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Decolonial Entangled Ethnographic Research: Transformative Collaborations With the UK Alevi Community Over the Last 15 Years

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ABSTRACT

The vibrant British Alevi community has settled in London and other parts of the UK since the late 1980s, constituting the largest population of Kurdish Alevis outside of Turkey. Their religion is Alevism, but they are often mistakenly identified as Turkish and Muslim, contributing to their invisibility in this country. We have worked with this marginalised community for at least the last 15 years, witnessing significant changes as it gained public recognition and in how we approach our collaboration. Our main priority is political, with academic/methodological rigour secondary. Our aim is always to work collaboratively with and for the community to achieve social justice outcomes in partnership with them. This entails putting their concerns at the forefront of the agenda and co-producing knowledge, rather than simply telling their story. In this article, we present our research as a 'decolonial, entangled ethnography', which best describes how our work has evolved, aiming to capture its complexity and commitment to social justice activism. Moreover, we situate ourselves in relation to the community and our involvement with them, using the projects we have undertaken to address issues relating to youth, religion and identity, and how our research practice has evolved, changing both us and our approach. We identify key principles of decolonial entangled ethnographic research to achieve transformative social justice outcomes with the Alevi community.

1 | Introduction

We welcome the opportunity this special issue provides to reflect on our collaborative work with the Alevi community and engage with the concept of 'entangled ethnographies' and 'decolonial' research practice (Denscombe 2025; Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021; Goddard-Durant et al. 2021; Ginsburg and Rapp 2013). From the outset of our engagement with the UK Alevi community, it was never our intention to 'do research' on or with the community but to use our academic knowledge in the service of the community in their struggle for visibility and recognition. Our methodological reflections in this article begin from the premise that decolonial research prioritises the political over methodological conventions in knowledge production (Luxardo 2024), and entangled ethnographies capture the

connections between research, activism and our positionality (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013). Since we began publishing our work, reviewers have consistently asked us to provide more detailed information about our methods and to provide 'stronger evidence' to support our claims. This has proved challenging, as unlike Cetin's doctoral research, we did not set out to conduct research with the careful framing usually implied by a method or approach, nor would we have progressed as far if we had. Regrettably, the community had previous experience with 'parachute researchers- dropping in, extracting data and getting out' (Luxardo 2024, 396; Zırh 2017), and we worked hard to demonstrate our commitment and gain their trust. Nevertheless, as social scientists, we have reflected on our methodological and ethical positions over the years and have become more engaged in describing our practice methodologically (Pillow 2003).

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Our joint research with the Alevi community began around 2010, when the community leaders attended a conference at the University of Westminster and expressed their concern about the ‘problem’ of Alevi youth. Their initial worry was the negative identity and disengagement of the second generation from Alevism and from the community (Jenkins and Cetin 2018). At its most extreme, the second generation’s (predominantly young men) disengagement with life in the UK was manifested through school dropout, unemployment, drugs, gangs and deaths by suicide in the early 2000s (Cetin 2014; Cetin 2017). We were invited to help ‘find solutions’, but this has been one of the most criticised aspects of our decolonial claims, as it implies that we are asserting authority over the community. Nonetheless, this language was used by representatives of the Alevi community, reflecting their belief that academic knowledge can address social problems through scientific inquiry. For example, when Cetin was invited to community centres to discuss his research on Alevi youth suicides, many people anticipated that he would offer a solution or remedy to prevent these issues. When he explained that there is no straightforward solution to stop these suicides, some individuals felt disappointed. Despite this initial reaction, his research contributed to a deeper understanding of the pressures faced by young men and opened up new avenues for collaboration with the community to address the issue. This was the point at which the other author, Jenkins, joined in.

