

## THE TWENTY-FIVE TURKISH ALAWI FROM TOKAT AND THE CREATION OF THE ALAWITE BEKTASHI ITALIA IN LECCO\*

Lecco'da Yirmi Beş Tokatlı Türk Alevi ve "Alevi Bektaşî İtalya"nın Kurulması

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### Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the rationale behind the creation of the first Italian Alawi association, the Alawite Bektashi Italia. It is based on fieldwork, interviews and participant observations conducted in the northern Italian city of Lecco mostly in 2018 and 2019. However, fieldwork trips date back to 2016. The association is mainly formed by Alawis coming from the rural areas of the Turkish Middle Black Sea Region of Tokat. The paper reports the outcome of the first research of this kind ever conducted in Italy and relies on data gathered from a number of informants, including former presidents of the Alawite Bektashi Italia Association, and, above all, upon the life-story of a key informant, one of the founders of the association. The article is structured in order to describe the following points: the trajectories of the first migration waves, in the late Eighties, from Turkey to Italy; the influences that inspired Alawis from Tokat to form an Alawi cultural association in Italy in 2006; the activities of the cultural centre; and, finally, the way the cultural centre and their members are responding to recent political changes in Italy and beyond.

**Keywords:** Alawi Cultural Centres, Italian Alawi Association, Tokat, Lecco.

### Öz

Bu makale, Alevi Bektaşî İtalya'nın -ilk İtalyan Alevi derneği- kurulmasının ardındaki mantığa ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, kuzey İtalya'nın Lecco kentinde çoğunlukla 2018 ve 2019 yıllarında yapılan saha çalışmasına, mülakatlara ve katılımcı gözlemlerine dayanmaktadır. Ancak saha çalışması gezileri 2016 yılına kadar uzanmaktadır. Dernek, ağırlıklı olarak Türkiye'nin Batı Karadeniz Bölgesinde yer alan Tokat'ın kırsal kesiminden gelen Aleviler tarafından kurulmuştur. Bu çalışma, İtalya'da bugüne kadar yapılmış bu tarz ilk araştırmanın sonucunu bildirmekte ve Alevi Bektaşî İtalya Derneği'nin eski başkanları da dâhil olmak üzere bir dizi kaynak kişiden toplanan verilere ve hepsinden önemlisi derneğin kurucularından biri olan, çok önemli bir kaynak kişinin yaşam öyküsüne dayanmaktadır. Makale, aşağıdaki şu noktaları açıklamak için yapılandırılmıştır: Türkiye'den İtalya'ya seksenlerin sonlarında ilk göç dalgalarının yörüngeleri, 2006 yılında İtalya'da bir Alevi kültür derneği kurmak için Tokatlı Alevilere ilham veren etkiler, kültür merkezinin faaliyetleri ve son olarak da kültür merkezi ve üyelerinin İtalya ve ötesindeki son siyasi değişikliklere tepki verme biçimleri.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Alevi Kültür Merkezleri, İtalyan Alevi Derneği, Tokat, Lecco.

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## 1. Labour Migrants from Tokat

My key informant lived in a village in the rural area of the Province of Tokat where there were only elementary schools. He and his brother went to study in Sivas (106 Km from Tokat) where there were middle and high schools. When he finished high school at the end of the Eighties, he enrolled in an open university, the Eskişehir Anadolu Üniversitesi (622 Km from Tokat) because there were no other options. He studied with cassettes, videotapes and television. However, the nearest location where he could take exams was Samsun (230 Km from Tokat), where he periodically went. He also found a temporary job as a fourth-grade teacher in the elementary schools that lasted four months.

Turkish neo-liberal economic policies in the Eighties had increased poverty, inequality and unemployment in many sectors (Delibas, 2015). These impacted class relations and labor migration dynamics (Caglar, 1987 ; Yalman, 2009), shaping working class capacities all around Turkey (Gürcan and Berk, 2017). Subsequently, dramatic changes affected the Turkish civil society as a whole. This was, for instance, documented in the seminal work by Bellér-Hann and Hann (2001) based on their fieldwork in Turkey's eastern Black Sea coast. Later, following the financial crisis of 2000 and 2001, the neo-liberal restructuring that took place and the challenges the economy faced, provided a comparative perspective on recent reforms and upon the position of Turkey in the global economy (Öniş and Şenses, 2009). In the meantime, a religious revival emerged well beyond Sunni Islamic movements, penetrating other religious denominations both at home and abroad (Delibas, 2009).

