31</sup> In the explanation for the unit “Ramadan and Fasting”, it is stated that “Literary texts that are suitable for the level, such as the *nefes...* related to topics such as Ramadan, fasting, Muharram, Ashura, and especially verses and hadiths, are utilised”.<sup>32</sup> In accordance with this explanation, the importance of Muharram fasting and Ashura in Turkish culture and the Alevi-Bektashi tradition is mentioned.<sup>33</sup> Within the scope of the activity “Let’s read it” in the unit “The Prophet Muhammad and his Family Life”, the love of the Holy Prophet for his grandchildren, Hazrat Hassan and Hazrat Hussein is emphasised in the parable, “Both of them have the same value in my eyes”.<sup>34</sup> The degree of kinship of Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Fatima, Hazrat Hassan and Hazrat Hussein with the Holy Prophet is presented as a matching activity. Following this activity, under the heading of “Hazrat Hassan (r.a.) and Hazrat Hussein (r.a.)”, the births of Hazrat Hassan and Hazrat Hussein are mentioned, and their moral character, youth and martyrdom are conveyed concisely with narratives from the hadiths. In addition, there are references to the influence of Ahmad Yasawi in the world of thought of Haji Bektash Veli<sup>35</sup> and to Haji Bektash Veli’s views on speech etiquette.<sup>36</sup>

**Table 3.** Unit and Learning Outcome in the 6th Grade

	Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
6th grade	The Life of Hazrat Muhammad	Evaluates the Mecca Period of the Invitation of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). Explanation: The first Muslims and their characteristics are briefly mentioned. Examines the causes and consequences of the <i>Hijrah</i> to Medina. Explanation: The roles of Hazrat Ali (r.a.) and Hazrat Abu Bakr (r.a.) in the <i>Hijrah</i> are covered. <sup>37</sup>
	Our Core Values	Recognises the core values that unite our society. Explanation: The role of the Holy Prophet’s love for the Ahl al-Bayt in uniting our society is covered. <sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> İsmail Erdoğan vd., *Ortaokul ve İmam Hatip Ortaokulu DKAB 5. Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Middle School and Imam Hatip Middle School RCMK 5th Grade Textbook]* (Ankara: Lisans Yay., 2019), 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8. Sınıflar)*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Erdoğan vd., *DKAB 5*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Erdoğan vd., *DKAB 5*, 92-93.

<sup>35</sup> Erdoğan vd., *DKAB 5*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> Erdoğan vd., *DKAB 5*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8.sınıflar)*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8.sınıflar)*, 30.

At the 6th grade level, the role played by Hazrat Ali<sup>39</sup>, who was among the first Muslims, in the *Hijrah* and the spread of Islam is explained.<sup>40</sup> The sensitivity shown by Hazrat Ali in the washing and burial processes after the death of the Holy Prophet is mentioned.<sup>41</sup> In the unit “Our Core Values”, under the heading of “The Holy Prophet and his love for the Ahl al-Bayt”, the concept of *Ahl al-Bayt* is defined and the prayer made by the Holy Prophet for his grandchildren and the love he felt for his *ahl al-bayt* are mentioned. In the content of the topic, the epithet “Lion of Allah” given to Hazrat Ali because of his bravery and heroism, and his acceptance in Sufi understanding as “head of the saints” due to his vast knowledge are included.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 4.** Unit and Learning Outcome in the 7th Grade

Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
The Hajj and Sacrifice	Evaluates sacrificial worship in terms of the importance given in Islam to cooperation and solidarity. Explanation: The “Sacrifice Prayer” in the Alevi-Bektashi tradition is also included. <sup>43</sup>
7th grade Interpretations within Islamic Thought	Distinguishes the Sufi interpretations that are active in our culture. Explanation: From among the Sufi interpretations that are active in our culture, the topics of Yasawiyya, Qadiriyya, Mawlawiyya, Naqshbandi and Alevism-Bektashism are included in accordance with the students’ level. Explains the basic concepts and rituals related to Alevism-Bektashism. Explanation: The <i>djem</i> and <i>djem</i> house, companionship, consent and asking about one’s rightful share, the twelve services, the <i>semah</i> ritual, the <i>gulbank</i> prayer, and the Khidr and Muharram fasts and the way they are practised are covered. Within this context: The “community culture” and the “hand by hand, hand to God” acknowledgment in Alevism-Bektashism are included. It is mentioned that in Bektashism, companionship is also called “admission and acceptance” and that this concept is based on the brotherhood between the Muhajirun and Ansar in the history of Islam. The <i>djem</i> house is described as “the place of the path, manners and ritual” where the <i>djem</i> ritual is held. It is mentioned that in Bektashism, the expression “house of gathering” is used instead of “ <i>djem</i> house”. The “good manners ritual”, “admission ritual” and “Abdal Musa ritual” are mentioned. Visuals related to the <i>djem</i> ritual and <i>djem</i> house are included. It is mentioned that in Alevism-Bektashism, the word “Bismishah” is said at the beginning of prayers, while “Allah Allah” is said at the end of prayers. The “ <i>lokma</i> (food) prayer” is included in the <i>gulbank</i> topic. <sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Safiye Özdemir, *Ortaokul ve İmam Hatip Ortaokulu DKAB 6. Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Middle School and Imam Hatip Middle School RCMK 6th Grade Textbook]* (Ankara: Dörtel Yay., 2019), 85-87.

<sup>40</sup> Özdemir, *DKAB 6*, 81-82.

<sup>41</sup> Özdemir, *DKAB 6*, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Özdemir, *DKAB 6*, 105-107.

<sup>43</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8. Sınıflar)*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (4-8. Sınıflar)*, 35.