Although there has been a significant improvement in the public recognition of the community and fewer deaths by suicide, the community leaders’ main worry persists about the lack of engagement of Alevi youth in Alevism and the movement (Cetin and Jenkins 2024a; Cetin 2016). Over the past 15 years of collaborative work, significant changes have occurred in our relationship and the ways we work together, as well as changes in leadership and priorities within the community, the transnational context beyond the community and our own lives. Our primary aim has always been political, using our knowledge and skills in the service of the community to achieve greater rights and recognition for Alevi communities. Over time, we applied different methodological tools and concepts to investigate various concerns, prioritising the needs of the community and finding an increasing affinity with participatory methods, which reflected our own approach (Humphries and Truman 1994). Our research practice has an underlying ethnographic foundation, stemming from our extensive engagement with the community. We would argue that we began with an activist approach, but finding the key element of activism in the concept of entangled ethnography (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013) enabled us to align our research practice with a decolonial conceptual framework that can be used for research with other marginalised groups too (Denscombe 2025).

2 | Entangled Ethnographic and Decolonial Research

Ginsburg and Rapp (2013) describe the term ‘entangled’ as a way for ethnographers to reflect the complexity of modern life while also adopting a more engaged and activist approach in their research. This perspective resonates with Denscombe’s assertion (2025, 233) that ‘the purpose of decolonial research is not just to understand the world but to use this understanding as a vehicle for

social change’. This suggests that there is potential to combine the entangled ethnographic approach with the qualitative decolonial research practices outlined by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021). They identify four key principles of decolonial research: ‘1) critical reflexivity; 2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination; 3) facilitating “othered” ways of knowing; and 4) adopting a “transformative praxis”’ (ibid: 1). Denscombe (2025, 232) also notes that decolonial research must critically examine the colonial legacy, which often serves to uphold the power and interests of specific groups, including, in this context, majoritarian politics in Turkey and Western nations. In Turkey, Alevis have been subject to colonial practices of the state since the Ottoman Empire, which has marginalised and suppressed their culture, religion and identity in a dehumanising and destructive way, leading to their displacement, migration and a negative sense of identity for subsequent generations. Their agency, subjectivity and knowledge were deemed inferior, and pervasive myths circulated to reinforce this idea (Cetin and Jenkins 2025; Yalcinkaya 2025; Turkyilmaz 2016; Çelik 2015; Yonucu 2024; Hanoglu 2023; Orhan 2019). This colonial dynamic often occurs at the expense of marginalised communities; hence, decolonial research aims to illuminate the unfairness and injustices inherent in these systems and take action to improve their situation (Denscombe 2025). This legacy of a colonial mentality is felt within the UK Alevi community too, where some people still devalue their knowledge and experience. For example, when we approached a member to share their experience, they would often respond that they did not know anything worth knowing and refuse, usually directing us to speak to someone else who ‘knew better’. In such cases, a continued informal conversation was far less threatening and more productive than insisting on a recorded interview.

Our overarching framework has evolved into a decolonial one, even if we could not articulate it as such at the time. This is evident in our pursuit of social justice outcomes to address the marginalisation of the community and concerns about youth disengagement. The entanglements highlight different priorities over time, changes in our conceptual and methodological approaches across various projects, and shifts in our positionality and relationships with the community. In this article, we describe a ‘decolonial entangled ethnographic approach’, utilising the principles of decolonial research and entanglement as a broader lens to frame how this approach has evolved. Additionally, we claim that our research is decolonial because it is led by the community, addressing their priorities and working in partnership with them. This has been transformative, leading to positive changes that increase the rights and recognition of the community, and combat the ‘negative identity’ of youth and the invisibility of Alevis in the United Kingdom. We will demonstrate this approach by drawing on examples from the main projects we have collaborated on, providing a more detailed description of aspects of our mixed methods, decolonial and entangled approach. This echoes Luxardo (2024, 393), who argues that ‘in collaborative ethnographies, we began by addressing communities’ priorities’.

