Deyiş

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Summary
In Alevi-Bektashi culture, deyiş are a form of folk literature recited spontaneously and accompanied only by the bağlama during cem ceremonies, alongside the semah, and rooted in collective memory. Alevi music is one of the foundational cultural motifs of Anatolia. The Alevi philosophy, the pursuit of truth, and unity with nature and the Divine are articulated through deyiş. These compositions defend the Bektashi philosophy that places the human being at the centre, in contrast to the symbolic values of Sunni Islam. Depending on the region in which they are recited, deyiş reveal the worldview, emotions, behaviours, preferences, sense of humour, and suffering of the people, as well as significant events embedded in the collective memory and traces of local traditions and customs. Elements of Alevi oral culture such as nefes, düvaz, deyiş, and semah have carried the ancient heritage from the past to the present. Deyiş are sung during cem rituals, in which both women and men participate, accompanied by the semah. The performer is called a zakir. “The Seven Great Poets of the Alevis,” listed according to the centuries in which they lived, are: Nesimi (Seyyid Imadeddin), Fuzuli, Hatayi (Shah Ismail), Pir Sultan Abdal, Yemini, Kul Himmet, and Virani. Taking different names depending on their forms and themes, deyiş primarily address Alevi thought and philosophy, the God–universe, and God–human relationship. They have played a crucial role in carrying Alevi-Bektashi identity to the present day. Due to their social and historical substance, deyiş are open to sociological analysis. Their political-critical power derives from this grounding. With their expansive semantic universe, deyiş will be examined through these thematic lenses.

Keywords: Alevi Müziği, Alevi-Bektashi, Alevi-Bektaşi, Âşık, Âşık Veysel, Bağlama, Cem, Devriye, Deyiş, Düvaz, Hatayi, Kaygusuz Abdal, Nefes, Nesimi, Ozan, Pir Sultan Abdal, Ritüel, Saz, Semah, Seven Great Poets, Sözlü Kültür, Yedi Ulu Ozan, Yunus Emre, Zakir

Deyiş as the Language of the “Other” and its Sociological Context

Societies transmit their experiences, sufferings, joys, migrations, and destructions into the future through cultural material and thus build their collective memory, thereby

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sustaining their existence. Rituals, rites, ceremonies, and acts of worship are forms of cultural transmission that require collective participation, reinforce social bonds, and emphasise the individual's adherence to social order. Public performances and ceremonies enact collective truths. Rituals are also public performances; they are conducted together, energise participants, provoke, protect, and recreate. They teach people how to behave in the face of sacred phenomena and events. Regardless of their qualities or aims, all ceremonies serve to bring individuals together, strengthen the bonds between them, create closeness, foster deeper interaction, and help the community reach a shared consciousness. Individuals renew their place within the collective and their emotions in relation to the community (And 2003, 308).

Music is one of the most important cultural sources in representing a society and transmitting its beliefs and values. The Alevi tradition, a spiritual organisation with roots reaching far into ancient times and embodying numerous philosophical, cultural, and cosmological teachings, is a thought tradition that brings divine knowledge and music together on the same axis in the relationship between God, universe, and human. In these traditions, music is one of the most powerful means of transcending the material world and approaching God (Güray 2012, 45). Because of its heterodox character, the Alevi-Bektashi belief, as a universal faith, has reached the present despite institutional and dominant religions and the oppression it has faced. Alevi music and *deyiş* have played a crucial role in this.

According to Kearney, who seeks to frame the concept of the "stranger / Other" philosophically, otherness has almost always been treated in a context of alienation that stains the pure unity of the soul. … Evil is alienation, and the evil is the stranger (Kearney 2012, 87).

Due to their oppositional identities, Alevis were regarded as the "Other" of society both during the Ottoman period and after the Republic. They lived inwardly and settled in remote

regions due to the repressive policies they faced. For this reason, Alevis created a line of resistance and existence through their *deyiş*. The people of Anatolia-especially Anatolian villagers-have always managed to overcome the rigid walls of institutionalisation with their love, tolerance, feeling, intuition, and intellect. And the most effective weapon and method they have resorted to is poetry (Erseven 1990, 50). Julia Kristeva proposes that we respond to the experience of alienation-one of our fundamental experiences-in three main ways: art, religion, and psychoanalysis. Kearney adds a fourth option: philosophy (Kearney 2012, 19).

