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Dersim - Jiar u Diyar (Sacred Geography)

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Summary

This entry reconceptualises Dersim not as a mere geographic or administrative region but as a sacred-political topography (a cultural geography) central to the Raa Haqi (Kurdish Alevi) cosmology and communal life. It challenges dominant (external) epistemic frameworks -state-generated cartographies, orientalist narratives, and ethno-political reductions- that have historically defined Dersim as a deviant frontier or symbolic territory. Instead, drawing on emic categories such as jiare (sacred-place or -object), Zahir/Batın (hidden/visible realms), and jiār u diyār (the sacred land), the entry approaches Dersim as a living, sentient landscape animated by ancestral spirits, mythic time, and non-human agencies. It traces three epistemic constructions that shape contemporary understandings of Dersim: the external state and colonial gaze that justified violent assimilation; the Kurdish and Alevi movements that politicised and reframed Dersim's identity in competing nationalist terms; and the Raa Haqi cosmology itself, which resists linear historiographies and proposes a relational ontology grounded in ecological and spiritual continuity. Central to this framework is the concept of jiare, which exceeds institutionalised religion by offering a place-based, talip-led religiosity characterised by ritual dialogue, personal ethics, and cosmological cohabitation with the land. As ocak-based hierarchies decline, talips increasingly engage directly with sacred sites, transforming religious authority into an individualised, emotionally grounded spirituality. The sacred geography of Dersim, far from being a relic of pre-modern belief, emerges here as a dynamic terrain of ecological resistance and diasporic memory, where the land itself becomes a witness, archive, and actor in ongoing struggles against environmental destruction, cultural erasure, and epistemic violence. In doing so, this entry argues that Raa Haqi cosmology offers a decolonial mode of knowledge rooted in embodied practice, sacred ecology, and the affective endurance of a people who continue to inhabit, defend, and reimagine Dersim as a site of cosmological belonging and political possibility.

Introduction: Reframing Dersim Beyond the Epistemic Border

To understand the significance of Dersim for *Raa Haqi* communities today, we must first confront the epistemic layers that obscure its lived realities. Dersim is not merely

a geographic or administrative entity-it is a multidimensional landscape where nature, memory, spirituality, and politics converge (Gültekin 2019; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29; 2025c). Yet much of the existing literature on Dersim either flattens its complexity into externally imposed categories or instrumentalises it within broader ideological projects. This necessitates a re-categorisation of knowledge: one that centres indigenous perspectives and reflects the cosmological and experiential dimensions of *Raa Haqi* belief.

Dersim has long existed as an “othered” space in the Turkish political and historical imagination (Hanoğlu et al. 2025). Since the late Ottoman period and especially with the advent of the Turkish Republic, it has been mapped, classified, and targeted as a “problematic” zone -an “unruly” region populated by “heterodox” and “tribal” groups resistant to state authority. This narrative, reinforced by travelogues, military reports, and state discourses, portrays Dersim as either a zone of mystified exoticism or one requiring civilising violence. Such an epistemic approach denies the region’s own systems of meaning and religious practices, rendering invisible the self-understandings of its inhabitants (Gültekin 2019; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29).

In contrast, the internal view of Dersim -as articulated through the *Raa Haqi* cosmology- offers an alternative mode of knowledge. Within this worldview, Dersim is not just a place; it is a living sacred land (*Jiār u Diyar*), animated by non-human entities, ancestral spirits, and mythic time. The mountains, rivers, forests, and even stones are not passive elements of nature but active participants in a sacred ecology. As Gültekin (2019; 2021a 225-43) argues, the *jiare* (sacred place) system reflects a non-anthropocentric order in which the *Batın* (esoteric realm) and *Zahir* (visible world) are interwoven.

Importantly, this sacred geography is not static. It evolves in relation to political events, environmental threats, and the spiritual needs of the community. The destruction of the *ocak-talip* religious order through mass displacement and state violence has not eliminated faith but transformed it. *Talips* have increasingly taken the initiative in maintaining religious life, often by forging intimate, personal relationships with *jiares* rather than relying solely on hereditary religious authority (Gültekin 2019). This shift reflects a broader process of religious individualisation and ecological consciousness -one deeply grounded in place-based spiritualities.

Thus, the aim of this entry is to displace conventional categories and approach Dersim not through the lens of state-generated cartographies or identity labels alone, but as a sacred-political topography. In doing so, it proposes an epistemological shift: from externally imposed definitions to emic understandings rooted in the *Raa Haqi*

lifeworld. This reframing is not merely an academic exercise -it is an act of restoring voice, agency, and sacredness to a community long subjected to erasure and transformation.