Topics and learning outcomes related to Alevism-Bektashism are covered in more detail in the 7th grade at primary education level. In parallel with the learning outcomes and explanations in the curriculum, after the heading of sacrificial worship and its importance in the unit “The Hajj and Sacrifice”, the “Sacrifice Prayer”, which is said while performing sacrificial worship in the Alevi-Bektashi tradition, is explained by giving an example as an information note.<sup>45</sup> In the unit “Interpretations within Islamic Thought”, after the reasons for differences of interpretation in religious understanding are explained, the historical process of Alevism-Bektashism based on the difference in Sufi interpretation is mentioned, and the main issues on which the Alevi-Bektashi tradition is based are discussed, namely the *djem* and *djem* house, the 12 services in the *djem*, the *semah* ritual, companionship, consent and asking about one's rightful share, the Khidr fast, the Muharram fast, and the *gulbank* prayer.<sup>46</sup>

**Table 5.** Unit and Learning Outcome in the 10th Grade

	Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
10th grade	Hazrat Muhammad and Youth	Prominent qualities of some young Companions of the Prophet are given as examples. Explanation: The topics “A Wise and Heroic Youth: Hazrat Ali”, “A Young Inviter: Al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam”, “A Young Teacher: Mus'ab ibn Umayr”, “A Young Commander: Usama ibn Zayd”, “A Young Manager: Muadh ibn Jabal”, “A Young Scholar: Hazrat Aisha”, “A Young Mother: Hazrat Fatima”, “A Responsible Youth: Asma bint Abi Bakr”, and “A Youth in the Presence of the Abyssinian King: Ja'far ibn Abi Talib” are included. <sup>47</sup>
	Theological, Political and Fiqh Interpretations in Islamic Thought	Recognises practical fiqh interpretations within Islamic thought. Explanation: The Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools are included among the practical fiqh interpretations within Islamic thought. In addition, the Ja'fari school is also mentioned, emphasising that this school is the practical/fiqh interpretation of Imamiyya Shia. <sup>48</sup>

In the “Hazrat Muhammad and Youth” unit of the 10th grade, under the heading of “Some Young Companions”, in the text “A Wise and Heroic Youth: Hazrat Ali”, Hazrat Ali's personality, intelligence, courage and important contributions to the spread of

<sup>45</sup> Sadullah Macit, *Ortaokul ve İmam Hatip Ortaokulu DKAB Ders Kitabı 7 [Middle School and İmam-Hatip Middle School Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge 7th Grade]* (İstanbul: FCM Yay., 2019), 47.

<sup>46</sup> Macit, *DKAB 7*, 116–128.

<sup>47</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar)*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar)*, 24.

Islam are mentioned<sup>49</sup>, while Hazrat Fatima’s intelligence, strong sense of responsibility, and among her many qualities, the effect of her educatory side on her maternal attributes and her sensitivity in childrearing are discussed.<sup>50</sup> In the unit “Theological, Political and Fiqh Interpretations in Islamic Thought”, information about Shiism and Jafarism, which is one of the main schools influencing Alevism<sup>51</sup>, is presented. There are explanations about the 12 imams, which is one of the important matters in Alevism, under the heading of “Imamiyyah”. The principle of *nubuwwah*, which is one of the common points of Alevism and Imamiyyah, is briefly defined within the scope of the subject.<sup>52</sup> The richness created in religious thought by the differences in interpretation within Islam and the life-facilitating aspect of religion are emphasised.<sup>53</sup>

**Table 6.** Unit and Learning Outcome in the 11th Grade

	Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
11th grade	The World and the Hereafter	Explains the religious practices related to the funeral farewell with examples. Explanation: The traditions related to the funeral farewell in our culture are introduced. In addition, the funeral farewell traditions in Alevism-Bektashism, such as the “Send-off to God Ritual” are also mentioned. <sup>54</sup>

In the 11th grade RCMK book, the definition of the concept of *Ahl al-Bayt*, which is also discussed in the lower grades, and the love for the *ahl al-bayt* in society are mentioned in the unit “Hazrat Muhammad According to the Qur’ān”.<sup>55</sup> In the unit “The World and the Hereafter”, after the social traditions related to the funeral farewell are mentioned, the “Send-off to God Ritual” is presented as a reading text.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Recai Doğan, *Ortaöğretim DKAB 10. Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Secondary Education RCMK 10th Grade Textbook]* (Ankara: Nev Kitap yay., 2019), 54–55.

<sup>50</sup> Doğan, *DKAB 10*, 62–63.

<sup>51</sup> Üçer, “Alevîliğin Neliği ve Şiîlik (Caferîlik)”.

<sup>52</sup> Doğan, *DKAB 10*, 138–139.

<sup>53</sup> Doğan, *DKAB 10*, 147–148.

<sup>54</sup> MEB, *DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar)*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Bekir Pınarbaşı - Fikri Özdemir, *Ortaöğretim DKAB 11. Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Secondary Education RCMK 11th Grade Textbook]* (Ankara: SDR Dikey Yay., 2019), 63.

<sup>56</sup> Pınarbaşı - Özdemir, *DKAB 11*, 41.

**Table 7. Unit and Learning Outcome in the 12th Grade**

	Unit	Learning Outcome-Explanation
12th grade	Islam in Anatolia	<p>Recognises some personalities who were influential in the formation of our religious understanding and culture.</p> <p>Explanation: Among the personalities who were influential in the formation of our religious understanding and culture, Abu Hanifa, Ja'far al-Sadiq, Al-Maturidi, Al-Shafi'i, Al-Ash'ari, Ahmad Yasawi, Mevlâna (Rumi), Ahi Evran, Haji Bektash Veli, Yunus Emre, Sarı Saltuk, and Haji Bayram Veli are included in accordance with the students' level.<sup>57</sup></p>
	Sufi Interpretations in Islamic Thought	<p>Distinguishes the Sufi interpretations that are active in our culture.</p> <p>Explanation: From among the Sufi interpretations that are active in our culture, the topics of Yasawiyya, Qadiriyya, Mawlawiyya, Naqshbandi and Alevism-Bektashism are included in accordance with the students' level.</p> <p>Explains the basic concepts and rituals related to Alevism-Bektashism.</p> <p>Explanation: The <i>djem</i> and <i>djem</i> house, companionship, consent and asking about one's rightful share, the twelve services, the <i>semah</i> ritual, the <i>gulbank</i> prayer, and the Khidr and Muharram fasts and the way they are practised are covered.</p> <p>Within this context:</p> <p>The "community culture" and the "hand by hand, hand to God" acknowledgment in Alevism-Bektashism are included. It is mentioned that in Bektashism, companionship is also called "admission and acceptance" and that this concept is based on the brotherhood between the Muhajirun and Ansar in the history of Islam.</p> <p>The <i>djem</i> house is described as "the place of the path, manners and ritual" where the <i>djem</i> ritual is held. It is mentioned that in Bektashism, the expression "house of gathering" is used instead of "<i>djem</i> house".</p> <p>The "good manners ritual", "admission ritual" and "Abdal Musa ritual" are mentioned. Visuals related to the <i>djem</i> ritual and <i>djem</i> house are included.</p> <p>It is mentioned that in Alevism-Bektashism, the word "Bismishah" is said at the beginning of prayers, while "Allah Allah" is said at the end of prayers. The "<i>lokma</i> (food) prayer" is included in the <i>gulbank</i> topic.<sup>58</sup></p>

<sup>57</sup> MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar), 31.