The emergence of the field of cultural studies within the social sciences has enabled all aspects of culture to be examined as a text. In this context, folk literature (epic, poetry, tale, proverb, and imaginative folk literature) is considered one of the most important sources. Folk literature stands apart from history and philosophy because it originates primarily from the need to narrate, transmit, and proclaim the experiences of the people. Its author and narrator are independent of the discourse created by the rulers, official ideology, and dominant belief. At the same time, it has the capacity to convey in detail the conditions of the time in which it was written and the ruptures those conditions created in people's lives. In this regard, because folk literature contains a philosophical essence, it is more enduring than historical knowledge; and because the events and characters it tells are real and specific, it is more concrete than philosophy. Thus, *deyiş*, in the broader sense of folk literature, create a reliable, unmediated space not shaped by power in the search for truth. *Deyiş* are filtered through a particular social / historical context. They derive their political-critical power from this source. When literary texts are analysed within the framework of the social sciences, the question of "why" becomes more dominant than "what" or "how." In the transmission of social / historical realities, how the narrative is constructed and the identities it represents gain importance. In this way, literary

works help us to question the social science paradigms through which we see: the state, centre-periphery, and Turkish-Ottoman identity (Köksal 2008, 225).

From its emergence, Alevism developed a politically oppositional identity. Against the ruling powers that institutionalised Sunni Islam, it defended and expressed its human-centred philosophy through deyiş. The following verses by Yûnus Emre may be examined in this context: "*Din-ü millet sorar isen / Âşıklara din ne hâcet / Âşık kişi harab olur / Bilmez ne din ne diyânet / Âşıkların gönlü gözü maşuk diye gitmiş olur / Ayruk surette ne kalır kim kılısar zühd u taat*" (Vikikaynak 2025).

These verses by Yunus Emre clearly express opposition to Sunni religious understanding, criticising its superficiality, its dependence on rules and institutions. Often dealing with the theme of love, Yunus Emre interprets love in terms of the mystical concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being), which views union with God as the highest reality. Love for humanity, tolerance, respect for nature and all living beings, becoming a perfect human being – *kâmil insan* – (one whose outer face is turned towards the public and inner face towards God, who has conquered his ego and knows himself), enthusiasm and sincere devotion to life form the essence of Alevi-Bektaşi philosophy. In Alevism, divine philosophy is expressed in two forms: existence and non-existence. Existence is essential. Non-existence is the wave that arises from it and returns to it. The sea is what exists, the wave is what does not. All is from that sea. The existing and the heavens are flames from that essence, that light. Everything is a reflection of that existence's mysteries and a mirror of its beauty. This is the force we call God. That force is ultimate beauty, ultimate perfection, ultimate facial beauty, and ultimate life. To understand why this is so, one must learn to read the book called the universe. The proof of this book is directly the human. It is not enough to merely look. One must read the sublime letters of the universe and also feel it inwardly. The supreme and definite force is not-as some say-something unknowable or unseeable. This force is

always with human beings (indeed, within them) and is not in a single thing but in everything. Everything defines the universe. Everything is its reflection (Birdoğan 1994, 310).

In the verses of Yunus Emre, a representative of the Abdal tradition, it is stated that *âşıks*-those who have united with God and reached the level of the perfected human-have no need for religion in the conventional sense; they are responsible only to themselves, and thus to the universal essence within themselves. This is achieved through an inner, emotional dedication. He says he has no desire for worldly pleasures and is situated on a divine plane with his beloved. In these lines, Yunus Emre fulfils the necessity of resistance and of taking sides. These verses enable us to understand the dominant political and social atmosphere of the time they were written, and also to draw parallels and contrasts with our current context.

Let us continue to explore the forms in which the concept of the "Other" is expressed through *deyiş*, by focusing on Pir Sultan Abdal. Pir Sultan Abdal, who was arrested and later executed by the governor of Sivas, Hızır Pasha, witnessed the Celali Rebellions in Anatolia and the war waged by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent against the Iranian Safavid state. Baghdad, which had previously passed from the Aq Qoyunlu to Shah Ismail, this time came under Ottoman control for the first time. This loss deeply saddened the Anatolian Alevis, and Pir Sultan Abdal composed a poem reflecting this sorrow. During these years, Pir Sultan composed poems that expressed the emotions of all Alevi communities, travelled to various regions, and carried out the necessary propaganda (Öztelli 1985, 14). The anticipation of the Shah-who was expected to liberate them from the economic and social pressures of the Ottoman state in peripheral regions-and the mixture of hope and despair during this period are reflected in the poet's works. In his *deyiş*, he gave voice to the oppression, uprisings, and resistance faced by the Alevi community, who were the "Others" of their time.

In response to Hızır Pasha, who had come to Sivas as governor and said, “If you recite three *deme* in which the Shah’s name is not mentioned, I will pardon you,” Pir Sultan Abdal composed a *deyiş* that has carried the rebellion of that era to the present day; “his *nefes* have been passed down from generation to generation” (Öztelli 1985, 16):

Hızır Paşa bizi berdar etmeden
Açılın kapılar Şah’a gidelim
Siyaset günleri gelip yetmeden
Açılın kapılar Şah’a gidelim

Gönül çıkmak ister Şah’ın köşküne
Can boyanmak ister Ali müşküne
Pirim Ali, On İki İmam aşkına
Açılın kapılar Şah’a gidelim

Due to its historical and social context, the poem has strong political and critical power. The identities and sides represented in the poem are positioned on the axis of oppressor-oppressed, insiders-outsiders. The hegemony of the central Ottoman power is felt over the Alevi community, whose symbolic values are “Pir Ali” and the “Twelve Imams,” and Shah Ismail, leader of the Iranian Safavid State, is seen as a means of salvation.