Three Epistemic Constructions of Dersim

External Constructions: Mapping and State Violence

The first dominant framework through which Dersim has historically been constructed is that of the external gaze -particularly through state apparatuses, Orientalist travel narratives, and ethnographic-military reports. These sources, which proliferated from the late 18th century onward, sought not to understand Dersim on its own terms but to discipline it epistemologically and politically. The knowledge they produced was never neutral: it served the dual purpose of defining Dersim as a deviant periphery and legitimising various projects of incorporation, suppression, and transformation (Aygün 2010).

One can trace this trajectory from the Ottoman imperial documents that described the region as “unruly” and “infidel” (*Kızılbaş*) to Republican-era reports that classified Dersim as a space of “primitive tribes” requiring assimilation and discipline. This logic culminated in the implementation of the infamous “Tunceli Law” of 1935, which erased the name “Dersim” from official maps and prepared the ground for the genocidal campaign of 1937-38. In these writings, Dersim was rarely seen as a subject of its own history. Rather, it was a zone of exception-an internal colony whose ambiguity justified violent nation-making projects (Gültekin 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, Aygün 2010).

These state-generated knowledges worked in tandem with Western missionary and orientalist accounts that often portrayed Dersim as a mystified and archaic world. Writers such as Josef Wünsch and other European travellers depicted the region as a “mysterious acropolis of the Middle East,” a forgotten land of ancient rites and wild landscapes. Such narratives romanticised Dersim’s supposed isolation while implicitly aligning it with backwardness, thereby justifying the “civilising” interventions of both empire and modern statecraft (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; Dreßler 2013; Kieser 2011, 89-111; 2001, 89-111).

A particularly pernicious feature of this external epistemic framework was its classificatory obsession. Alevis of Dersim were categorised as Kurds, Turks, Zazas, or even crypto-Armenians -never as what they might consider themselves. Religiously, they were variously labelled as Shiʿites, Sufis, Kızılbashs, syncretists, or heretics, depending on the political needs of the classifier. Within Ottoman Islamic governance,

they fell outside “the millet system” that afforded protections to Jews and Christians, remaining unclassified and unprotected, their beliefs dismissed as un-Islamic aberrations (Gültekin 2021b, 39-69).

Ultimately, this construction of Dersim as a cartographic and religious anomaly laid the ideological foundation for state violence. From the Ottoman “Kızılbaş persecution” to the Dersim massacre of 1938 and the village burnings of the 1990s, external epistemologies have always walked hand in hand with strategies of domination. The erasure of sacred spaces, the forced displacements of tribal populations, and the destruction of oral cultures were all predicated upon the belief that Dersim was a zone of deviance that needed reformation or removal (Gültekin 2019).

What these accounts failed to grasp -or actively suppressed- was that Dersim was not simply a physical terrain but a sacred landscape inhabited by non-human entities, storied through ancestral memory, and sustained by ritualised relationships with place. The jiares, mountains, rivers, and forests of Dersim were not inert matter to be mapped, mined, or militarised. They were agents of spiritual, moral, and social order - living sites of cosmological meaning.

Kurdish and Alevi Movements: Ethnic and Political Reframing

The second major epistemic construction of Dersim emerged not from state or orientalist sources, but from within the politicised terrains of Kurdish nationalism and Alevi revivalism, particularly since the 1990s. As Turkey’s political landscape was reconfigured through rising ethno-political claims and identity-based mobilisations, Dersim increasingly became a symbolic battleground where multiple movements projected their respective narratives, each attempting to integrate -or appropriate- Dersim’s complex heritage into broader ideological frameworks (Bruinessen 1997, 1-23).

Within the Kurdish movement, Dersim was often reframed as a Kurdish region par excellence, a site of rebellion, resistance, and indigenous autonomy. Historical events such as the Koçgiri Uprising (1921) and the Dersim Genocide (1937-38) were recast as foundational moments in the Kurdish national consciousness. The language spoken in Dersim -Kırmancki (Zazaki) and Kurmanci (Kurdish)- was interpreted as further proof of Kurdish identity, while the violent suppression of the region was viewed as a colonial operation against Kurdishness (Bruinessen 1997, 1-23).