<sup>58</sup> MEB, DKAB Öğretim Programı (9-12. Sınıflar), 32.

In the 12th grade, in line with the learning outcomes related to Alevism-Bektashism, the lives and contributions to Islamic culture of scholars such as Ja'far al-Sadiq<sup>59</sup> and Haji Bektash Veli are included. Within the scope of the unit “Sufi Interpretations within Islamic Thought”, the history of Alevism-Bektashism and the influence of Haji Bektashi Veli's thought and teachings on the development of the Alevi-Bektashi tradition are mentioned.<sup>60</sup> Explanations of the basic building blocks and practices of the Alevi-Bektashi tradition are included.<sup>61</sup>

Although Alevism is not included as a separate unit in the RCMK curricula and textbooks, it is intensively included in the 6th and 7th grades of primary education and in the 12th grade of secondary education with topics, learning outcomes and various activities. In addition to the learning outcomes in the updated programmes, the inclusion of Alevism-Bektashism especially in the explanations is a benefit of the skills-based approach. A noteworthy detail in the learning outcomes and explanations in question is that they are written in such a way that they are similar to each other and can even be called a repetition of each other. This situation can affect the attitudes of primary and secondary school students, who have different developmental stages and needs, towards the course. It can also reinforce views to the effect that the RCMK courses are not beneficial. From a different point of view, however, it can be interpreted that the difference between the repeated topics and learning outcomes is actually not very large in terms of understanding. The way Alevism-Bektashism is included in the programmes shows that Alevism is a Sufi interpretation of Islam<sup>62</sup> and is considered in the same context due to its closeness to Bektashism. Based on this point of view, it can be stated that efforts to prepare the curriculum, in which concrete steps have been taken to meet the needs and demands of Alevi citizens, are being continued in accordance with a supra-denominational approach. It was found out that there was no consensus in some families (F1, F2, F9) about the status of the RCMK courses. In these families, while one of the parents stated that she endorsed the fact that his/her children took the RCMK course because he/she found it beneficial despite a flaw/flaws in the course (P1FA, P2FS, P9FS), her spouse (P1MS, P2MA, P9MA) advocated the abolition of the course. However, although the participants had different opinions about the RCMK courses, they stated that the exchange of information on this subject did not turn into an argument that would cause unrest. Opinions about the RCMK course can be summarised under three headings as follows:

P1MS and P3FA, who stated that (a) *the RCMK courses should be abolished* and thought that non-formal education institutions did not provide “healthy information” (P1MS, P3FA). Regarding participants who wanted (b) *the RCMK courses to be offered optionally, not*

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<sup>59</sup> Ali Kuzudişli, *Ortaöğretim DKAB 12. Sınıf Ders Kitabı [Secondary Education RCMK 12th Grade Textbook]* (Ankara: Eksen Yay., 2019), 51.

<sup>60</sup> Kuzudişli, *DKAB 12*, 89–92.

<sup>61</sup> Kuzudişli, *DKAB 12*, 93–100.

<sup>62</sup> Onat, “Alevilik-Bektaşılık”.

*compulsorily*, P4MA summarised their opinions on the much-debated problem of representation and content-method as follows:

**P4MA:** I am opposed to compulsory religious education in schools. Not only today, but years ago, I was against it and I am still against it. It was optional in our time. I even have a recollection. We started secondary school. Because it was an elective course, I said, "I don't want to attend it". I know nothing about it. My father also went and selected the religion course. Since I did not select the religion course, I did not attend the classes. I didn't keep up with the exams or anything. It was the end of the year, and I failed my religion course. In our time, I would have got a certificate of merit, but even if you failed in a single subject, a certificate of appreciation or merit was not given. How could that happen? They said, "You selected the religion course. You didn't take those exams. You have failed the class due to the religion course". I had such trouble. My opinion hasn't changed since then. I am still of the same opinion. There should be no compulsory religion class. The basic understanding should be: give the children or their families freedom to choose. There is no need to drag these people into chaos by imposing a religion or a creed on children or families. Let them go, set them free. Let it be optional, look, I'm not saying abolish it. Let it be optional. Let it cease to be made obligatory... When you look at the subjects included in the curriculum, they definitely have nothing to do with Alevism. It is not information that describes Alevism in any way. Let me describe myself, does anyone else need to describe me? Let me explain myself, does anyone else need to explain me?

In his discourse, P4MA brought up the issue of whether the decision would be made by the parents or by the child him/herself, if the courses were optional. In fact, students at basic education level under the age of 18 start taking the RCMK courses from the age of 10. Therefore, in the profile of a student who wants to take the RCMK course and a parent who does not approve of this view, whose decision will be taken as the basis? Moreover, it is not possible to accept the idea that individuals with different identities cannot produce objective, fact-based studies about each other. The views of Alevi opinion leaders can be sought in the preparation of the programmes, but how possible, how scientific and objective is it to conduct religious education through the interpretation of a certain group of sects and leaving aside the curriculum based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, which are the main sources of the religion and are not based on a single creed or understanding?

Though few in number, there were also participants who demanded (c)*the development of RCMK courses considered "necessary"* (P2FS, P3FS, F6, F7, F8, P9FS, F10) as they contribute to individuals' meeting and getting to know each other on common ground and to integration. In this regard, the participants (P2FS, P6MS, F7), who pointed out that the "inadequacy" of the RCMK programmes might stem not only from religious education policies, but also from the attitudes of students and parents towards the RCMK course, stated that the problem was not one-sided, as follows:

**P7FA:** I don't know how it is in other places, but I see that there is a deficiency in Tunceli. When I was in secondary school, we had a religion teacher. But when I look at the current period, for example, when I look at the period after 2012-2013,

I don't see a religion teacher, I don't hear anything from anyone. My brother also goes to high school. There is nothing to do with religion, because there is no teacher. Even if there is a religion teacher, a friend of mine who is a religion teacher does not see much respect in children. They don't listen to the lesson, they don't care about it. They used to teach us prayer. They would pray, and we would watch. We didn't used to say anything to our family. But today's children directly complain. It happens a lot here. The child says, "The teacher teaches us how to pray", and the family immediately writes a complaint saying, "He cannot teach my child!" I think this is a big deficiency; I think this is something everyone should know. Complaints are sent to the Republic Communication Centre (RCC). I think the biggest deficiency is in families. Everything would be better if teachers had a little more authority. It seems to me that there is a deficiency on both sides. This is a major shortcoming for me. Alevi families cannot put up with religion lessons. They immediately stand up saying, "They are teaching my child to pray!" On the other hand, there is a Sunni segment that perceives Alevism in a different way. There is a society that does not accept things on either side. Certainly, nothing can be instilled by force; if the mind doesn't take it in, it doesn't.