3 | From Ethnography to Entangled Ethnography

In this section, we outline our positionality from our initial contact with the community and describe how we became involved

in addressing community issues. Entangled ethnography explores our feelings about our work methodologically by examining how our connections with the community have evolved over time. It highlights our shared commitment to activism and our relationships with various segments of the community. This approach enables us to reflect on how our work has impacted our lives, both personally and professionally. For example, by working together with the community, we have found ways to leverage our diverse knowledge and expertise to design and introduce Alevism lessons, which have made a difference for both the community and ourselves that we never expected.

Cetin's first contact with the community was as a member. However, in 2009, he started his doctoral research to understand the underlying social factors contributing to the suicides of second-generation Alevi young men (Cetin 2014). The starting point of his work was academic research, applying an ethnographic approach and drawing on his insider status within the community to explore the 'anomic disaffection' of these young men. Whilst there were decolonial elements embedded in his research, he framed them as part of his ethnography. For example, he described the impact of the colonial legacy on the marginalised position of Alevi-Kurds in the United Kingdom as a necessary context for his research. Cetin found inevitable tensions between his position as an academic researcher, where his main aim was to understand youth suicides rather than find solutions, and his position as an insider, in which he was inevitably more involved and wanted to play his part in finding solutions. Having his own child growing up in the United Kingdom, Cetin became even more entangled with the community, as he wanted his son to embrace his Alevi heritage as a positive identity.

As mentioned earlier, our joint work with Jenkins began in 2010, when community leaders invited us to assist in addressing their concerns about Alevi youth. Previously, she was familiar with Cetin's research but not directly involved with the community. Nevertheless, she was eager to do anything to help. Essentially, her role was envisaged by the community as a consultant, an academic expert who could offer alternative solutions. However, from the outset, she was keen to establish a more collaborative relationship, drawing on the community's knowledge and experience to address the issue together. The community leaders had already explored a range of strategies with other faith and public sector organisations to try to prevent further suicides and support Alevi youth. They explained the 'negative identity' associated with the second generation in terms of their not knowing much about their religion because it was suppressed in Turkey, and their parents were not able to teach them. This is another reflection of the colonial legacy impacting the lives of Alevis in the diaspora context. Thus, religion was not felt as meaningful to the younger generation, nor did they feel a sense of belonging in the United Kingdom. This led to our collaborative Religion and Identity project.¹

Through meetings with Alevi youth, they proposed that Alevism be taught in Religious Education (RE) classes in schools. We listened when the Alevi young people shared their experiences of marginalisation in schools and expressed their desire for Alevism lessons in the RE curriculum. We worked with them, the leaders and the schools to incorporate these lessons into their RE curriculum. This was despite our expectation that they would not

make much of a difference, but we were wrong. The project lent itself to an action-based research framework. It involved the co-production of curriculum units on Alevism for the locally agreed RE syllabuses at Key Stages 1–3. We collaborated with İAKM-C and the Prince of Wales Primary School in Enfield, which has a substantial Alevi cohort. We designed the lessons from scratch, as there were no existing materials in English. With permission from the Standing Advisory Committee on Education (SACRE) for the Local Education Authority, the lessons began in 2011 at the primary stage (ages 5–11) and were a great success, making pupils feel more connected to the school. At Highbury Grove Secondary School in Islington (ages 11–18), Alevi students requested that the lessons be integrated into RE classes and gained approval from the school and their local SACRE. The lessons there began in 2013, raised awareness of Alevism as a religion among the school's students, having a positive impact on all of them. Alevi students learnt enough about their religion to move beyond describing themselves as 'sort of Muslim' and proudly embrace their Alevi identities without having to justify or explain their religion (see Jenkins and Cetin 2018).

