

# **An Anthropological Look at the Debates on “Which Alevism”**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of “Alevism” is used to describe those who took the side of the prophet Muhammed’s cousin Ali during the uncertainty about the identity of the caliphate after the death of the prophet Muhammad. In Arabic, Alevi means “belongs to Ali” or “pro-Ali”. However, Alevism has assumed different meanings according to regions and countries in the historical process. As of the 19th century, it is stated that the concept of Alevism began to be used to name a heterodox Islamic sect. Studies, especially in the last decade have focused on what Alevism is at its core, whether it is actually within or outside the religion of Islam and there are various understandable reasons for these debates. However, this study criticizes these "essentialist" debates on Alevism from an anthropological point of view, based on a field study conducted with central Anatolian Alevi in 2020. Understanding today's world of meaning requires a holistic view of the history of Alevism and not ignoring the contribution of processes that are thought to have changed/destroyed Alevism in this process. In this context, this study focuses on how Alevism is experienced today, how a philosophy can be kept alive despite all the pressures and obstacles to accessing their religious resources.

**Keywords:** Alevism; anthropology; essentialism; sociology of religion