Turkey was then also going through a rapid urbanization process (Danielson et al. 1985) which impacted productivity. Economic localization and urbanization as well as market accessibility had become productivity-enhancing factors (Coulibaly et al. 2007). This was also the case in the Province of Tokat. A 2009 study in the Tokat region on intensive cherry production showed that recent inputs used in their production were not used efficiently. Human resources had not improved, sustainable agriculture was not extended and conscious farming was lacking (Kizilaslan, 2009). In a similar fashion, a 2007 study (Erdal et al. 2007) on sugar beet production in Tokat had indicated that 82.43% of total energy input was in non-renewable energy form. Although intensive energy consumption in production increased the yield, it also resulted in global warming, land degradation, nutrient loading and pesticide pollution. Another 2007 study (Esengun et al. 2007) on stake-tomatoes grown in open fields in Tokat suggested that about 76% of the total energy inputs used in their production was non-renewable. Findings revealed that the intensive use of chemical fertilizers had raised serious problems (e.g., environmental pollution, global warming) although they produced a high tomato yield. In other words, the old critical structural issues of the economy had not yet been properly addressed, while unemployment rates or migration trends were still as controversial as they were in the Eighties.

My informant, like many of his generation, saw his contemporaries, who had migrated to Europe, returning to Turkey for holidays with lots of money and then buying items he could not afford, e.g. expensive cars. For him it was almost impossible to find a public job, which everyone wanted, without completing university. This was even more difficult for those, like him, who were coming from an Alawi rural village and were planning to move to look for jobs in Sunni urban centres. Young Alawi were afraid to move towards Anatolian urban centres. This fear was due to the fact that Alawism, as a heterodox religious persuasion within Islam which spread also among Anatolian Turks, had maintained pre-Islamic cultural elements and was at times seen as opposing Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the institutionalisation of Alawi organizations in Turkey had been possible since the mid-1980s, their first public appearance took place only later, in 1990, when a group of Alawi intellectuals published the so-called 'Alawitic Declaration' (Öz, 1996). (On the Eighties' Alawi involvement in politics see Moussa 1987; on Alawi identity and its relationship with the rise of Islamic identity and political Islam see Bruniessen (1996), Bozarlan (2003), Borovalı and Boyraz (2015) and the recent discussion developed by Delibas (2016) on Alawi organizations emerged in the 1990s in Izmir.) Delibas (2016) suggests that, for various reasons, Alawi mass migration from rural population gained a new momentum with the neoliberal restructuring policies of the Eighties. Turkey's Alawi almost deserted their traditional homeland and by the mid-Nineties, had gained visibility in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin. This process brought about a crisis of identity for them that needed to be renegotiated within the group and with the others, and required new strategies and mechanisms to sustain Alawi identity in the new urban setting.

It was thus a combination of the above reasons that pushed my key informant to leave Turkey. At that time, there was no need to have a visa to enter Italy. The law was later changed (Regulation European Union Council 539/2001); from then on Turkish citizens were required to have a visa to enter the European Union and traverse internal borders. My key informant had to pay for his ticket twice from Istanbul to Milan (via Rome). The first time he was stopped at Rome International Airport immigration office and sent back to Istanbul. A few months later, on his second migration attempt, he succeeded. Properly instructed, when stopped at the customs he produced formal documents and university papers, and, even if not asked for, he showed one of the Airport police officers his wallet full of money from his internal jacket pocket. His youngest brother and a few friends from Tokat were waiting for him at the Milan International Airport. It was early April 1990.

What follows is mostly based on my key informant's life-story (Bertaux 1981 ; Rosenwald and Ochberd, 1992 ; Linde, 1993 ; Chamberlayne, 2000), from his arrival in Milan Airport to the Turkish national election of 2018. In addition, half a dozen interviews were collected with former representatives of the Alawite Bektashi Italia Association centre. A focus group interview was run while attending the annual

organization of a picnic with members of the Association in 2016, in a Como tourist resource garden. For privacy reasons, my key informant will remain anonymous. For the same reason, I have also chosen not to insert visual material.

## 2. Turkish Presence in the Italian Peninsula

There has never been a significant Turkish presence in Italy (Motta, 2000 ; Bosworth, 2005 ; Sella, 2014). Ottoman troops invaded what is today the north-eastern Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia several times in the last quarter of the XV century (Cozzi and Prodi, 1994). Meanwhile, in the southeast part of the Italian peninsula, they occupied the Apulian town of Otranto for one year in 1480, slaughtering about 800 people. Later they were expelled during the struggles for succession of Mehmet II (Giaffreda, 2007 ; Houben, 2008 ; Conte, 2014). The Otranto massacre inspired a film “Nostra Signora dei Turchi” (Our Lady of the Turks), based on a theatre play written and acted by Carmelo Bene. It won the 1968 Special Jury Prize at the Venice International Film Festival. From the beginning of the XVII century until 1838, the Fondaco (Fontego) dei Turchi (Turkish Inn) was used by the Ottoman population of Venice as a house, warehouse and market (Brusegan, 2005 ; 2007). Finally, according to Visintainer (2011), some descendants of the Ottomans who settled in the northeast of Italy in the XVII century were literally ‘forgotten’ there. The town of Moena in the Province of Trento was referred to by Visintainer. There is still a district called ‘Turchia’ (Turkey), a name said to be linked to the legend of an Ottoman soldier who arrived there during the battle of Vienna in 1683, ‘Hasan il Turco’ (Hasan The Turk). Hasan became a hero. He rebelled against the Austrians and later married a local woman<sup>1</sup>. Today, the people of Moena still celebrate the so-called ‘La Baschia dei Turchi’, to re-evoked a typical Islamic marriage<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of 2017, the Turkish population in Italy numbered 19,509<sup>3</sup>. According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) they were 19,217 at the end of 2016; the majority was in Lombardy (7,133, and of these 1,288 in Milan)<sup>4</sup>. Their number has remained constant in recent years (according to Istat there were 19,068 in 2010). However, Çakırer (2010) estimated that in Italy there were around 30-40,000 people of Turkish origin, most of them in Rome, Milan and Venice (Çakırer, 2009).