Participants (P4MA, P9MA) who drew attention to the changes in religious education policies in recent years stated that the importance given to quantity did not bring quality, and that the targeted objectives could not be achieved. In this respect, it was stated that individuals resorted to comforting themselves by growing lazy and masking their lack of questioning with resignation. As pointed out by P9MA and expressed in the final report of the Alevi workshops, although Alevi citizens' efforts to organise themselves through institutions such as associations and non-governmental organisations<sup>63</sup> are considered to be a way of having their demands and requests conveyed to and met by the authorities in a more systematic and organised manner, this situation may also cause the division of group identity into subgroups.<sup>64</sup> A point that should made here is that, contrary to what has been said, the compulsory RCMK course is not a 4-hour but a 2-hour course. Based on this point of view, the "distrust" mentioned by P9MA may be due to the fact that individuals make comments on the conclusions they reach without possessing the necessary knowledge on the subject, and adopt this as absolute truth.

The opinions of participants (F6, F8, P9FS, F10) who approved of the fact that the course was compulsory and stated that the most objective and reliable information among the information sources would be provided in government institutions, and that they trusted the steps taken in this respect, can be summarised by P9FS as follows:

**P9FS:** I don't know much about the *djem* houses. Frankly, we are doing something wrong regarding the RCMK. I would be lying here if I said I took the textbook and examined it. Even so, frankly, I have trust. Sometimes things happen in the media, people don't believe them sometimes, but I still have trust. I don't think anything so

<sup>63</sup> Recep Kılıç, "2010'lu Yıllarda Alevilik Sorun, Beklenti ve Gerçekler [Alevism Problems, Expectations and Realities in the 2010s]", *Dini Araştırmalar* 12/33 (2009), 7–16.

<sup>64</sup> İrat, *Modernizmin Erittikleri: Sunniler, Şiiler ve Aleviler*.

bad is written. My children do not receive a bad education in religious subjects at school. One of the issues on which I disagree with my husband is that although the lessons given in schools have deficiencies and a change of method is needed, I still find them beneficial. We have friends who are teachers of the RCMK. I see what they do, there are those who do such good things and guide their students... Frankly, until I finished primary school, I didn't know that the fard of the evening prayer was before (the sunnah). I learned that at school too. Good things were taught in school. I suppose we are a bit lacking in terms of critical thinking. Well, maybe this could stem from the incoming student profile, or it could stem from the family. But the teacher can fill the gap in the curriculum if he has trained himself very well.

The programme of the RCMK courses was planned with a religious-scientific approach, in a supra-denominational and inter-religious model. Finally, as a result of the updates made in 2018, in terms of the distribution and weight of the subjects in the curriculum, the programme was prepared with a philosophy and structure that gains momentum from "root values" in order to render the possibility of living together in a pluralistic, multicultural structure with a worldview that not only includes the differences in interpretation and understanding within Islam, but also encompasses religions in general. However, according to the parents' point of view, just as root values such as industriousness, honesty and tolerance are not sufficiently included in the programmes, it cannot be said that they are based on objectivity, scientificity and pluralism, either. Therefore, all of the participants evaluated the RCMK courses as "deficient". Evaluation of the courses as "deficient" was attributed to the fact that the Sunni view was dominant (P2FS, P5FA), that all surahs were drilled in Arabic, that rather than human values, religious knowledge was focused on (P1FA, P3FS), that they were seen as "worthless" (P1MS), that the steps taken were not sincere or realistic, and that teachers imposed their own ideologies (F4, P3MA, P7FA). However, only 5 (P1FA, F2, P4MA, P7MS) of the participants stated that they took a look at the RCMK programmes and textbooks "at some time or other" and in the previous periods. Therefore, none of the participants had any information about the content of the updated 2018 programmes and textbooks. After formal education, it was determined that with regard to non-formal religious education activities as well, a number (F1, F2, F3, F5, P8MS, P9FS) of participants did not have any knowledge about the activities offered by the *djem* houses in particular. In the words of P4MA, who has been in charge of a *djem* house for 4.5 years, it was stated that *djem* houses can provide "support that is seriously needed by society in the economic, social and cultural areas, and also in the areas where our state is lacking", and that the *djem* houses should be recognised as places of worship<sup>65</sup> in order for "people to practise their beliefs freely and to enjoy the same rights" (P2FS). The fact that in non-formal education institutions, religious education is provided by people whose "professional competence" is questionable

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<sup>65</sup> Cemal Salman, *Göç ve Kentleşme Sürecinde Alevi Kimliğinin Kültürel-Siyasal Değişimi ve Dönüşümü [Cultural and Political Transformation of Alevi Identity in the Process of Migration and Urbanization]* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2015).

strengthened the views that this work should be done via the MoNE. Participants did not look kindly on guidance from people who are not experts in a sensitive subject such as religion. While Sunni participants did not approve of regulations that could disrupt the unity- and solidarity-enhancing function of religious education and the fact that the course adopted a doctrinal model, Alevi participants did not trust the state's education, especially its religious education policies and practices, and criticised the duration and content of the course. As stated by Kaymakcan<sup>66</sup>, when parents think that the religious education activities offered to their children are not compatible with their own beliefs and philosophies, they consider this to be a violation of rights. In Tekelioğlu's study<sup>67</sup>, mixed families were asked for their thoughts on their children's participation in religious education in schools and places of worship. Twenty of the thirty-two participants approved of these educational services in order for children to acquire accurate information and for their religious development to occur in a healthy way. Eleven participants were opposed to formal and non-formal religious education activities for children because "one-sided religious education is given at school<sup>68</sup>, stereotyped judgments of religion are taught, religious education prevents the child from thinking freely, this choice should be left to the child him/herself rather than the family, and religion is an abstract field<sup>69</sup> and the child is not old enough to understand it".<sup>70</sup> In addition, in parallel with the views of participants in related studies, it was determined that Alevi citizens had demands such as definitely having RCMK courses, making them optional, and abolishing them completely.<sup>71</sup> The desire to abolish courses or make them optional was mostly related not to course curricula, which were stated to be shaped on the basis of Sunni understanding, but to the fact that course teachers' own ideologies were taught. However, the request for the abolition of the course, which was expressed as one of the solutions, may mean limiting the freedoms and demands of others while expanding one's own freedoms and fulfilling one's own wishes. Furthermore, the fact that the way prayers are performed and the Surahs are taught is considered strange is an enhanced reaction due to the idea that Islam is based on Arab customs and traditions. The participants who agreed that there are minimal differences between Alevism and Sunnism in terms of worship found the RCMK curricula to be deficient, even though they had not examined the curricula, which also include basic elements such as the *djem* house, the *djem* ritual and types of *djem*, and the Muharram