The impact of the lessons succeeded in their initial aim, and the community capitalised on their success to provide crucial legitimisation of Alevism as a religion, supporting evidence for the Britanya Alevi Federasyonu [British Alevi Federation] (BAF)'s application to the Charity Commission for England and Wales, seeking official recognition of Alevism as a religion (2015). Furthermore, these initiatives contributed to the case presented to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for including Alevism as a distinct religious category in the national Census, under the 'Other' option for the voluntary religion question. We were involved in both community campaigns, which raised the visibility of Alevis in the UK, and are currently collaborating with İAKM-C to conduct a survey with young people about their engagement with Alevism and the movement (Cetin and Jenkins 2024a). We have been flexible in our application of research methods over time, deploying both quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, with hindsight, we can identify some decolonial elements in our research practice, although we did not describe them in that way previously. Now we feel confident in describing our collaborative work as an entangled ethnographic decolonial approach, which we will outline in the next section, detailing what makes it decolonial.

4 | Decolonial Knowledge Co-Production and Exchange

Denscombe (2025, 232) argues that 'there is a legacy of 'colonial ways of thinking... colonisation... was also a mental process involving the imposition of a Western worldview'. We are aware of the colonial legacy that impacts the Alevi community, and we address it throughout our knowledge co-production and exchange process. For example, as described above, we contextualise the colonial legacy of the Turkish state and challenge the misrepresentation of Alevi people in state discourses, which deny Alevism as a religion, instead describing it as merely syncretic or as a cultural or philosophical practice. Alevis have been portrayed as rural, uncivilised, lacking a proper religion (i.e., Sunni Islam), uneducated and in need of domestication, leading to the dismissal of their views as lacking value (Cetin and

Jenkins 2025; Yalcinkaya 2025; Turkyilmaz 2016; Salman 2023; Yonucu 2024; Doğan 2025). State narratives often claim that Alevis have no conflict with the state due to their shared commitment to secularism and a progressive worldview. This perspective reduces Alevis to a secular entity, overlooking atrocities, such as the massacres in Koçgiri (1921), Dersim (1937–1938), Maras (1978), Çorum (1980), Sivas (1993), İstanbul-Gazi and Ümraniye (1995) and Muğla-Ortaca (1966), which have profoundly influenced their identity and relationship with the Turkish state (Doğan 2025; Emre 2023). This view fails to recognise the historical agency and collective memory of the Alevi community, mischaracterising them as ‘loyal guards of the republic’. In this light, decoloniality encapsulates our research approach by exposing the colonial legacy in Turkey and the state project of Turkification and Sunnification, which aims to assimilate and silence Alevis forcefully. One of the primary objectives of our research with the Alevi community is to challenge these state narratives and counter their marginalisation as an ethno-religious group. Our focus underscores ‘the intrinsic value of cultures and knowledge associated with Indigenous people and the ways these stand as an alternative to colonial ways of seeing the world’ (Denscombe 2025, 232).

In the United Kingdom and transnationally, Alevi communities are demonstrating agency by resisting practices that diminish their identity. They are developing strategies aimed at recognising Alevism as a distinct religion and contributing to knowledge production and exchange, which offer alternative ways of knowing. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) describe the practice of embracing ‘othered’ forms of knowledge by producing alternative forms that originate within the community and represent their perspective as a key strategy to counter dominant narratives. Our Religion and Identity project developed Alevism lessons that could be taught in schools, representing Alevism as a distinct religion from the community’s perspective. The lessons utilised the community’s knowledge of Alevism to produce content compatible with the UK national curriculum for delivery in schools, while also serving as a further source of knowledge exchange for community centres. The lessons aim to raise awareness about Alevism as a religion and ensure that Alevis are visible and recognised as a distinct but equal community within a multicultural UK and global society.

5 | Decolonial and Entangled Positionality

When Ginsburg and Rapp (2013) introduced the concept of ‘entangled ethnography’, it was to capture the complexity of research and activism, documenting their changing positionality over time, from being researchers as outsiders in the field of special education to becoming more entangled as insiders once they became parents of children with disabilities themselves. This directed them towards activism related to policies and initiatives aimed at improving the position of young people with learning disabilities, while also maintaining their critical reflexivity as researchers. Similarly, Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) stress the importance of critical reflexivity in questioning the knowledge assumptions and situatedness of the researchers, which underpin the power imbalance between researchers and researched. They suggest that this will require some unlearning of assumptions, and rather than imposing their expert knowledge,

researchers should prepare themselves to learn from the communities. In our research, we position ourselves as partners and collaborators with the community, while continually reflecting on the power imbalance associated with our own situatedness in academia.