In 2018, 8,657,219 Turkish tourists visited foreign countries. 142,511 visited Italy, with a drop of 51.2% compared to 2017 (291,788). The 142,511 Turkish tourists who chose Italy represent 1.6% of the total Turkish tourists who travelled in 2018<sup>5</sup>. The preferred Italian destinations are Rome, Venice, Florence, Bologna and Milan, with an increase in interest in lesser known Italian destinations such as Campania, Puglia, Liguria and Sicily<sup>6</sup>. In 2018, there were 45,628,673 foreign tourists who visited Turkey, of which 264,491 Italians (an increase compared to 199,813 in 2017). 69.4% went to Turkey for tourism, 17.2% for business reasons, 9.9% for visits by relatives and friends, 1.8% for health reasons<sup>7</sup>. In early 2020, before the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the two major Turkish airlines companies offer 17 (12 Turkish Airlines<sup>8</sup> and 5 Pegasus<sup>9</sup>) direct flights to Italian destinations.

### 3. First Italian Setting: Como, Entering the Italian Market

My key informant's brother had arrived in Italy two years earlier, in 1988, through some local Tokat contacts. In practice, it was possible to pay someone who would accompany the prospective migrant directly from the country of origin (here Turkey) to the place of destination (here Italy). My key informant, however, had not paid. Usually, preferred destinations were Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Mollica, 2012). These were Alawi destinations well before the migration crisis that followed the Arab Spring of 2011 and even more after the Syrian War from 2014.

In European countries, issues concerning foreigners and immigration have long been debated and have played a central role penetrating all political agendas at all levels. As Martin Sokefeld's (2002, 2003, 2008) seminal work on Alawi in Germany showed, the issue of recognition is at the heart of all migration-related issues. Alawi have long been part of this debate. In nearby countries, Turkish immigrants and their descendants have become a target of anti-immigrant political rhetoric since the 1990s; for instance, Turkish immigrants have often been described as unwilling to integrate into Austrian society (Atac et al. 2014).

Switzerland is very close to Como<sup>10</sup>. And starting from 1985, some of the migrants who originally wanted to go to Switzerland began to arrive in northern Italy. These were Turkish citizens who had not received asylum seeker status in Switzerland, and since Italy was very close, they relocated there. In those years it was easy to find a job in Italy and also to obtain a residence permit. This is the reason why a number of Turkish migrants re-located to northern Italian cities, although in Italy they earned much less than in Switzerland.

While trying to obtain his residence permit, my key informant stayed in a hotel in Milan. Usually, resident permit seekers had to pay someone about one million Italian liras [about 500 Euros today] under the table, to facilitate procedures. His brother worked in Alessandria (137 Km from Como) as a farmer; meanwhile the other very few Alawi migrants then in Italy were scattered in northern towns, between Alessandria, Piacenza, Pavia, Como and Milan. There was no real Turkish (let alone Alawi) group; their average age was 20-25 years and almost all of them could not properly communicate in Italian<sup>11</sup>.

About a week after his arrival, my informant got a residence permit to stay in Italy. It would have been easy for him to renew it from then on. However, he stayed in the hotel for 23 more days, until, through a friend, he found a job as a cleaner in a tourist resort on the Lake of Como. After he finished this first job, he started working as an assistant cook in a restaurant near the Italian-Swiss border. My key informant could speak some German. However, he soon started an Italian language course. Not long after, he found a job in a textile-dyeing factory as a storekeeper through another friend. He then moved into an apartment with three other Turkish Alawis.

The Lake Como has historically been a centre of the textile and metallurgical industries. Como city had 83,320 inhabitants as of 31 December 2018<sup>12</sup>. The city was famous for the processing of wool and silk cloths and it is still considered the capital of silk production, even if the raw thread is now imported from China and Japan. The biggest fashion houses in the world come to Como to choose their designs (Muti, 2015 ; Peron, 2017). However, Lake Como itself is a world-famous tourist destination. The two main inhabited centres around Lake Como are Como and Lecco. The structure of one of the most famous Las Vegas resorts, the Bellagio<sup>13</sup>, was inspired by the Lake Como landscape. George Clooney the actor is one of the owners of villas on Lake Como. He bought the lakeside Villa Oleandra in 2002<sup>14</sup>.