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<sup>66</sup> Recep Kaymakcan, "Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi Politikaları Üzerine Düşünceler [Thoughts on Religious Education Policies in Turkey]", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 10/27 (2006), 21-36.

<sup>67</sup> Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*, 53-55.

<sup>68</sup> See also Elise Massicard, *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe: Identity and Managing Territorial Diversity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> See also Demir - İpek, *Alevilere Yönelik Ayrımcılık*.

<sup>70</sup> Tekelioğlu, *Çocukların Din Eğitimi*, 53-55.

<sup>71</sup> Yılmaz, "Alevilik-Sünnilik Açısından DKAB"; *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor*; KONDA Araştırma ve Danışmanlık, *Anayasa'ya Dair Tanım ve Beklentiler Araştırması [Definition and Expectations Research on the Constitution]* (KONDA Araştırma ve Danışmanlık, 2012); Kurt, *Alevilik Öğretimi*.



fast that they mentioned, albeit not in unison. In our opinion, this is the continuation of existing false assumptions and putting political-ideological views into words.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, in which the effect of differences in religious interpretation/ understanding on parents' perception of religion, their child-rearing attitudes and family relations was investigated, the subject was examined under the headings of participants' views on the phenomenon of religion and their perception of religious identity, and religious education in the family. As a result of the data obtained on the phenomenon of religion, it can be understood from the participants' statements, such as "We are the same, we can only differ in terms of prayer, and there are Alevi who pray as well, it does not mean atheism", that Alevism was generally defined in terms of what it is not and in terms of the other. In this respect, no difference was essentially seen between the two different interpretations of Islam, namely Alevism and Sunnism. However, due to the social changes that have occurred, the characteristics of Alevism, which can be called folk Islam, such as *dedelik* (leadership by forefathers), *musahiplik* (spiritual brotherhood) and *düşkünlik* (exclusion for wrongdoing) have begun to lose their functions and disappear in modern city life (K3MA, K6MS, K7FA). Alevi associations, which are aware of this situation, have undertaken an effort for institutionalization by opening their own *djem* houses and association buildings (P9MA). However, despite the operating Alevi associations and *djem* houses, it was pointed out that the idea of "Alevism without Ali" (P6MS) had spread in some regions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although P3MA described himself as an Alevi, he stressed that he was an atheist in terms of religious identity. Furthermore, contrary to what is generally believed, Alevism was not considered as a sect, and was defined by some participants as "true Islam", in which the 12 imams from the "Haqq, Muhammad, Ali" trinity conducted their worship and beliefs through interpretation of the Qur'ân and understanding of the Qur'ân. Although parents stated that their lifestyles were the same as those of their spouses in terms of their religious beliefs, they were aware that they interpreted Islam differently. However, the parents stressed that transforming these differences into conflict and marginalization was incompatible with the essence of religion and the social fabric. Contrary to Çatlı's findings, participants did not see mixed marriages as "contrary to tradition"<sup>2</sup> and pointed out that these marriages had begun to be welcomed more warmly in society, because both traditions are evaluated within the Islamic circle despite their differences. Alevi-Sunni marriages were not identified with inter-religious marriages.<sup>3</sup> It was determined that religion did not play a very important

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<sup>1</sup> Eyup Şimşek - Özcan Güngör, "Alevi Yapısallaşması, Talepler ve Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Ders Kitaplarında Alevilik-Bektaşılık [Alawi Structuralism, Demands and Alevism- Bektashism in the Course Books of Religious Culture and Knowledge of Ethic]", *Turkish Studies* 8/3 (2013), 539-565; İbrahim Turan, *İnkârdan Diyaloga Türkiye'nin Alevilik Politikaları [Turkey's Alevism Policies, From Denial to Dialogue]* (İstanbul: İdil Yayıncılık, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Çatlı, *Alevi-Sünni Evliliğinin Antropolojik Açısından İncelenmesi*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Williams - Lawler, "Marital Satisfaction and Religious Heterogamy: A Comparison of Interchurch and Same-Church Individuals".

role in the marriage decision after the acquisition of some basic values. Indeed, participants (F2, F3, F4) did not have any objection to any marriages that their children might make with individuals of different religions and races.

All in all, while a more rigorous human model emerged in implementing and maintaining religious rules in the evaluations of Sunnism, which was associated with the concept of a “sect/tariqa”, in the case of Alevism, which is a philosophy of life/culture, a human model acting at the centre of values such as love, tolerance, brotherhood, friendship and neighbourliness was drawn. Participants who perceived the differences in religious interpretation/understanding as a natural part and element of belief were critical of the term “sect”. It can be understood that the criticisms they voiced were not aimed at Islam, but at the narration of Islam from a masculine or self-interested point of view, and at the perception of this narrative as the essence and truth of Islam.

According to the participants' views, a difference was found between their perceptions of belief and of religion and worship.<sup>4</sup> Culture, belief and morality were reflected in the participants' sentences as intertwined, intricate concepts. However, a humanistic and universal moral view was adopted rather than a moral understanding based on religious sources. In the participants' views on the phenomenon of religion, it can be said in short that they “believed as they lived”, and that they had the attitude of “your religion is for you, my religion is for me”, which emphasizes the value of secularism.