The dominant (national, ethnic, cultural, religious) majority can only accept the existence of a minority if that minority wholeheartedly accepts the dominant values and demonstrates a willingness to live according to the dominant rules. The minority will rush to please the rulers and try to win their favour; it will discover that the number of concessions demanded by the dominant group increases in proportion to their confidence that the minority has surrendered to their values and poses no threat of rebellion. The minority also learns that attempting to assert its own uniqueness in order to be seen as an equal partner backfires. In such cases, the minority either retreats into its own ghettos or changes its strategy in line with the model of symmetrical schismogenesis[1]. Whatever the choice, the

likely outcome is a rupture in the relationship (Bauman 2013, 63-64).

Zygmunt Bauman's framework of minority-majority relations manifested in different ways in the Alevi community both during the Ottoman period and the Republican era. To give an example in this context: with the proclamation of the Republic and the abolition of the Caliphate, all religious foundations-including Bektashi lodges-were closed. Although opposition to the Caliphate led to outcomes such as the closure of the Bektashi lodges, this was largely welcomed by Alevi communities. Because through this, they were able to gain constitutional rights in terms of official citizenship status and participation in public life (Gültekin 2023, 55-56).

The Historical Background of *Deyiş*

All ancient ceremonies and rituals are fundamentally nourished by two sources: word (*mythos*) and action. A ritual is essentially a set of codified behaviours and customs. *Mythos*, on the other hand, is the verbal transformation of the emotion and action of ritual (And 2003, 308). The *Semah* dances performed in *Cem* rituals, the *Ashura* (Ruz-i Qatl) on the tenth day of Muharram, and *Ta'ziye* traditions are examples of the *mythos* and rituals of Anatolian Alevi communities. All these *mythos* and rituals have been distilled from lived historical experiences. Since the Safavid period in Iran, the public's emotional engagement with Muharram and the events of Karbala have had significant political and ideological implications for the state. Shah Ismail redirected the quest for vengeance for Imam Husayn into the realm of Sufism. To weep for Imam Husayn was believed to guarantee entrance into paradise. The shrines in Karbala and Najaf were also of deep interest to Sufi and *Futuwwa* orders. Throughout Muharram month, ceremonies were held with great reverence until the 20th and 28th of Safar (And 2022, 216). On the other hand, Alevism cannot be reduced to specific events in Islamic history. In other words, it would be unjust to reduce Alevism to certain historical incidents. Once it had completed its historical formation, Alevism

transformed into a universal belief system and, in doing so, transcended history. This means: Alevism is not opposed to the Sunni approach because Imam Husayn was its advocate. On the contrary, it opposes institutional religion-religion that is manipulated by the state or worldly powers. Moreover, it stands against all such religions. In this context, it would not be incorrect to say that had Alevism developed in a society dominated by Catholicism, it would have opposed the institution of the Church and emperors crowned in the name of God, even if they had not spilled Imam Husayn's blood (quoted in Poyraz 2007, 88-89).

Within the broader frame of *mythos* are tales, legends, *deyiş*, and epics-elements that constitute oral tradition. The importance of oral tradition in the transmission of culture is undeniable. Words and *mythos*, legends and *deyiş* have ensured the permanence of rituals, their transmission to the future, and the recording of the political and social conditions of the time. In every culture, *âşık*s and bards have acted as the spokespersons and interpreters of the people's pain, injustices, fears. Their words and verses became collective values, passed from generation to generation. In the preface to *Let My Friends Remember Me*, a collection of Âşık Veysel's *deyiş*, Sabahattin Eyuboğlu laments the erosion of folk poetry and *deyiş* in contemporary times, and expresses his thoughts as follows: "Think of Yunus Emre: he spoke seven hundred years before Abdülhak Hâmit. His words were never distributed to the people by the state in bookloads, nor did he enter the gates of fame and glory. Yet you can still find in him words as fresh as if spoken today, as if said by one of us-words so moving that they stir ears from university halls to village coffeehouses. Is Yunus a more skilful poet than Hâmit? Does he say truer, deeper things? No; but there is a fountain from which Yunus's poetry has drawn, one that Hâmit inevitably remained distant from: the people's fountain. The same fountain where Dante, Shakespeare, and Molière washed their words. Our poetry's gradual departure from that fountain, along with our state, is a long story. Many gilded, barren fountains have made us

forget it; and yet it has continued to flow far away, on its own, for the people, for the poor. And it still flows. Here is Âşık Veysel-, but now we are all standing at the fountain together." (Veysel 2001, 10)