#### **4. Second Italian Setting: Lecco, Entering the ‘Fomp – Fonderie Moro Primo’**

My key informant obtained the Italian working residence permit in 1991. However, the factory he was then working for denied him permission to go on holiday to Turkey. He was working in the factory from 7 am to 7 pm, and by then there had already been several layoffs. Thus, he decided to resign and buy a ticket to go to Tokat for New Year’s Eve. There he got engaged and later married. John Lievens (1999) has studied the intensity and trends of such marriages of Turks and Moroccans living in Belgium to partners from their countries of origin, the so-called ‘imported partners’ and the motives for marrying such partners. His data from the 1990’s shows that a large proportion of the migrant groups choose a partner from the country of origin; this kind of marriage was not simple traditional behaviour, but (above all for brides) also a means to satisfy ‘modern goals’.

When my key informant returned to Italy, his wife got pregnant; so, they decided to rent the apartment on their own that he was previously sharing with the three Alawi friends. However, in 1993, he left the Como apartment and moved to Lecco, because he found a new job in a foundry factory in Valmadrera (26 Km from Como), the ‘Fomp - Fonderie Moro Primo’. He moved again and settled in Bellagio (21 Km from Valmadrera). Soon after that, his daughter was born. He continued to work in that foundry until 2001, when his second child was born. In the Fomp foundry, out of 200 workers, there were 25 Alawi Turks. My informant soon became a trade union delegate of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (Cgil), the most important Italian trade union<sup>15</sup>.

Amelina and Faist (2008) argued that the transnational politics of migrants are determined by the ways migrant associations connect to their homeland orientation with public integration requests. This stance opposes the dominant thesis that the transnational political activities of migrant communities and organizations are influenced by the institutional pressure of nation state. Their case study focused on associations of Turkish migrants settled in Germany. The way that associations deal with integration pressure differs decisively. Sunni associations, for instance, do

not emphasize their transnational bonds to avoid visibility, because of the assumed danger of transnational Islamic organizations. However, many political and business organizations do voice their transnational connections. For the *Alawitic Community of Germany*, the main goal is the ‘protection’ of cultural independence and the ‘values’ of the Alawi living in Europe, operating in both German and Turkish national contexts (Amelina and Faist 2008). They are strongly involved in the debate on the *Diyanet* existence in Turkey because this religious department prefers Sunni Islam (Tezcan, 2003). The Alawi Community Association of Germany (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (AABF)) protested against the plans of the Turkish government to send Alawi *dedes* (clergymen) to Europe with the help of *Diyanet* (Amelina and Faist, 2008). AABF activities concentrate on the debates about obligatory religious education in state schools. While the Alawi in Turkey want a general abolition of religious education, the AABF prefers the German model of religious freedom (where religious communities determine the content of religious education) (Amelina and Faist 2008). Amelina and Faist (2008) suggest rethinking the role of migrant associations in the receiving countries.

My key informant was the third Alawi to be hired in the Fomp foundry; all Alawi had been employed through Alawi contacts, in my key informant’s case through his wife’s relatives.

On 31 December 2018, Lecco had 48,177 inhabitants<sup>16</sup>. The population had grown since 2001 thanks to the increase in migratory flows<sup>17</sup>. Between the XIX and XX centuries, Lecco had become an important industrial centre for metallurgy and steel, so much so as to be known as the ‘Città del Ferro’ [Iron City]<sup>18</sup>; in recent years commercial, building and metalworking activities have also grown.

In the XXI century, like many northern Italian centres, Lecco had a significant number of residents coming from abroad. There were 5,023 foreign individuals residing there as of 31 December 2017, which was equal to about 10% of the inhabitants<sup>19</sup>, which had doubled since 2006<sup>20</sup>. Foreigners come from the Balkans, Eastern Europe and North Africa; the Muslim community resides in the districts of Maggiano and Chiuso where there is an Islamic cultural centre. There are some individuals from sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean; while immigrants from the European Union are mainly Croats, French and Spanish<sup>21</sup>. The largest number of immigrants is concentrated on Viale [Avenue] Filippo Turati. They are mostly Senegalese, Ivorian, Moroccan and Chinese. The largest community of foreign residents is the Romanian community (410 inhabitants)<sup>22</sup>.

Today, commercial activity and industry are well developed, in particular the metallurgic industry, iron and steel and electrical engineering. However, of the old silk factories, only one, the Arlenico<sup>23</sup>, survives. About 1,300 industrial activities are present in the Lecco area, with over 9,000 employees. In total, more than 24,000 individuals are employed, more than 50% of the inhabitants. The first country for

import and export is Germany, followed by France and Spain. Most exported material comes from the metallurgical industry<sup>24</sup>.

### **5. The Alawis working at the ‘Fomp – Fonderie Moro Primo’**

The Italian trade unions usually called for general strikes when the Red Brigades, a left-wing Italian terrorist organization, killed someone<sup>25</sup>. So even at the Moro Foundries, following periodical calls for a general strike, workers would go on strike. My key informant organized the strikes because he was a Cgil trade union delegate. He and his friends were the first to stop their shifts, and consequently the furnace of the foundry.