In the religious education given in the family, there was an identity construction that did not allow the public sphere to invade the private sphere and made the individual, namely the child, dominant and responsible in the private sphere. Indeed, parental guidance and inspiration were evaluated as a situation that could restrict children's rights and abilities. There were two forms of religious transmission in families, namely “passive” and “active”.<sup>5</sup> In this construction, the influence of religion and its interaction with other elements of identity were placed in a minimal and narrow framework and even ignored by some families. The majority of participants, on the other hand, mentioned religious education and religious identity as the main source of the values that make up the “me”. Therefore, parents' understanding of religion, consensus and differences in religious education, and the family meaning and value set are the factors that play a role in the child's religious development. Parents who pointed out the changeable nature of belief actually stated that it is important “to be an open-minded, moral, and good person”, that this is “the essence of the religion of Islam”, and that “belonging to a religion is not the only way to be a good person”. Parents who did not approve of sharply limited identity policies were opposed to the limitation of children's autonomy and freedom. However, although children are free, they imitate whatever they see from their parents. Parents are in a conscious or

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<sup>4</sup> Petersen, “Interfaith Marriage and Religious Commitment among Catholics”.

<sup>5</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, “Young People's Identity Formation”.

unconscious orientation. This orientation usually occurs on the axis of good morals, creative belief and prayer, which are common denominators, and teaching of worship in some families. However, parents preferred their children to construct this identity themselves as a result of their own experiences rather than giving them a ready-made religious identity, because parents who stated that their children's ideas and religious perspectives could change and transform over time<sup>6</sup> thought that it was not really possible to "choose" or "attribute"<sup>7</sup> an identity for their children. It can be understood from the statements of the participants, who stressed that fear, pressure and coercion were unacceptable in religious education, that unless religious education given with dry knowledge is replaced by the correct style and methods, the desired quality in religious education cannot be achieved.

The participants, who pointed out that the environment has as much effect on the child's religious development as the family does, stated that the problems experienced stemmed from social prejudices and incorrect information. Prejudices generally arise from the acquisition of religious knowledge via unresearched, second-hand oral culture. Participants looked kindly on the learning of Alevi-Sunni traditions, which were considered as richness rather than differences in family life, by future generations, and on all kinds of educational activities that would play a role in this process. However, if the inequality of opportunity caused by the lack of education given in the family is not eliminated by schools, it increases the possibility of exposure to false information and abuses of religion in the information age. Therefore, in this regard, an important task falls on formal and informal religious education activities, because parents desire that society and social institutions should provide services and opportunities that will support and strengthen the family meaning and value set in children's religious acculturation. For this reason, inclusion of falsehoods assumed to be facts in marriage school seminars organised by formal and non-formal religious education institutions, informing staff working in these institutions about differences in religious interpretation/understanding, and increasing areas of communication and interaction of our citizens from both groups representing the community can be counted among the steps to be taken for solving problems that are experienced. In the confusion of identity and especially of religious identity that children may experience, parents' knowledge of both their own religious understanding and their spouse's religious understanding, objectively based on the right sources, will ensure a healthy implementation of religious education in the family.

It can be understood from the data in the Chapter III that the participants had satisfaction in their marriages. This supports the finding that healthily functioning families are similar in structure despite differences based on religion and culture<sup>8</sup>, because the individuals who made up the study group of the research regarded the

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<sup>6</sup> Arweck - Nesbitt, "Young People's Identity Formation".

<sup>7</sup> Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity".

<sup>8</sup> John DeFrain et al., "Family Health and Dysfunction", *Family Therapy Review: Preparing for Comprehensive and Licensing Examinations*, ed. Robert H. Coombs (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 3–20.

Alevi-Sunni difference not as a nucleus of separation and polarisation, but as a richness that each adds value to family and social life. Each parent created a system of values within the family in order to establish a functional family atmosphere. Based on open-mindedness, agreement, love, respect, sincerity, tolerance, freedom and openness to communication<sup>9</sup>, this system of values helps parents to overcome potential crises in their relations with each other and with their children. Parents did not consider the phenomenon of religion as a field of struggle in their lives. The attitude of the extended family, which Kalmijn<sup>10</sup> calls the “third element”, and the role of social perception have generally been influential in the transformation of religion into a field of struggle. The participants mentioned the mission undertaken by mixed families in overcoming obstacles such as the closed group structure, stigma and prejudices on which the extended family's attitude was based, and the absence of contact that would create positive relationships between groups. The fact that values such as tolerance, respect and open-mindedness were consolidated in their marriages was a situation that increased participants' happiness. However, in cases where prejudices could not be broken, the solution was generally found in reducing communication with the extended family.

Regarding the religious identity and religious education of the child, which affected the relationship between our participating families and their extended families, the participants did not share the same degree of concern as their families. However, the participants' attitudes towards the activities of formal and non-formal religious education institutions were an issue that occupied the family agenda from time to time. In this regard, some of the (9 out of 20) participants objected to the differences in religious interpretation, or more precisely, to including and referring to religious identities in schools and textbooks. Regarding religious education activities, participants made criticisms such as the fact that “ideological loading” was carried out, and that due to the compulsory status of the RCMK courses, the teaching of prayers, religious language and worship “imposes the teachings of the dominant sect<sup>11</sup> and this kind of education bores children and negatively affects their religious development”. Due to negative images and perceptions about what religion is and about the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA)<sup>12</sup>, religious education has often been mentioned with an appeal for civilisation, learning and freedom. However, hardly any of the participants examined the updated RCMK programmes and textbooks. Therefore, the

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<sup>9</sup> Reiter - Gee, “Open Communication and Partner Support in Intercultural and Interfaith Romantic Relationships”; Seshadri - Knudson-Martin, “How Couples Manage Interracial and Intercultural Differences”; Williams - Lawler, “Marital Satisfaction and Religious Heterogamy: A Comparison of Interchurch and Same-Church Individuals”.

<sup>10</sup> Kalmijn, “Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends”.