Deyiş constitute the broadest domain of folk poetry. Composed with syllabic metre, in quatrain form, and with rhyme, they are sung with melodies accompanied by the *saz*. Like epics, *deyiş* are products of the oral literature of Turkic peoples of Oghuz origin. From the 13th to 15th centuries, folk bards played a significant role in the development of *ocaks* and Sufi orders in Anatolia. Until the 15th century, poems composed in syllabic metre were performed by bards who travelled from tribe to tribe, playing the *kopuz*. In this tradition, which nurtured the linguistic masters Yunus Emre, Sait Emre, Kaygusuz Abdal, and Abdal Musa Sultan, the 15th century also saw figures such as Hacı Bayram Veli and Eşrefoğlu Rumi; the 16th century gave rise to Kul Mehmet, Öksüz Dede, and Azmi Dede, as well as the immortal Pir Sultan Abdal and Hatayi. Later centuries brought forth renowned bards such as Karacaoğlan, Gevheri, Kuloğlu, Dertli, Emrah, Bayburtlu Zihni, Seyrani, Ruhsati, and many others (Şimşek 1996, 19). Folk poetry is written in pure Turkish, though over time it has incorporated words from Arabic and Persian. Transmitted orally, not in writing, the ritual of becoming a folk bard is described in Mehmet Şimşek's research: according to a widespread belief, *âşık*s drink the *dolu* (blessed drink) from the hand of a *Pir*. This event marks the bard's awakening. A beloved is also shown to them, and the bard burns with love for this imagined figure, wandering from land to land in search. Some receive their *mahlas* (pen name) during this time. During the drinking of the *bade* (dolu), it is said that knowledge previously unknown is taught to the *âşık*. Those who drink the *bade* are, according to tradition, called "folk *âşıks*." This act of drinking often occurs during sleep (Şimşek 1996, 20).

The *deyiş* recited extemporaneously by the *zakir* during *Cem* ceremonies gives voice to the philosophical heritage and codes of Alevi-Bektashi thought. Depending on their subject,

these poems are classified as *deyiş*, *nefes*, *mersiye*, *semah*, *düvaz*, and *miraclama*. These poetic forms-whose foundations go back to the 13th century-draw their philosophical background from Yunus Emre's understanding of Sufism (Gölpınarlı 2017, 7). Rhythmic repetition, melodic motifs, recurring phrases, and the unity of music and word play a key role in making *deyiş* an expression channel of spiritual depth. In this framework, music is essential for the teachings and traditions that express divine love, the doctrine of unity, and the soul's spiritual journey to be sustained in a vibrant, dynamic, and effective cultural terrain (Soylu Bağçeci, Şenol Atıcı 2022, 21). Although the oppositional line developed through Alevi songs and *deyiş* brought with it persecutions such as the executions of Hallâc-ı Mansûr and Pir Sultan Abdal, *deyiş* have managed to survive in full vitality. The Alevi-Bektashi use of music-especially in religious activity-was perceived by orthodox clergy as heresy and blasphemy. Such views were often expressed without even the attempt to restrain anger. The 18th-century poet Dertli received the following command from the *kadi* of Beypazarı due to his love of music: "Go and break your *saz*, for it contains the devil-it is forbidden to play." Dertli responded in the way he knew best (quoted in Poyraz 2007, 121):

Telli sazdır bunun adı
Ne ayet dinler de de kadı
Bunu alan anlar kendi
Şeytan bunun neresinde

Venedik'ten gelir teli
Ardıç ağacından kolu
Be Allah'ın sersem kulu
Şeytan bunun neresinde

In fact, though Alevism has been ignored throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, Alevi music, in a sense, could not be ignored. Even though no state institution dared utter the word Alevi for much of the Republic's history, the broadcasting of Alevi music on TRT radio could not be fully

prevented-despite some restrictions. Because of its scope and significance within Anatolian music, ignoring or erasing Alevi music was not feasible. Once one understands that seven out of every ten folk songs are of Alevi origin, it becomes clear why the strict prohibitions enforced in other institutions could not be applied-nor sustained-at TRT (Poyraz 2007, 134). Muzaffer Sarısözen and later Nida Tüfekçi fulfilled their intellectual duty in collecting, transcribing, and transmitting *deyiş*-the voice of the Anatolian Alevi people-faithfully, while preserving their originality.