Cetin’s ethnographic doctoral research with the community membership was premised on his insider access and insight into the social factors influencing second-generation male suicides. Whereas it is generally assumed that being an insider is a positive advantage, Cetin recognised that, as a member of the community, he was also an outsider when conducting his academic research on them and trying to maintain a critical distance. Moreover, being an insider has the potential to be as much a disadvantage as a benefit at times, and he cites Merton’s (1972) identification of a dynamic tension between the insider and outsider status. This was perhaps the most challenging dynamic to manage, given Cetin’s shared experiences with community members. As with many others, he had arrived in the UK in the 1990s and worked in textile sweatshops and the catering sector in London. When he turned up as an academic ‘researcher’, some of his peers were surprised. Cetin was also considered an outsider by some because he framed the London Alevi community as ‘Kurdish Alevis’ when he conducted his PhD research and after. Those who prioritised their Kurdish identity viewed him as a divisive figure due to his focus on Alevilik (Alevism). Conversely, those who emphasised their Alevi identity perceived this emphasis on Kurdishness to divide the UK Alevi community along ethnic lines, ultimately serving the interests of Kurdish nationalism (which is sometimes perceived as Sunni/Şafi Islam). Moreover, due to his involvement in designing the Alevism lessons with the BAF, which included key figures such as Ali, Huseyin and Kerbela, there was concern that he was serving the interests of those trying to ‘Islamicise Alevism’.

The positionality of Jenkins as an outsider, a middle-class white English woman and an academic ‘expert’ who cannot speak Turkish or Kurdish and had no knowledge of Alevism, raised suspicion about her motivation, as the community had witnessed other parachute researchers exploiting the community to pursue their own interests. Some questioned whether Jenkins was working for the British government to infiltrate the community, which reflects their experience of surveillance under the Turkish government and its interventions in countries of Alevi settlement.² Similarly, Cosan Eke (2017, 2024) found that despite her insider status as an Alevi, in her ethnographic research on Alevis as a faith community in Germany, she too was sometimes suspected of infiltrating the community, especially by Leftist members. However, thanks to Jenkins’ close connection with Cetin, he negotiated her involvement, translated for her, advised her and mediated interactions with community members. Increasingly, she was welcomed into the community and felt accepted as a relationship of mutual trust and respect developed through her engagement in the religion and identity project.

Both of us have had to unlearn certain assumptions and become more reflective about our positionality, embracing the concept of ‘unlearning’ as a decolonial methodological practice (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021; Smith 2012). Denscombe (2025) argues that, despite being insiders in a community, researchers are often steeped in their training by Western

universities, which can counteract decolonising strategies. Cetin had to critically reflect on his position as a classically trained sociology student highly immersed in the 'Eurocentric paradigm'. When he went into the field for his PhD research, he was committed to theoretical and methodological perspectives and concepts that Durkheim and other European scholars employed in their research on suicide. Anxious to meet the expectations of a PhD student, he kept a critical distance between his research and the Alevi community. However, after completing his PhD and in conversations with Jenkins (who taught research methods), he unlearned some of the criteria expected by classical methodological perspectives. Cetin also understood Alevism based on his own experience, but gradually came to accept the diversity of perspectives and practices that exist within Alevi communities. These transformations showcase some of the decolonial practices he has undergone through this journey.