Yet this framing often entailed a reduction of *Raa Haqi* beliefs into markers of ethnic Kurdishness, flattening the internal religious plurality and cosmological specificity of the community. In some cases, Kurdish nationalist discourse treated Alevism as a

“cultural” layer rather than a distinct religious worldview with its own theological and ontological depth. A recurring tendency was to subsume sacred geography into national territory -to interpret *jiares* as heritage rather than as sentient beings in an ongoing cosmological relationship with the community (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43).

At the same time, the Alevi movement -particularly in the diaspora- articulated a parallel project of political recognition and identity reformation. From the late 1980s onward, Alevis began to organise themselves as a religious minority, demanding state recognition, legal status for cemevis, and equal representation in educational and cultural institutions. In this context, Dersim’s Alevi character was increasingly emphasised, and the region was positioned as the symbolic heart of Alevism -distinct from Sunni Islam and deserving of separate institutional rights (Walton & İlengiz 2024).

However, here too, a tension arose. The dominant trend within the mainstream Alevi movement was to construct a unified Alevi identity -frequently articulated in Turkish, framed through Kemalist secularism, and often indifferent to or suspicious of Dersim’s radical otherness. Kurdish Alevis, especially those articulating a *Raa Haqi* perspective, often found themselves marginalised within this framework. Their language, rituals, sacred geographies, and mythological narratives did not easily fit into the rationalised, institutionalised vision of “Alevism” promoted in the diaspora or within legal advocacy efforts.

This dual marginalisation -by Kurdish nationalism and Alevi institutionalism- has prompted a third kind of epistemic reaction: the search for a locally rooted, culturally specific, and spiritually autonomous self-definition. In this process, concepts such as *Raa Haqi*, *jiare*, *Batın/Zahir*, and *Kırmanc* have become key emic terms through which Dersim Alevis articulate a sense of belonging that is at once religious, ecological, and political. These terms resist both statist reduction and ethnic simplification by insisting on a non-anthropocentric, place-based identity, one grounded not only in memory but in the continued presence of sacred life across the land (Gültekin 2019; 2025c). In short, while the Kurdish and Alevi movements have played critical roles in raising awareness about the historical injustices and contemporary struggles of Dersim, they have also produced their own epistemic frameworks that often misread or bypass the ontological depth of *Raa Haqi* cosmology.

Raa Haqi Cosmology: Sacred Geography as Lived World

Beyond the frameworks of external mapping and politicised identity discourses, a third epistemic construction arises from within: the cosmological worldview of Raa Haqi itself, as practised, narrated, and ritualised by the communities of Dersim. This

internal framework challenges both statist cartographies and nationalist essentialisms by offering a radically different mode of understanding space, time, being, and belonging -grounded not in linear history or territorial sovereignty, but in the ongoing relationship between humans and the non-human sacred (Gültekin 2019; 2020; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

In the Raa Haqi tradition, Dersim is not merely a homeland (*welat*) but a sacred entity (*jiār u diyār*). The land itself is alive, storied, and personified. Natural elements such as mountains, springs, trees, and rocks are not inert backdrops for religious life -they are active participants in it. They are *jiares* -sacred beings who see, hear, give signs, accept prayers, and demand respect. Every corner of Dersim is marked by such presence; every river and peak is bound to a myth, a sacrifice, a saintly figure, or a communal ritual. As Gültekin writes, the sacred landscape of Dersim is animated by a "non-human moral order" in which the *Batın* (the hidden, esoteric world) coexists with the *Zahir* (the visible world) (Gültekin 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

This cosmology cannot be separated from daily life. Unlike scriptural religions or institutionalised theologies, Raa Haqi is an embodied, performative faith-a way of living that weaves together prayer, ecology, ethics, and memory. People do not merely visit sacred places; they live with them, tend to them, whisper their sorrows to them, ask for healing, or offer votive bread (*niyaz*) in exchange for protection. The *jiare* is not only a ritual site-it is a member of the community (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

The *Batın* world is populated by *wayırs* (spirits), semi-deific figures, ancestral protectors, and martyrs. These are not abstract theological categories but real presences encountered in dreams, signs, natural phenomena, and ritual experience. This spiritual ecology blurs the human/non-human divide and renders the landscape a sentient being -capable of grief, anger, and forgiveness. As Gültekin notes in his ethnographic accounts, even the land itself becomes wounded when disrespected or desecrated, such as through mining, deforestation, or intrusive tourism (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