The Semantic Universe of *Deyiş* and Examples

Folk poetry constitutes the building blocks of a cultural universe woven with both literal and metaphorical meanings. It plays a central role in representing a society, expressing itself, forming its cultural codes, articulating its critical political stance, and conveying its philosophy. Within this same framework, *deyiş* are the musicalised form of folk poetry, embedded with layers of deep meaning and symbolic expression. They reflect the Alevi community-a community influenced by various religions, cultures, and philosophies-and show variations according to region and *ocak*. Hermeneutic engagement is an effective method used in many religious and belief systems to reveal a consciousness of being embedded with hidden messages within theological texts. Transcendent knowledge becomes categorically integrated through the linguistic transmission of metaphysical meanings in such fields as divine knowledge, belief systems, philosophical depth, and artistic or moral values (Tokat, quoted in Soylu and Atıcı 2022, 22).

It is possible to say that *deyiş*, which were once uttered in low volume with a single *bağlama* out of fear that locals might overhear and report them to state authorities during periods of oppression, have evolved into expressions of identity with the increasing visibility of the Alevi community and its representation in society. Today, Alevi music and *deyiş* have established themselves in the public sphere.

Poets such as Âşık Veysel, Ruhi Su, Arif Sağ, Emre Saltuk, Ali Ekber Çiçek, and Mahzuni Şerif have played key roles in carrying *deyiş* into the present day. In general, *deyiş* can be exemplified across the following layers of meaning:

Deyiş Reflecting Alevi-Bektashi Philosophy

These are poems that convey the core philosophy of Alevism, the principles of the path (*yol*), and what must be accepted by those who wish to follow it (*Talip*), such as not lying, knowing the three hundred and sixty-six *erkân*, memorising the forty stations, accepting the truth that "the moon is Ali, the sun is Muhammad," and believing in the saints. Among these *deyiş*, *Devriye**[2]** hold a special place. One sees that Shah Ismail Hatayi addressed and developed these rules, and articulated them most extensively in his *deyiş*. Many of Hatayi's well-known *deyiş* narrate the rules of Alevism. According to Alevi belief, the path consists of 366 rules, of which only eight pertain to religion. The rest deal with human relations. Thus, Alevism becomes, in its full sense, an institution aimed at worldly happiness.

İmam Cafer kullarıyız,
Sohbetimiz nihan olur.
Ölmeden evvel ölürüz,
Can cana vasıl can olur.

Budur evvel, budur âhir,
Bundadır mahabbet mihir,
Küfür, her mezhepte küfür,
Küfür bunda iman olur.

Bunda kibr ile kin olmaz,
Hem sen olup hem ben olmaz,
Âdem öldürsen kan olmaz,
Nefes öldürsen kan olur.

İmam kulları dirilir,
Erkân muhabbet sürülür,
Mahşer sorgusu sorulur,

Bunda Âli divan olur.

Şeraben tahur içilir,
Müşkül hal olur seçilir,
Şol kan işlerden geçilir,
Erenler mürvet kân olur.

İmam kulları yolu hak,
Derdine derman iste tek,
Üç yüz altmış altı uğrak
Sekizi usul din olur.

Şah Hatai dir candayım,
Hak divanı günündeyim.
Sen sendesin, ben bendeyim
Ne sen olur ne ben olur (Birdoğan 1994, 413).

The unity of human with nature and the cosmos, the search for the Divine both within that unity and in the smallest unit that constitutes that whole, can be seen in the sayings of Âşık Veysel, which blend the dialectical cycle with Alevi-Bektaşi philosophy:

Aslıma karışıp toprak olunca
Çiçek olur mezarımı süslerim
Dağlar yeşil giyer bulutlar ağlar
Gökyüzünde dalgalanır, seslenirim

Ne zaman toprakla birleşir cismim
Cümle mahluk ile bir olur ismim
Ne hasudum kalır ne de bir hasımım
Eski düşmanlarım olur dostlarım (Veysel 2001, 33).

In this same vein, these lines by the folk poet Hacı Bektaş Veli (1352-1429) express the essence of Alevi philosophy and the search for the self:

Hararet nardadır sac'da değildir
Keramet baş'dadır taçta değildir
Her ne arar isen kendine ara
Kudüs'te, Mekke'de, Hac'da değildir

Sakin ol, kimsenin gönlünü yıkma
Gerçek erenlerin izinden çıkma.
Eğer adam isen ölmezsin korkma
Aşığı kurt yemez, Uc'da değildir (Şimşek 1996, 40).

A *deyiş* by Pir Sultan Abdal also touches on the theme of transcending this world, returning to essence, conquering the self, and becoming one with the universe and the Divine:

Aşk harmanında savruldum
Hem elendim hem yuğruldum
Kazana girdim kavruldum
Meydana yetmeğe geldim

Ben Hakk'ın ednâ kuluyum
Kem damarlardan beriyim
Ayn-ı Cemin bülbülüyüm
Meydana ötmeğe geldim

Pir Sultan'ım der gözümde
Hiç hata yoktur sözümde
Eksiklik kendi özümde
Dârına durmağa geldim (Öztelli 1985, 283).