Jenkins was previously unaware of the existence of Alevis or Alevism until she discussed Cetin's doctoral research with him and subsequently became involved in the community. She had no real knowledge or understanding of the colonial legacy in Turkey or that its traumatic effects would extend to Alevis' experiences in the United Kingdom until she spent time at the Alevi community centres. There, she listened to young people's stories of marginalisation and discrimination at school and saw firsthand the impact of the lessons on older generations who spent their school lives trying to hide their Alevi identity through fear of discrimination, bullying and damnation by teachers and peers. Additionally, gaining this knowledge made her keen for Alevis to share their stories of experiences in Turkey and the United Kingdom, providing a testimony for and about the community. However, she had to unlearn the assumption that the community would share this priority. Instead, she has learnt to listen to what the community identifies as its priorities (although, of course, the community is not a uniform entity that always agrees on the same priorities) and works collaboratively to achieve social justice outcomes. Our engagement with the community has intensified over the years, and we have become more 'entangled' than ever since we discovered that collectively, we could make a difference in achieving social justice outcomes and are keen to continue this work. The following section discusses some of the transformative aspects of our decolonial research practice.

6 | Decolonial Research Practice and Transformative Outcomes

As hooks (1996) writes: 'There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change, that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures' (cited in Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 3). Our collaborative research is a transformative practice that makes a difference in the lives of Alevi youth at school and the wider community, contributing to the recognition, visibility and sense of belonging of Alevis in the United Kingdom (Cetin and Jenkins 2024b). This approach aligns with our values and ethics, which are centred around decolonial practices in both political and academic contexts (Cetin and Jenkins 2025; Anand and Kaul 2025; Saini and Begum 2020). To the best of our ability, we aim to ensure our methodological approach aligns with the

definition provided by Datta (2018), who states that 'decolonising research methodology adopts the principle of reciprocity to foster collaboration from the conception of a study to its conclusion'. This section addresses the transformative elements in terms of outcomes achieved with the knowledge produced collaboratively with the community and research practice.

The introduction of Alevism lessons in schools and the knowledge exchange that has ensued have had transformative outcomes in helping Alevi young people overcome their negative identity. Instead of describing themselves as 'sort of Muslim', they take pride in their Alevi religion and identity (Jenkins and Cetin 2018). What everyone witnessed in the primary school when the lessons were introduced was Alevi children proudly identifying as Alevi and learning about their religion without fear of reprisals. Subsequently, the school introduced a range of measures to make Alevi parents and pupils feel at home, for example, by displaying Alevi artefacts prominently so that parents would see them when they visited the school. Additionally, the school changed its policies to include Alevis as an ethnic and religious category on its school admissions forms, whereas previously, only Turkish and Muslim were available as options. Parents told us that before the Alevism lessons, they would not have felt safe to register their children as Alevi in case it led to discrimination against them. Moreover, the deputy headteacher co-produced the lessons with us, piloting and teaching them, and introduced the project to the staff, making teachers aware of which children in their classes were Alevi. This inspired the teachers to embrace the lessons and change their understanding of the children's Alevi identity. The school launched the lessons with an assembly about Alevism, to which parents were invited, and Alevi children and members of the Alevi community participated. This led to a much closer relationship between Alevi parents and the schools than previously, with the lessons adding to the knowledge of all children, not just Alevi pupils. At the school, the Ofsted inspection viewed the Alevism lessons very positively as an example of the school's inclusivity towards different religions (Ofsted).

The recognition of Alevism as a distinct religion in the lessons is another significant achievement and transformation from the Sunni majority and state-produced colonial discourses in Turkey. Furthermore, their inclusion in the religion question in the 2021 UK national census is the first time a nation has included Alevis in official records, heralding significant changes in their self-perception. Alevis are taking charge of addressing their own issues with the collaboration of skilled experts like us and should not be seen as passive victims in need of liberators. Vital to decolonial practice is treating the community with respect (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021). The UK Alevi movement is agentic and more than capable of conducting its own research and mobilising its own resources without our engagement. We are clear that our task is not to rescue them, but to work with them at their request, where they set the research agenda and the terms of engagement are negotiated. We feel privileged to be treated as partners in addressing the projects and priorities of the Alevi movement, and we feel deeply immersed in the community, committed to working together towards achieving social justice outcomes. This is demonstrated through the content of the Alevism lessons too, where the lessons were co-produced, with the community defining the

content, and collaboration with the schools to adapt it according to national guidelines for RE.