Indeed, at Fomp factory, the 25 Alawi met, gathered and were all members of the Cgil. Everything seemed to be going well, up to when the foundry suddenly closed in November 2001. The crisis had broken out unexpectedly, so much so that only twenty days before the closing extraordinary hours for the employees had been decided. The crisis, according to the owners of the factory, was due to market difficulties (Decker, 2001a). However, according to my key informant it was because of family problems. The 125 workers of Moro Foundries went on the Italian unemployment benefits and mobility allowance programs which are available to those who have lost their jobs<sup>26</sup>. 98 workers applied for mobility procedures; the others will choose unemployment benefits (Decker, 2001b)<sup>27</sup>.

My key informant had bought a house in October 2001. He joined a cooperative housing corporation, paid some of the expenses and made instalments. Following the crisis of the Moro Foundries, he was thus placed on unemployment benefits (as guaranteed by the Italian Constitution<sup>28</sup>), that is, an economic benefit for workers, to help companies in temporary difficulty by relieving them of labour costs<sup>29</sup>. However, he got a new job almost immediately through the mobility allowance system. Then he took part in an ESPE<sup>30</sup> training course to be a bricklayer. Soon after he found his first job as a bricklayer for two weeks, then as a storekeeper for two months and finally went to work in another foundry in Mandello<sup>31</sup>. Through the mobility allowance system, three of the 25 Alawi who previously worked in the Fomp foundry moved to the new foundry.

After just two weeks from the beginning of the work at the new foundry, the Cgil called for a general strike. The three Alawi took part in the strike, they were the only ones in their shift; however, it was not usual to go on strike in that factory. In the factory they produced cylinders for BMW and there were about 600 workers working on three shifts. A month later, a new strike was called, on that occasion the three Alawi involved their entire shift in the strike. Later they managed to involve the other shifts as well. However, after a while, one of the three Alawi left the factory.

At the end of 2002, all of them who had accepted the mobility allowance system (like my informant) had to decide whether they wanted a permanent job contract or

not. My key informant would have to accept because if he did not accept the mobility allowance would end. However, he told the owner of the factory that he had to go to Turkey and that once he returned, he would go back to work for them. But when he came back to Italy he did not go to the factory, instead he went to work on his new home, by then almost finished. Then he made 30 photocopies of his CV and left them around in the city. He was later called from the Fontana Pietro Company. The company made moulding machines, employed about 600 people, and had a branch in Turkey<sup>32</sup>. He has stayed there until today, the only Alawi working for the company in Italy.

## 6. The Making of the Alawite Bektashi Italia

Today, all twenty-five Alawi friends who originally worked at the Fomp Foundries live and work in the Lecco area, some even in close-by Switzerland. My key informant commented that when they worked together, if someone was sick or a child was born, it would be instantly known. Sometimes they gathered to play cards, or went for a beer on a Saturday night in a bar of the city. However, they soon realized that in that way it could not go on, above all it was a problem for their families. So, they spontaneously decided to have a meeting at the beginning of 2006. They first gathered as friends, and then they decided to create an 'Alawi-related' association. The idea of an association came about as a response to the need to have a cultural reference point, religion here clearly comes later. In my multi-sited field research carried out in north-eastern Switzerland in 2010-11 on Anatolian Alawi migrants, I came to similar conclusions. Migrant Alawi life experiences intersected with their religious group associational trends and activities in the host country. Indeed, without their home country, religious instruction had become a point of juncture, regardless of major structural changes that had taken place, following the necessity of diaspora, within the Alawi religious organization (Mollica, 2012).

According to my key informant, if the foundry had not closed, there probably would have been no need to create the Alawi association. My key informants meant that, in the foundry they had everything they needed. They were also used to gather with their families at weekends and for festivities. On the one hand, the trade union they belonged to became the basis of their social network. On the other hand, social activities organized within the factory permitted them to meet regularly.

Among the twenty-five Alawi who worked at the Fomp Foundry, there were no 'religious' Alawi. Someone more 'religious' would then go to the Alawi centre in Lugano to attend the *Cem*; just a few would engage in religious fasting. The 25 Turkish Alawi friends started gathering information. First, they contacted the Alawi in Austria, and then they were directed towards the association in Cologne (where there is the Headquarters of the AABF). Founded by seven Alawi associations in 1991 (renamed Alawi Community of Germany in 1992), today it is the central community of the Federation of Alawi Communities of Europe (Avrupa Alawi

Birlikleri Konfederasyonu) (AABK). Not only Turkish but also Kurdish migrants are affiliated with the AABK (Amelina and Faist, 2008). What the 25 Alawi from Lecco wanted to know was how to understand the procedures to create the association. Shortly afterwards, the presidents of the Austrian associations and some *dede* from Germany came to see them in Lecco. In 2006, they also organized the first *Cem* in a Lecco indoor tennis court; it was officiated by a *dede* who came from Germany, Cafer Kaplan. However, they needed a place where they could gather. Since they had good relations with the Italian Cultural Recreational Association (Arci)<sup>33</sup> of Lecco, they asked to use their premises. They got a positive reply and immediately rented the Arci place at weekends. Thus, the Alawite Bektashi Italia (acronym Aibkb) was founded in 2006. Aibkb was located at number 11 of Via (Street) Cantù, very close to Lake Como. However, this posed immediate problems of parking, because it was in the very heart of the Lecco tourist area. The premises were also narrow, that is, 60 square meters. In those rooms they had to organize both dance parties and *Cems* for about 60 families. Nevertheless, they remained in that place for about 4 years.