The following *deyiş*, which deals with the concept of 'Human' as defined by Kaygusuz Abdal's 'Adam' metaphor, can also be cited as an example of Alevi philosophy:

Bu Âdem dedikleri, el ayakla baş değil
Âdem manaya derler, Suret ile kaş değil
Gerçi et ü deridir, cümlenin serveridir
Hakk'ın kudret sırrıdır, Gayre bakmak hoş değil

Âdem odur ey hoca, Gıdası mâna ola
Maksud Âdemden ahi, hayal ile düş değil
Bu Kaygusuz Abdal'a Âşık demen dünyada
Nakş ü sırat gözetir, maksudu nakkaş değil (Şimşek 1996, 191).

Deyiş **Expressing Rebellion and Suffering**

As an example of *deyiş* reflecting the spirit of resistance and rebellion in Alevi philosophy-often ignored, denied, or reshaped into "acceptable" forms by official ideology-we may cite the verses of Muhyittin Abdal, a *tekke* bard believed to have come from a Yörük Türkmen family in the 16th century:

Zâhid bize ta'n eyleme Hakk ismin okur dilimiz
Sakın efsâne söyleme Hazret'e varır yolumuz
Halvetî yolun güderiz çekilir Hakk'a gideriz
Gazâ-yı ekber ederiz İmâm Ali'dir ulumuz

Sayılmayız parmak ile tükenmeyiz kırmak ile
Taşramızdan sormak ile kimse bilmez ahvâlimiz
Muhyî sana olan himmet 'âşık isen câna minnet
Elif Allah mim Muhammed kisvemizdedir dâlimiz (Dilbeyti 2025).

Also, within this context, we may offer a *deyiş* by Seyyid Nesimi, one of the major poets of Alevi-Bektashi culture, who lived from the late 14th to early 15th century:

Ben yitirdim, ben ararım, yar benimdir kime ne
Gah giderim öz bağıma gül dererim kime ne
Gah giderim medreseye ders okurum Hak için
Gah giderim medreseye dem çekerim kime ne

Kelb rakip haram diyormuş şarabin bir katresine
Saki doldur, ben içerim, günah benim kime ne
Ben mekamet gömleğini deldim, taktim eğnime
Ar-u namus şişesini tasa çaldım, kime ne

Ah Yezid, seccadeni al yürü mescid yoluna
Pir esiği benim kâbem kıblegâhım kime ne
Gah çıkarım gökyüzüne hükmeder kaftan kafa
Gah inerim yeryüzüne yar severim kime ne

Kelp rakip böyle diyormuş güzel sevmek pek günah
Ben severim sevdigimi, günah benim kime ne
Nesimi'ye sordular, yarin ile hoş musun
Hoş olayım, hoş olmayım, o yar benim, kime ne (Alevi Haber 2025).

Pir Sultan Abdal, who lived during a time of intense economic and social pressure on the periphery by the Ottoman central state and who witnessed the Celali Uprisings, voiced his resolute stance against oppression and the importance of organisation in struggle through this renowned *deyiş*:

Uyur idik uyardılar
Diriye saydılar bizi
Koyun olduk ses anladık
Sürüye saydılar bizi

Sürülüp kasaba gittik
Kanarayı mesken tuttuk
Canı Hak'ka teslim ettik
Ölüye saydılar bizi

Pir defterine yazıldık
Hak divanına dizildik
Bal olduk şerbet ezildik
Doluya saydılar bizi (Boratav and Gölpınarlı 1943, 91-92).

From lived historical and social experiences to the present, *deyiş* have survived. One example comes from Dedemoğlu, a 17th-century *âşık* about whom little is known:

Çıktık Horasan'dan sökün eyledik,
Düşürdüler bizi tozlu yollara,
Omuzda parlayan kargı cidalar,
Aşırdılar bizi karlı dağlara,

Bölük bölük oldu yüklendi göçler,
Atlandı kocalar, yayandır gençler,
Başımıza geldi görülen düşler,
Göçürdüler bizi gurbet ellere.

Gâhi konduk, gâhi göçtük yollarda,
Bilip bilmediğin gurbet ellerde
Âlem dağlarından şu daz çöllerde,
Halim destan olsun bütün dillere.

Oradan yüklendik geldik Culab'a
Seksen dört bin erdir gelmez hesaba,
Deve, koyun çoktur insan kalaba,
Susuz hayvan inileşir göllere.

Dedemoğlu der ki aşkın bağından,
Aşırdılar bizi Yozgat dağından.
Anadolu Sivas şehri sağından,
Bizden sonra bu nam kalsın illere (Birdoğan 1994, 410-411).