<sup>11</sup> Yılmaz Ceylan, *Kültürel Çeşitlilik Bağlamında Anadolu Aleviliği [Anatolian Alevism in the Context of Cultural Diversity]* (Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> *Alevi Çalıştayları Nihai Rapor; Ulaş Tol, Kentsel Alevilik ve Alevi Gençlerin Kimlik Arayışları [Urban Alevism and Alevi Youth's Search for Identity]*, İstanbul: Podem, (2016); Turan, *İnkârdan Diyaloğa Türkiye'nin Alevilik Politikaları*.

lack of existing information caused the ongoing criticisms to be brought up again. As is known, while some of the participants evaluated the RCMK courses as too “secular”, others considered them to be too “Sunni”. However, apart from the difference seen in the worship dimension expressed by the participants, and the presentation of Alevism-Bektashism as a Sufi interpretation in the RCMK programmes and textbooks with references taken from works belonging to the Alevi tradition, the idea that “We are all faithful to Islam. We are under a banner” (P5FA) does not show a contradiction, it shows harmony and parallelism. However, the definition and explanation of Alevism from the Sunni perspective, which was seen as the dominant understanding, was at the focal point of the assertions. At the root of the problem of recognition, definition and identification facing us here lie mutual distrust, lack of knowledge, and individualised interpretations of concepts such as Sunnism, Alevism and creed. The participants stated that there were problems not only in the textbooks, but also regarding the approaches of the RCMK teachers. It was stated that teachers did not have the knowledge and training to deal with this sensitive issue in the classroom environment, and that the courses did not meet families’ expectations or children’s needs. As stated by P9FS, such a concern may have arisen from news reflected in the visual/printed media whose accuracy requires confirmation. Or, as Kaya<sup>13</sup> stated, it may consist of the reflection of individuals’ positive-negative attitudes towards religion on the RCMK courses and teachers. In another study on the subject, Turan found a significant difference in RCMK teachers’ perceptions of their professional competence for teaching Alevism, depending on the faculty they graduated from.<sup>14</sup> Just as this significant difference may be due to the cautious behaviour of the participants, it may also have stemmed from the fact that the level and accuracy of existing knowledge of the Alevi-Bektashi tradition varies from person to person, that is, from the question “according to whom, according to what?” In fact, in Gencer’s<sup>15</sup> study conducted with Alevi students, it was determined that 70% of the students were satisfied and happy with the RCMK teachers’ attitudes and teaching methods. The data we have show that there is a need for up-to-date studies including teachers and students on the adequacy of RCMK teachers’ knowledge and instruction regarding the Alevi-Bektashi tradition.

Participants who wanted the non-formal and especially formal religious education activities to be updated and improved so that they could effectively fulfil the function of providing an area of interaction and an environment of dialogue, however, were of the opinion that the RCMK courses contributed to self-knowledge, a culture of peace in

<sup>13</sup> Fatih Kaya, *Öğretmen, İdareci ve Öğrencilerine Göre Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi: Tunceli Örneği [The Views of Teachers, Administrators, Students About Religious Culture and Ethics Courses: The Case of Tunceli]* (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> İbrahim Turan, “Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Öğretmenlerinin Aleviliğin Öğretimi ile İlgili Yeterlik Algıları [The Perception of Proficiencies of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teachers About Teaching of Alevism]”, *Hitit Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 10/2 (2017), 879–902.

<sup>15</sup> Nevzat Gencer, “Alevi Öğrencilerin Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersine Karşı Tutumları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme [A Review on the Attitudes of the Alevi Students towards Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Course]”, *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 19/1 (2020), 85–118.

society, and coexistence. It was a view advocated by almost all of the participants that the perception of a marginalising mentality circulating at the extremes could only be changed with the guidance of reliable institutions and resources. Therefore, to create an environment that fosters a culture of peace, not conflict, it is necessary to identify the situations that lead to distrust. It is clear that after making this identification, there is a need for activities and organisations that will increase positive relations and trust between groups. The trust and equality that is established will allow individuals to express their expectations and wishes for their children from institutions without hesitation. It will also prevent individuals from orienting towards groundless criticisms without first doing research.

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## ADDITIONAL

### Appendix I: Ethical Research Committee Approval

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 06.12.2021-103751



T.C.  
SIVAS CUMHURİYET ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ  
Hukuk Müşavirliği

Sayı :E-60263016-050.06.04-103751  
Konu : Etik Kurul Kararı

Sayın Dr Öğr. Üyesi Fatma KURTTTEKİN

Üniversitemiz Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Kurulunun 30.11.2021 tarih ve 13 sayılı toplantısında alınan 20 nolu kararda "**Farklı Mezhep Mensubu Çiftlerin Çocuklarının Din Eğitimine Yönelik Tutumları**" olması gerekirken sehven "**Farklı İnanç Mensubu Çiftlerin Çocukların Din Eğitimine Yönelik Tutumları**" olarak yazılmıştır.  
Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

Prof.Dr. Hilmi ATASEVEN  
Rektör Yardımcısı

Bu belge, güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

Belge Doğrulama Kodu :BS DKMR8ZYNE Pin Kodu :97592  
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Bilgi için: Gamze ÇİFTÇİ  
Unvanı: Sürekli İşçi



## Appendix II: Participant Information Form

### Katılımcı Formu

Değerli katılımcı, bu çalışmada dini anlayış farklılığına dayalı evliliklerde ebeveynlerin din olgusu ve çocukların din eğitime dair görüşleri incelenmektedir. Çalışmaya katılımınız bu incelemenin amacına ulaşmasına katkı sağlayacaktır. Araştırmada kullanılan anket ve mülakat esnasında paylaştığımız bilgilerin gizliliğine dikkat edilecektir. Şahsi bilgilerinizin gizliliği her türlü akademik yayın ve sunumlarda korunacaktır ve hiçbir kişi ve kurumla hiçbir sebeple paylaşılmayacaktır. Çalışmaya yapacağınız katkı bu konudaki literatüre, ilgili devlet kurumlarına yardımcı olacaktır.

(Görüşme için) Görüşlerinizi gereken şekilde kaydettiğimden emin olmak için ses kaydı yapmama izin veriyor musunuz?

Eğer cevap evetse: Teşekkür ederim, şimdi mülakatı başlatıyorum.

Eğer cevap hayırsa: Ses kayıt cihazını kapatıyorum.

Not almak ve mülakat protokolüne devam edebilir miyim?

Bu çalışmaya katılmak zorunda olmadığınızı ve katılmayı reddetme hakkınız olduğunu bildirmek isterim. İstemeniz halinde araştırmacı katılımınızı durduracak ve şayet elde edilen veri varsa silinecektir. Arzu etmeniz halinde vereceğiniz email adresini verdiğiniz cevapların yazılı bir dökümü gönderilecektir. Çalışmanın amacı ve içeriğini anlayıp gönüllü olarak katılımınız için teşekkür ederim.

Araştırmacı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Fatma Kurttekin  
Sivas Cumhuriyet Üni, [fkurttekin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr](mailto:fkurttekin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr)

## Participant Form

Dear Participant,

This study aims to examine the role of religion in marriages with differing religious understandings, as well as parents' perspectives on religion and their children's religious education. Your participation will contribute significantly to achieving the study's objectives.