### 7. Moving to the Former Bonfanti Club

In 2010, the members of the Alawi association decided to leave the Arci place and moved to the Bonfanti Club. It was an indoor bowling alley with outdoor areas built in the 40s. The complex and its surrounding area had not been used for some time because the heating was quite expensive. Once they agreed on the rent, they cleaned and arranged the rooms, spending a large amount of money. They are still there today, and all *Cems* have been celebrated there ever since.

On the day of the opening, it was said that it had to become their second home. Today it is attended by about 80 families (and has increased by 20 since 2006); each family pays 15 Euro per month to contribute to the operating expenses, which amount to around 1,000 Euro per month. Some members even thought about buying the complex, but they could not come to an unanimous decision on the issue. In 2018, the owners of the complex were ready to sell it to the Alawi association for 150,000 Euro.

The members did not celebrate the inauguration of the complex, but each year they celebrate the anniversary of the opening. They have been inviting Turkish and Alawi singers for the anniversaries, including Ali Kızıltuğ and Gülcihan Koç. They celebrated the tenth anniversary in 2017.

Main activities are: the *Semah*, the ritual dance; courses of *Sas*; courses to celebrate the *Cem*, with a *dede* or some of the oldest to hold classes; the annual organization of a picnic with all the members. A few years ago, there was also a football team made only of Turkish Alawi from the area. The association also holds periodically a flea market, where they sell Turkish things; the flea market is also visited by many non-Alawi Turks. However, the management of the centre requires time and energy. It requires above all volunteers. Today women participate more; concurrently, it is increasingly difficult to involve young men.

New Year's Eve is regularly celebrated at the Alawi centre; there is an entrance fee and raffles are often organized. Sometimes over 300 tickets are sold. Many people visit the association for celebrations, and especially if the celebration is related to funerals. This is due to the fact that the centre is the ideal location to make condolences. Usually if one of the members or member's relatives or friends dies in Turkey, then there is a commemoration at the centre. If an Alawi dies in Italy, the association helps the family of the deceased financially, contributing to the transport of the body to the place of origin in Turkey. Money is then collected among the members to rebalance the budget. A few years ago, money was collected in Italy as well as from Switzerland, for a boy who was not Alawi to transport his body to Izmir. At the time of writing, no Alawi belonging to families who are member of the Alawite Bektashi Italia have been buried in Italy.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusions

The main room of the Alawite Bektashi Italia in Lecco is about 200 square meters, and then there are other rooms, including a kitchen, a room for holding courses and a meeting room. In the centre a large photo of Ali dominates in the middle, alongside those of Haji Bektash and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Then there are the Turkish and Italian flags. Their religious leader is *dede* Baki Erkonak, 49 years old, from Tokat himself. However, he lives in Como, where a second Alawi centre was recently created.

Today Mehmet Yıldır<sup>34</sup> is the president of the Alawite Bektashi Italia association. The association membership is limited to adults. On April 20, 2014 the association was transformed into an Onlus, a Non-profit organization of social utility as defined by Italian law. According to the Association Statute, the main objectives are: organizing courses to raise awareness of Alawi thought and culture; fundraising to deal with uneasy situations; Italian and Turkish language and culture courses; integration process support; folk art classes, especially for young people, dance and music; celebrations; recreational moments; mutual help among the members.

There is an elementary school opposite to the Alawi association. Due to an agreement with the Municipality of Lecco, the Turkish Foreign Ministry can make free use of classrooms to teach Turkish history, culture and language in this school<sup>35</sup>. The agreement with the Municipality was signed in 2013; Turkish teachers change every four years.

The courses are held once a week on Saturday evenings. This allows parents to stay at the Alawi association while their children are at school. The courses are also held in Como on the remaining days of the week, where there are many other Turkish citizens. Concurrently, in Milan, no courses are held because local Turkish citizen of Kurdish ethnic origin did not want the courses in the city. Courses are also held in other places in Italy, for example in Imperia. However, only Sunni Turks reside there.

And they have informal Sunni places of worship. In Como city there are half a dozen informal places where the Sunni community prays.

There are only about 200 families from Tokat today in Italy. There are a few Sunni Turks in Lecco, but many more in Como. In the last Turkish national elections of 2018, at the polling station at the Turkish Consulate in Milan, the Republican People's Party (CHP) won. Coming in second was the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and third the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

My key informant proudly remembers that he was invited, with his wife, to a number of parties organized by local cultural associations in Lecco. He got to know other people and explained what Alawism means while distributing illustrative material on his religion and culture. Some of these cultural associations have learned about Alawism, and some of their members went to visit the Alawi centre. For my key informant, being Alawi is a source of pride. He says that if you want something for yourself, it is to have it for humanity. He also argues that he does not pray to go to heaven but to thank God. Alawism, for him, is being equal, being human.