Kul Nesimi, an Azeri-origin *tekke* poet who lived in 17th-century Anatolia, has no known birth or death dates. His poetry reflects traces of Hurufism, Ja'farism, and Haydarism. It is believed he was prosecuted and eventually executed for taking a pro-Safavid stance in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict and expressing it in his poetry:

Har içinde biten gonca güle minnet eylemem
Arabi farisi bilmem, dile minnet eylemem
Sırat-i müstakim üzre gözetirim rahimi
İblisin talim ettiği yola minnet eylemem

Bir acaip derde düştüm herkes gider karına
Bugün buldum bugün yerim, hak kerimdir yarına
Zerrece tamahım yoktur şu dünyanın varına
Rızkımı veren Hüda'dır, kula minnet eylemem

Oy Nesimi, can Nesimi ol gani mihman iken
Yarın şefaatlerim Ahmed-i Muhtar iken
Cümlenin rızkını veren ol gani settar iken
Yeryüzünün halifesi hünkara minnet eylemem (Cited in Çaylak & Kaymal 2020, from Kuzucu).

Deyiş **of Devotion to the** ***Murshids*****, the Guiding Figures of Alevi-Bektashi Tradition**

Hacı Bektaş Veli is a highly significant figure for the Alevi faith. He is known as the one who brought the love of the *Ehl-i Beyt* to Anatolian lands. He witnessed the Mongol raids, the devastation and plunder of Anatolia during his lifetime. The title *Veli* granted to Hacı Bektaş of Khorasan

stems from his commitment to the spiritual heritage descending from Hz. Ali. He is referred to as the "main fountain of saints" and the "sovereign of the *velis*" (Şimşek 1996, 39). In this context, many *deyiş* by our poets such as Pir Sultan Abdal, Hatayi, Emrah, and Beratî can be cited.

Sensin bizim zahir batın ulumuz
Aman medet Mürvet Pir Hacı Bektaş
Her taraftan sana çıkar yolumuz
Ali'sin bir adın var Hacı Bektaş

Seni sevdik, senden yana yıkıldık
Münkirlerin keserinden sıkıldık
Her birimiz künc-i famda tıkıldık
Yetiş bu imdada er Hacı Bektaş

Pir Sultan Abdal'ım sana dayandım
Uyur idim himmetinle uyandım
Hep isteyenlere verdin inandım
Benim de muradım ver Hacı Bektaş (Şimşek 1996, 42).

Let us conclude this heading with an example from Hatayi's *deyiş*:

Gece gündüz hayaline dönerim
Bir gece rüyama gir Hacı Bektaş
Günahkârım günahımdan bezerim
Özüm dara çektim sor Hacı Bektaş

Derdimin dermanı yaremin ucu
Dört güruh mevcuttur, Guruh-i Naci
Belinde kemeri başında tacı
Yüzünden balkıyor nur Hacı Bektaş

Yandı bu garip kul nedir çaresi
Yine tazelendi yürek yaresi
Onulmaz dertlere derman olası
Bu senin bendindir sar Hacı Bektaş

Dedimend Hatayi eyler niyazı
Ulu Pir katardan ayırma bizi

Yarın mahşar günü isterem sizi
Muhammed önünde car Hacı Bektaş (Şimşek 1996, 43).

Kaygusuz Abdal, one of the poets of the 14th-15th centuries, often refers in his *deyiş* to Khorasan, which they were forced to leave. The following *deyiş* of Kaygusuz Abdal relates to the life of his *murshid*, Abdal Musa:

Beylerimiz Ablan Göl'ün üstünde
Ağlar gelir "Şahım Abdal Musa'ya.
Urum abdalları postu eğninde
Bağlar gelir "Şahım Abdal Musa'ya.

Urum abdalları gelir dost deyi,
Eğnimizde aba, hırka post deyi,
Hastaları gelir derman isteyi,
Sağlar gelir "Şahım Abdal Musa'ya (Birdoğan 1994, 410).

***Deyiş* Whose Critical Political Power Derives from Irony:**

These *deyiş*, also known as *Şathiyyat-ı Sofiyane* or *Taşlama*, are poems that critically examine contradictions within common beliefs, the flaws or absurdities observed in others, and the misfortunes of fate through subtle irony. Through satire and irony, they vividly portray the injustices of social life, the moral decline of the world, degeneration, and bigotry. Gevheri, Kaygusuz Abdal, and Dertli are among the poets who produced many poems in this style. For example, Dertli expresses his old age and the misfortunes he faces in the following lines:

Girdab-ı mihnette kapandın kaldın.
Vermedin bir yandan ses kara bahtım
Anladım gafilsin, uykuya daldın,
Deli poyraz gibi es kara bahtım

Alemde bir candan korkulmaz iken,
Pençenden kimseler kurtulmaz iken,
Aslana, kaplana yırtılmaz iken,
Dedirdin tilkiye "pes" kara bahtım.

Dertli'ye çıkar mı bu işin ucu,
Şimdi fark eden yok altunu, tuncu.
Evvel beğenmezdin mesti, pabucu
Verdiğin çarığa mesh kara bahtım (Birdoğan 1994, 420).