The confidentiality of the information you share during the survey and interview will be strictly maintained. Your personal information will be protected in all academic publications and presentations, and under no circumstances will it be shared with any individual or institution. Your contribution to this study will aid the related academic literature and assist relevant state institutions.

(For the interview) Do you consent to audio recording to ensure that your opinions are accurately documented?

If the answer is yes: Thank you. I will now start the interview.

If the answer is no: I will turn off the audio recording device.

May I take notes and proceed with the interview protocol?

Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to decline participation at any time. If you choose to withdraw, the researcher will stop your participation and delete any collected data if requested.

Should you wish, a written transcript of your responses can be sent to you via email.

Thank you for understanding the purpose and content of this study and for voluntarily participating.

Researcher: Dr. Fatma Kurttekin  
Sivas Cumhuriyet Uni., [fkurttekin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr](mailto:fkurttekin@cumhuriyet.edu.tr)



### Appendix III: Data Collection Forms

#### Anket Soruları

1. Cinsiyetiniz? .....
2. Kaç Yaşındasınız?.....
3. Eğitim durumunuz nedir?  
 Okuma-yazma bilmiyor  İlköğretim  Lise  
 Üniversite  Lisansüstü (Yüksek lisans, Doktora)  Diğer.....
4. Mesleğiniz nedir? .....
5. Gelir durumunuz: .....
6. Aşağıdaki ifadelerden hangisi dini tutumunuzu en iyi tanımlar?  
 İnançlı ve ibadet eden  
 İnançlı ama ibadetlerini aksatan  
 İnançlı ama dini vecibeleri yapmayan  
 İnanç konusunda tereddütleri olan  
 İnançsız
7. Kaç yıllık evlisiniz?.....
8. Şu an kimlerle beraber yaşıyorsunuz?  
 Eşim ve çocuklarla  Eşim, çocuklar ve ebeveynlerimle  
 Eşim, çocuklar ve eşimin ailesiyle  Diğer.....

Lütfen çocuğun din eğitimi ile ilgili aşağıda verilen sorularda size uygun olan seçeneği önündeki paranteze (x) işareti koyarak belirtiniz.

9. Sizce çocuklara verilecek din eğitimine ne zaman başlanılmalıdır?  
 Buna gerek yok  Doğumdan itibaren  
 Konuşmayı öğrendikten sonra  
 Okula başladıktan sonra  Ergenlikten sonra
10. Çocuğunuza ilk olarak verdiğiniz dini bilgi aşağıdakilerden hangisiyle ilgilidir?  
 İman ve itikat  İbadet ve dualar  Ahlak  
 Diğer.....
11. Çocuklarınızın dini kimlik kazanmasında en etkili kişi ya da kaynak nedir?  
 Anne  Baba  Büyükanne-baba  Okul ve öğretmenler  
 Arkadaş çevresi  Medya  Din adamları  Diğer .....

**Görüşme Soruları**

Aile hayatınızda dinin rolü nedir? Dini bilgilerinizin kaynağı nedir?

Çocuğunuzun adına nasıl karar verdiniz?

Ebeveynlerin çocuklarına karşı dini sorumlulukları nelerdir?

Çocuğunuzun din eğitime yönelik neler yapıyorsunuz?

Çocuklarınızın dini ve kültürel kimlikleri hakkında neler söylersiniz?

Çocuklarınızla cami veya cemevi ziyaretlerinde bulundunuz mu?

Okullarda, camilerde veya cemevlerinde verilen din eğitimi faaliyetlerini nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

Aile içinde hangi dini günleri nasıl kutluyorsunuz?

Aileniz içinde karşılaştığımız kültürel veya dini sorunlar nelerdir? Bu durumları nasıl aşyorsunuz?

**Survey Questions**

1. What is your gender? .....
2. How old are you? .....
3. What is your level of education?  
 Illiterate  Primary education  High school  University  
 Postgraduate (Master's, Doctorate)  Other: .....
4. What is your occupation? .....
5. What is your income level? .....
6. Which of the following statements best describes your religious attitude?  
 Believer who practices religious rituals  
 Believer who occasionally neglects religious practices  
 Believer who does not perform religious obligations  
 Doubtful about religious beliefs  
 Non-believer
7. How many years have you been married? .....
8. Who do you currently live with?  
 Spouse and children  Spouse, children, and my parents  
 Spouse, children, and my spouse’s family  Other: .....

Please answer the following questions about your child’s religious education by marking the appropriate option with an (x).

9. When do you think religious education for children should begin?  
 It is unnecessary  From birth  After learning to speak  
 After starting school  After adolescence
10. Which of the following was the first religious information you provided to your child about?  
 Faith and belief  Worship and prayers  Morality  Other: .....
11. Who or what is the most influential person or source in shaping your children’s religious identity?  
 Mother  Father  Grandparents  School and teachers  
 Friends  Media  Religious leaders  Other: .....

**Interview Questions**

1. What is the role of religion in your family life? What are the sources of your religious knowledge?
2. How did you decide on your child’s name?
3. What are the religious responsibilities of parents toward their children?
4. What actions do you take regarding your child’s religious education?
5. What can you say about your children’s religious and cultural identities?
6. Have you visited mosques or cemevis with your children?
7. How do you evaluate religious education activities provided in schools, mosques, or cemevis?

8. Which religious days do you celebrate as a family, and how do you celebrate them?
9. What cultural or religious challenges have you encountered within your family? How do you overcome these situations?

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Dr. Fatma KURTTEKİN

# Effects of Alevi-Sunni Marriages on Children's Religious Education and Family Relations

This book explores the perspectives of parents on religion, religious education for children and family relations in marriages characterized by religious differences. While there has been growing research on the role and significance of religion in Alevi-Sunni marriages, there is a lack of studies specifically addressing attitudes towards children's religious education. Aiming to contribute to the existing literature, this research provides valuable insights into this under-explored area.

The findings indicate that religious differences do not significantly impact perceptions of religion or the approach to religious education for children. Most parents expressed a desire for their children to learn about both religious perspectives, allowing them to choose their own path. Two main challenges arose in families with both Alevi and Sunni traditions: opposition from family members regarding the marriage and the issue of religious education for children.

The study reveals that discussions often stem from external factors, rather than religious beliefs affecting family dynamics or child-rearing. To ease tensions in these areas, the research emphasizes the importance of overcoming prejudices, accepting differences, and fostering open dialogue rooted in honesty, trust, and communication.



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