Moreover, *Raa Haqi* cosmology creates a layered temporality, in which mythic time and historical trauma interweave. Events such as the 1938 massacre or the more recent destruction of villages are not merely "past"; they are spiritually inscribed into the land, which continues to "remember" them. Pilgrimage to sites like Kemerê Duzgi or Munzur Springs is not just devotional-it is also a form of political memory work, a return to a wounded but living homeland that reaffirms communal resilience (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

This worldview resists not only external categories but also internal essentialisms. It refuses to be enclosed within Sunni-Shia binaries, to be reduced to Turkishness or Kurdishness, or to be homogenised as a mere “rural” or “syncretic” Islam. Instead, it offers a different ontology -one that prioritises relationality over hierarchy, place-based wisdom over doctrine, and spiritual intimacy over institutional authority. The power of this perspective lies in its ability to hold multiple truths at once: to remember the past, to inhabit the present, and to enact a future grounded in sacred continuity.

As such, the *Raa Haqi* cosmology not only reframes Dersim but decolonises epistemology itself. It offers an indigenous theory of space, ethics, and being that challenges the very foundations of both secular nationalism and world religion categories. The next section will explore how this cosmology has reshaped religious practice -particularly through the rise of *talip*-centric religiosity and the decentralisation of sacred authority.

From Sacred Space to Sacred Land: The Concept of *Jiare*

At the heart of *Raa Haqi* cosmology lies the concept of *jiare*, a *Kırmancki* word that simultaneously denotes sacred place, sentient being, and site of cosmological presence. Far more than a shrine or a site of visitation (*ziyaret*), the *jiare* represents a relational ontology that binds people, land, spirits, and ancestors into a living network of reciprocity. In contrast to the institutionalised sacred spaces of world religions -churches, mosques, or temples- the *jiare* is not constructed but revealed; it is not owned but encountered; it is not governed by clerics but cohabited with by believers (Gültekin 2019; 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

Jiares may take the form of natural features -a spring, a stone, a tree, a mountain, or a cave. What distinguishes them is not their physical form, but the stories, signs, and rituals that surround them. Many are associated with mythic figures such as Duzgı, Xızır, or unnamed *wayırs* (spirit-beings), who are believed to appear, heal, punish, or protect. Others are bound to ancestral memory: sites where martyrs fell, where a pir rested, where a community found refuge. Each *jiare* thus carries a multi-temporal imprint, woven from layers of myth, history, and everyday encounter (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

In this sense, the *jiare* is not merely a sacred space -a designated location within an otherwise profane landscape- but part of a sacred land, a total cosmological field in which no sharp boundary exists between sacred and profane, human and non-human. All of Dersim is potentially a *jiare*. As Gültekin writes, “every square meter of Dersim directly relates to the perception of a sacred land,” where the social, the spiritual, and the geographical are entangled (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43).

This has profound implications for the understanding of religious practice and social order in *Raa Haqi*. While traditional *ocak* systems governed social and spiritual hierarchies through inherited lineage and ritual obligation, *jiare*-based religiosity offers a more horizontal, *talip*-centric spirituality. Anyone can approach a *jiare*, speak to it, offer *niyaz*, or seek guidance-without requiring the presence of a pir or the sanction of an ocak. This fosters not only a personalised form of devotion, but also an inherently ecological and non-anthropocentric ethics of care (Gültekin 2020).

Jiares also function as places of negotiation -between life and death, seen and unseen, memory and forgetting. Sacrificial practices (often now symbolically transformed), votive offerings, candle lightings, and dream interpretations are all part of the ritual repertoire through which people communicate with the *jiare*. In these interactions, people are not merely passive recipients of sacred power; they are active participants in a cosmological dialogue. The *jiare* listens, responds, sometimes warns or punishes, but always anchors the believer to both land and lineage (Gültekin 2022, 570-88; 2025a, 513-26; 2025b, 405-29, 2025c).

Crucially, in the contemporary context of environmental degradation, religious displacement, and political repression, *jiares* have also become nodes of resistance. Anti-dam protests, anti-mining campaigns, and efforts to protect the Munzur and Pülümür valleys are not framed only in environmental terms -they are sacred struggles, grounded in the belief that the land itself is a being under threat. In this way, the concept of *jiare* bridges cosmology and activism, memory and territory, ritual and resistance (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43).

In sum, the transformation from sacred space to sacred land through the concept of *jiare* signals a paradigm shift in the understanding of Dersim's spiritual geography. It reveals a cosmological system that cannot be reduced to either Islamic heterodoxy or cultural folklore, but must be seen as a living, relational, and politically consequential mode of being (Also see Gezik 2021, 560-80; Deniz 2021, 243-61; 2019, 45-75; 2017, 13-33; 2016,177-97; Yürür 2015, 109-32; Çakmak 2013; Gezik & Çakmak 2010).