Kaygusuz Abdal, a poet from the 15th century who followed the style of Yunus Emre, wrote poems both in syllabic meter and in prosody. He transformed humour and irony into sharp political critique, producing richly layered poetry. *Kaygusuz Sultan Divanı*, *Dolab Nâme*, and *Budala Nâme* are among his major works.

Yamru yumru söylerim, her sözüm kelek gibi
Ben avare gezerim, sahrada leylek gibi
Terk etmedim benliği, bilmedim insanlığı
Suretim âdem veli, her huyum eşek gibi
Ârifler sohbetinde, marifet söyleseler
Ben de hemen düşünmem, ürerim köpek gibi
Bu marifet ilminden, haberim yok cahilim
Benden mana sorsalar, sözlerim sürçek gibi
Miskin Sarayi kıydın, kul oldun sen nefsine
Senin hırs u hevesin, tutu seni fak gibi (Şimşek 1996, 191).

Conclusion

The expressive forms of Alevi oral culture-*nefes*, *duvaz*, *semah*, and *deyiş*-are performed spontaneously by the *zakir* during *Cem* rituals, accompanied by the *saz*. The knowledge embedded in the community's collective memory is transmitted through shared concepts familiar to that memory, thus reinforcing the sense of unity among individuals.

As a result of political and historical conditions, Alevi peoples, who have been othered in various ways by the dominant Sunni population, have sustained their beliefs, traditions, and philosophy through poetry and *deyiş*. Just as in all societies where existence has required rebellion and every rebellion has been violently suppressed, within Alevi-Bektashi culture, songs and *deyiş* have served both as acts of

resistance and as means of expressing their belief system. The *deyiş* and songs used as a line of resistance and a vehicle for conveying the Alevi philosophy also serve as the voice of their history. When the verses are examined, they reveal a deep-rooted history and lived experience. *Deyiş* are the composed form of folk poetry of the Alevi community, influenced by many religions, cultures, and philosophies, containing layers of meaning and symbolic expressions that vary by region and *ocak*. *Deyiş* addressing political, social, and historical conditions contain, in this respect, a critical political essence. For Alevi communities-who view all living beings and nature as reflections of the Divine, and therefore refrain from violence-*deyiş* have become symbols of rebellion and a way to preserve their identity. In conditions where opposition and taking sides were necessary, *ozans* did not abandon the defence of truth, and some were punished by death for it. Alevi philosophy, which views the origin of existence through the concept of love, has set as its principle reaching the *insan-ı kâmil*-the self-aware human who takes responsibility for their actions-in opposition to any understanding of power that positions itself between God and human. The *deyiş* and Alevi music, whose roots we have attempted to reach here, have become the essential carriers of Alevi-Bektashi identity.

Evaluating *deyiş* in light of Yalçınkaya's observation that Alevism is in constant construction, it is evident that their words remain relevant today, embodying a philosophical and universal essence capable of addressing contemporary social conflicts. While Alevi-Bektashi *deyiş* bear the influence of Sufism, they reflect Alevi-Bektashi *erkân* and beliefs, express respect and love for revered figures, mirror historical suffering and social anger, and transform irony and humour into the striking force of political critique. *Deyiş* express the responsiveness of a community that lacks official status, is ignored by authorities, unrecognised, and marginalised. Until the late Ottoman period, Alevi music-except for the regional travels and performances of itinerant *âşıks*-was prohibited from being played or sung publicly. With the

proclamation of the Republic, policies of pressure and denial over Alevi communities continued. Nonetheless, the community's growing self-expression on various platforms, the changing global context, the expansion of communication networks, and the recognition of Alevi music as a fundamental motif of Anatolian culture have brought Alevi music into public view. *Deyiş*, once recited only during *Cem* rituals, are now performed in all venues and continue to carry Alevi identity.

Due to their socially and politically critical stance, *deyiş* have come to express social opposition and standing with the just. As the Milesian philosopher Thales once said: "Those who create the songs of the people are more powerful than those who make their laws."

Endnotes

[1] Gregory Bateson defined schismogenesis as a chain of action and reaction in which hostile attitudes intensify by effectively encouraging the opponent, thereby reinforcing one's own justification.

[2] Devriye: In Sufi thought, a being that falls into the "realm of the unseen" (gayb)-that is, into the material world-first appears in the form of cemmat (inanimate beings), then as plant, then as animal, and finally as human. Having passed through these four elements, the human being develops a desire to become aware of and reach the ultimate truth. From there, they gradually ascend until they reach Hakk, that is, God. The final stage before union is insan-ı kâmil, the stage of the most mature human being. Only after this does one return to one's origin. This is a kind of descent and ascent. Poems that deal with these themes are called devriye (Birdoğan 1994, 425).

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