However, there is a fundamental disagreement among the Alawi about whether Alawism is a religion or a culture. This question was analysed by Martin Soekefeld (2004) on his famous case study on a *cem* in Hamburg. However, it seems difficult to be completely applicable in the Italian case. First of all, in religious terms the main concern does not regard an infra-Alawi debate but it is always represented as an Alawi vs. Sunni problem. The reality in Lecco is essentially Alawi; but in nearby Como it is above all Sunni. Indeed, in Como there have been problems dealing with the management of the classrooms to hold the courses of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Problems here are due to the fact that a section of the local population seems to be sceptical about the Turkish Sunni component. It is this perception from the local community towards communities coming from Turkey that most worries the Alawi in Lecco, which is, being homologated with their Sunni counterpart as part of a monolithic (all-encompassing) entity. Second, at the moment, locals' attitudes vary between the two Turkish communities, based on their religious affiliation, not their ethnic membership. Their specific belief can explain the 'missing mistrust' (Amelina and Faist, 2008) of Alawi in Europe because the Alawi religion distances itself from Sunni Islam, e.g., division of gender, veiling, five-times prayer, prohibition of alcohol. This has a final repercussion in political terms. Following a trend already documented in other parts of Europe (see on this Amelina and Faist, 2008; Mollica, 2012) even in Lecco, their orientation goes to the left, in the lay sector.

Finally, by reference to the Alawi dwelling in Italy, this ethnography documents a move from secular association (e.g., trade union) to religious association (e.g., Alawi associations). This is however not an isolated case for identical scenarios are reproduced elsewhere, even within Turkey. Similar conclusions were, for instance, reached by Delibas (2016) in his ethnography on Izmir Alawi. From this descends

that, on the one hand, the slow declining of working-class related groups, and above all trade unions, seems to be counterbalanced by a religious revival. On the other hand, the global transformations of trade unions and the reorganization of left parties reconfigured the same social networks (Delibas, 2015). The dramatic socio-economical changes that took place in the Anatolian peninsula from the late 1980s to the early 90s are here revealing. These changes seem indeed to have been reproduced in the diasporic Alawi context. A major consequence seems to have been the shift from class based social divisions and solidarity organizations to a culture of religious belonging as a means of communal solidarity. Thus, if previously trade unions and other work-related associations were the bases upon which workers, both at home and abroad, relied on for social solidarity, later solidarity built upon a culture of religious affiliation as a means of communal harmony and unity.

### Sonnotlar

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dailysabah.com/features/2015/02/18/moena-a-hidden-turkish-town-in-the-foothills-of-the-alps>.

<sup>2</sup> [Http://www.valledifassa.com/baschia-dei-turchi-a-moena-ricordi-di-un-passato-islamico-fra-storia-e-leggenda/](http://www.valledifassa.com/baschia-dei-turchi-a-moena-ricordi-di-un-passato-islamico-fra-storia-e-leggenda/).

<sup>3</sup> [http://demo.istat.it/str2017/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/str2017/index_e.html).

<sup>4</sup> Regular residents in Italy coming from Turkey for work, study or personal reasons: 2002, 7,183; 2003, 9,183; 2004, 11,077; 2005, 12,359; 2006, 13,532; 2007, 14,562; 2008, 16,225; 2009, 17,651; 2010, 19,068; 2011, 16,354; 2012, 17,711; 2013, 19,951; 2014, 15,943; 2015, 19,388; 2016, 19,217. Distribution by regions in 2016: Emilia Romagna 3,258; Lazio 1,471; Liguria 1,467; Lombardy 7,133; Piedmont 2,159; Tuscany 1,253; towns with higher percentage of Turkish people: Milan 1,288; Imperia 1,033; Como 1,001; Rome 903; Modena 784 (demo.istat.it, [http://demo.istat.it/str2010/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/str2010/index_e.html); <http://www.comuni-italiani.it/statistiche/stranieri/tr.html>).

<sup>5</sup> See on this the Turkish Statistical Institute at <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.infomercatiesteri.it/turismo\\_out.php?id\\_paesi=95](http://www.infomercatiesteri.it/turismo_out.php?id_paesi=95).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.infomercatiesteri.it/turismo\\_in.php?id\\_paesi=95](http://www.infomercatiesteri.it/turismo_in.php?id_paesi=95).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.turkishairlines.com/fr-int/flights/country/italy/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.flypgs.com/en/travel-guide/italy>.

<sup>10</sup> The border post between Italy and Switzerland is indeed called Como-Chiasso.

<sup>11</sup> This is clear in the very first story that my key informant told me which was about a 17-year-old Alawi who lived in a village near Lecco. One day he accompanied a friend who was leaving by train; however, on the way back he walked back along the railroad track because he could not understand the information given to him by locals on how to get back.