Talip-Centric Religious Practice and the Rise of Individualised Faith

One of the most significant consequences of the transformation of sacred geography in Dersim is the shift in religious authority and practice from *ocak*-centred to *talip*-centred modes. Traditionally, the socio-religious structure of Kurdish Alevism (*Raa Haqi*) was based on a caste-like hierarchy wherein the *ocaks* -sacred hereditary lineages- exercised religious authority over their *talips*, or followers. This relationship was sustained through the binding of *ikrar* (sacred oath), ritual obligations, and moral codes upheld by pirs, mürşids, and raybers (Gültekin 2019; 2020).

However, the cataclysmic disruptions of the 20th century -particularly the 1938 massacre, forced displacements in the 1990s, and rapid urbanisation and diaspora migration- fractured these social and ritual infrastructures. *Ocak-talip* networks eroded, and the capacity for regular guidance from pirs diminished. In response, a new religious dynamic emerged: one in which *talips* themselves took on active roles in sustaining, reinterpreting, and even reinventing the religion (Gültekin 2019; 2020).

Rather than signaling religious decline, this shift gave rise to a more individualised, yet highly engaged, religiosity, often rooted in direct relationships with *jiares*. Without formal mediation by *ocak* figures, *talips* began to seek sacred presence, protection, and meaning through personal visits to sacred places, dream visions, rituals of offering (*niyaz*), and engagement with oral traditions. In this sense, the *jiare* became not only a substitute for religious authority but a spiritual partner, enabling religious expression that was both experiential and autonomous (Gültekin 2019; 2020).

This *talip*-centred religiosity is also marked by a strong moral and emotional dimension. As observed in fieldwork, people interpret signs in nature, feel guilt or punishment from disrespecting a sacred place, or undertake pilgrimages to seek healing or guidance. Religious practice is no longer primarily governed by communal ceremonies such as the Cem, but by everyday acts of reverence, storytelling, remembering, and ecological care. In this lived religiosity, subjectivity and interiority become central -religion is not only what one does, but what one feels, sees, and knows through relationship with sacred land (Gültekin 2019; 2020; 2022, 570-88).

Moreover, this transformation has allowed for the emergence of new religious meanings, often linked with contemporary values such as gender equality, environmental consciousness, and resistance to hegemonic religion. As Gültekin (2019; 2020) notes, the sacralisation of place has become a key site for rearticulating Kurdish Alevi identity in a non-institutional and pluralistic form. The modern *talip* may be politically secular but spiritually devoted, culturally Kurdish but ritually Alevi, diasporic but emotionally rooted in Dersim. ***This new religious subject cannot be understood within traditional theological or sectarian frameworks -it represents a vernacular mode of religious agency, forged in historical trauma and spiritual resilience.***

Furthermore, this decentralised faith creates space for reinterpretation and creativity. Young *talips* in the diaspora write poems about Munzur, perform semah at protests, organise digital campaigns to protect sacred sites, and reinterpret sacred narratives through feminist or ecological lenses. While some critics may see this as a loss of orthodoxy, it is more accurately understood as a reformulation of tradition -an effort to

maintain continuity under radically changed conditions (Gültekin 2025d, 48-64).

In sum, the rise of *talip*-centred religiosity reflects not merely the collapse of *ocak*-based authority, but the adaptive resilience of Raa Haqi faith. It represents a decentralised, affective, and emplaced spirituality that sustains sacred presence not through institutional power but through embodied, intimate, and landscape-oriented practices.

The Political Afterlives of Sacred Geography

The cosmological vision of Dersim as a sacred land is not only a religious worldview -it is also a political force. In recent decades, *sacred geography* (Drozdzewski 2016, 447-56; Luz 2015, 326-36; Stephenson & Lynch 2025) has become a critical site of political articulation, resistance, and reimagination for Kurdish Alevis. The very notion that the land is alive, storied, and imbued with spiritual agency challenges both the material logics of capitalist extraction and the assimilationist strategies of state control. What emerges is a form of place-based counter-governance, where *jiares*, not bureaucracies, authorise ethical action and community alignment.