<sup>12</sup> <http://demo.istat.it/bil2018/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.destination360.com/north-america/us/nevada/las-vegas/bellagio>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://wevillas.ch/news/villa-oleandra-a-laglio-la-dimora-di-george-clooney-sul-lago-di-como>.

<sup>15</sup> [Http://www.cgil.it/i-tesserati-2014/](http://www.cgil.it/i-tesserati-2014/). With its 5.5 million members, although in decline since 2013, it is the second largest trade union in Europe, after the German DGB, which has over 6 million members (<http://www.cgil.it/>).

<sup>16</sup> [Http://demo.istat.it/bil2018/index.html](http://demo.istat.it/bil2018/index.html).

<sup>17</sup> [Http://demo.istat.it/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/index_e.html) ad annum.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.esl.lecco.it/duemila-anni-di-metallurgia-nel-nel-lecchese/>. The economic history of Lecco went through three industrial phases: fishing and silk (XVIII - mid-XIX century), steel (late XIX - XX century) and construction (mid-XX - today). In the late XX century the crisis of Italian

industry led to the dismantling of the main steel mills (Rostagno 2005, Daccò 2014).

<sup>19</sup> [Http://demo.istat.it/str2017/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/str2017/index_e.html).

<sup>20</sup> [Http://demo.istat.it/index\\_e.html](http://demo.istat.it/index_e.html) ad annum ad annum

<sup>21</sup> [Http://www.slow-way.com/city.php?city=lecco](http://www.slow-way.com/city.php?city=lecco).

<sup>22</sup> Then: Albanians 365, Maroccans 364, Senegaleses 296, Kosovars 285, Moldavians 255, Ivorians 253, Ukrainians 187, Peruvians 180; Chinese 167 ([https://web.archive.org/web/20150207103910/http://www.comune.lecco.it/arg-docinfjhtml?param3\\_1=N1302dc2b63599377a5b&param2\\_1=N106e925f0ba5e62efa9&param1\\_1=N106e9227d4a32b6a923](https://web.archive.org/web/20150207103910/http://www.comune.lecco.it/arg-docinfjhtml?param3_1=N1302dc2b63599377a5b&param2_1=N106e925f0ba5e62efa9&param1_1=N106e9227d4a32b6a923)).

<sup>23</sup> [Https://www.ilgiorno.it/lecco/economia/arlenico-1.3828852](https://www.ilgiorno.it/lecco/economia/arlenico-1.3828852)

<sup>24</sup> [Https://www.lecconotizie.com/economia/cresce-lexport-lecchese-germania-francia-e-usa-i-principali-mercati-440314/](https://www.lecconotizie.com/economia/cresce-lexport-lecchese-germania-francia-e-usa-i-principali-mercati-440314/).

<sup>25</sup> Formed in 1970, reached its peak in 1978, when they first kidnapped and then murdered the former Christian Democrat PM Aldo Moro. In late 1980s, the group was broken up by Italian investigators (Drake 1995; Clementi 2007).

<sup>26</sup> See Laws 92/2012, 223/1991 and 236/1993; Decree Ministry of Labour and Social Policies 186/2000 and 142/2001. The provision was later abandoned and from January, 1 2017 it was replaced by the Nuova Assicurazione Sociale per l'Impiego (NASpI).

<sup>27</sup> On 04.11.2017, the City Council of Lecco signed an agreement with the Svi.va Srl concerning the area of the former Moro Foundries to develop cinemas, restaurants and a shopping area (Morleo 2017).

<sup>28</sup> See art. 38, Italian Constitution: “[...] workers have the right to the provision of financial support sufficient to meet their needs in case of accidents at work, ill health, disability, old age and involuntary unemployment [...]”.

<sup>29</sup> See Decree 12.08.1947, n. 869; Law 21.05.1951, n 498; Law 20.05.1975, n. 164; Law 23.07.1991, n. 223.

<sup>30</sup> Ente Unico Paritetico Formazione e Sicurezza O.P.P. Edilizia della Provincia di Lecco ([www.espelecco.it](http://www.espelecco.it)).

<sup>31</sup> 10.6 Km da Lecco.

<sup>32</sup> They have two production sites in Istanbul (Fontana Pietro Kalip) and Schitu Golesti, Romania (Fontana Pietro Romania) and four production plants in the Province of Lecco (<http://www.fontana-group.com/en/>).

<sup>33</sup> It is the biggest Italian non-profit association not linked with the Catholic Church, with almost 5,000 cultural centres and a million members; its official name has been ‘Associazione Arci’ since 2006 (<https://www.arci.it/>).

<sup>34</sup> Previous presidents were: Ergün Çelik; İsmail Özçakmak; Rafet Altıntaş; Ergün Çelik; Rafet Altıntaş.

<sup>35</sup> [Http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turk-kultur-merkezleri-turkce-egitim-merkezleri\\_en\\_en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turk-kultur-merkezleri-turkce-egitim-merkezleri_en_en.mfa).

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