This politicisation of sacred geography is evident in the environmental struggles of Dersim. Protest movements against hydroelectric dams, mining operations, or state-sponsored tourism projects are not framed solely as environmental or cultural concerns. They are often articulated in religious and cosmological terms: as acts of desecration, as violence against living beings, or as attacks on ancestral spirits. Campaigns to protect sites such as Munzur Gözeleri, Halvori Springs, or Kemerê Duzgi are therefore ritual-political events-combining the language of ecology, memory, and divine presence into a unified call for preservation (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43; İlengiz 2022, 369-413).

This politics of sacred geography also plays out in the diasporic sphere, where transnational Kurdish Alevi associations mobilise around sacred land as both symbol and site of return. Annual pilgrimages to *jiares*, public commemorations of massacres, and digital rituals of remembering contribute to the translocal reterritorialisation of Dersim. In these acts, the land becomes not only a place of origin but a symbolic homeland -a node of political identity and emotional belonging that resists both Turkish nationalism and standardised Alevi-diaspora religion.

Moreover, the reactivation of *jiares* in this context enables a form of ***post-secular resistance***. Rather than rejecting religion in favour of secular identity politics, Kurdish Alevis -particularly *talips*– have re-signified their religious traditions to include feminist ethics, ecological values, anti-authoritarianism, and diasporic solidarity. In doing so,

they create new hybrid forms of religiosity that challenge the binaries of tradition/modernity, religion/secularism, and local/global. The sacred becomes not a retreat from politics, but a source of ethical imagination and communal resistance (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43).

Importantly, these sacred geographies are not abstract or symbolic alone -they are under physical threat. State-led development projects, militarised ecologies, and extractive economies seek to erase these places not only from maps, but from memory. In this context, the politics of *jiare* protection is also a politics of survival, asserting the right to exist as a distinct ethno-religious community whose identity is inseparable from the land (Gültekin 2021a, 225-43).

Thus, the sacred geography of Dersim is a site of ongoing political afterlife: a palimpsest where memory, martyrdom, cosmology, and community intersect. The land does not passively bear witness to history -it *enacts* history, offering both a refuge from loss and a platform for new articulations of Kurdish Alevi presence in the world.

Conclusion: Dersim as a Sacred-Political Topography

To grasp the full significance of Dersim in the 21st century, we must understand it not as a territory defined by administrative borders or ethno-political claims, but as a sacred-political topography -a living, storied, and contested landscape where cosmology and resistance coalesce. As the preceding sections have shown, Dersim cannot be reduced to a minority region within the nation-state, a battlefield of identity politics, or a relic of heterodox Islam. Rather, it is an active epistemic world, shaped and reshaped through the relational interplay of land, memory, belief, and struggle.

The category of *Raa Haqi* -long overlooked by mainstream Alevi Studies- offers a key to this world. As a cosmological system, it centres not on textual dogma or formal institutions, but on a dynamic relationship between human and non-human agents. Mountains, rivers, and stones are not symbols of the sacred -they *are* the sacred. Through the practices of pilgrimage, oral tradition, dream interpretation, and ritual offering, *talips* enact a religiosity that is embodied, ecological, and continuous with place. This allows for religious life to persist -even thrive- in the absence of *ocak* authority or formal recognition.

At the same time, this sacred geography is deeply political. It bears the marks of trauma -of massacre, exile, and displacement- and yet remains a source of dignity, resilience, and mobilisation. In a world where spiritual cosmologies are often marginalised or folklorised, the survival and revitalisation of *jiare*-centred religiosity

assert an epistemic autonomy. They challenge dominant categories of religion, ethnicity, and politics by offering an *emic* grammar of belonging -rooted in Dersim, but resonating across diasporic and transnational spheres.

The political afterlives of sacred geography reveal a community not frozen in the past, but one that reanimates tradition through new practices, discourses, and solidarities. *Talips* today do not simply inherit belief; they curate it, revise it, and expand it, often aligning it with feminist, ecological, or decolonial frameworks. These creative reinterpretations do not weaken tradition -they make it more alive, more flexible, and more responsive to the present.

Dersim, then, is more than a homeland. It is a cosmological archive, a site of ancestral memory and spiritual presence, a battleground of epistemic violence and ecological defiance, and a generative space for ethical futures. Its sacred topography is not just remembered or revered -it is inhabited, spoken to, and defended.

To speak of Dersim today is to speak of a way of being in the world that refuses reduction -an ontology of relation, resistance, and reverence. In the face of ongoing state erasures, capitalist enclosures, and ideological simplifications, the *Raa Haqi* path continues to offer a radically different vision: not only of Alevism, but of life itself.

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