Saini and Begum (2020) describe decolonising knowledge production in university social sciences as questioning research norms and sharing the knowledge production process to ensure that it is 'knowledge co-production'. Through our engagement with the community, Jenkins has learnt a great deal about coloniality, and both of us have revised our university teaching on research methods, education and religion modules to include Alevis and Alevism, as well as our collaborative partnership with the community. This impacted Alevi students in our courses who had previously felt invisible at university and now felt more connected. We spent a lot of time at İAKM-C, Enfield Alevi Cultural Centre, where BAF is also located, and other Alevi centres in London, attending events, including cems, cultural festivals, funerals, meetings and political debates as participants and invited speakers. We also host Alevi meetings, events and conferences at the University of Westminster, where we work, crossing boundaries between the Alevi community and bringing the university into service for the community in the interest of knowledge co-production and exchange, and raising the visibility of Alevis. Throughout our collaboration, our primary concern has been to achieve social justice outcomes for this group, which transcends academic rigour as our priority. As Zavala (2013) argues, the lessons learned from research projects suggest decolonial research is 'less about the struggle for method and more about the spaces that make decolonising research possible' (cited in Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 6).

One of Thambinathan and Kinsella's (2021, 6) principles of decolonial research is reciprocity and respect. They cite Barreiros and Moreira (2020), who suggest that: 'respect for self-determination and reciprocity calls upon the act of listening as a symbol for healing wounds of colonialism and as a demonstration of resistance'. We listen to and respect diverse perspectives and voices within the community, and we collaborate to find mutually acceptable solutions. With the Alevism lessons, we proceeded with the solution proposed by Alevi youth, as it most affected them. There were many different perspectives and views on what should be included in the Alevism lessons. However, we tried to find a common ground that is as inclusive as possible, reflecting Alevi and school values about the purpose of RE. In our current Youth Engagement project, and through ongoing ethnographic engagements with community leaders, members and faith leaders, we have identified competing narratives regarding the perceived 'problem of youth disengagement.' This demonstrates that, so far, there is no single shared explanation or agreed solution. We discussed working with Alevi youth to design the survey and develop the questions in a way that is meaningful to them, rather than risk imposing questions only the leaders want to ask. This is a key principle of our research: to engage with all stakeholders and avoid making assumptions on behalf of any group. We suggested running focus groups with Alevi youth at İAKM-C to identify issues relevant to them and to formulate questions together. We have not covered all aspects of decolonial entangled ethnographic research practice. However, we broadly comply with existing advice on how to conduct decolonial and ethnographic research, without suggesting that our approach is the only way.

7 | Concluding Remarks

In this article, we discuss how we conceptualised our collaborative work with the UK Alevi community as activism rather than research. We reflect on the implications of this reframing by describing our approach as a 'decolonial entangled ethnography'. Entangled ethnography captures the complex relationships we have developed with the community over time, highlights the central role of activism, and emphasises critical reflexivity regarding our positionality. This approach enables us to identify effective strategies for addressing the community's issues. Decolonial entangled ethnography encourages us to consider the impact of colonial experiences on the Alevi community and challenges us to decolonise the assumptions often embedded in academic research practices. Our 15-year entanglement with the community has not only enriched our lives but has also illustrated how our sociological knowledge and skills can benefit them. Additionally, we have gained valuable insights from both academic literature and the lived experiences of Alevis, which have helped us develop effective strategies and deepen our understanding of the Alevi experience. We feel valued and respected by the community, reflecting our own respect for them. We hope our collaboration fosters recognition among Alevis of the legitimacy and significance of their own knowledge—knowledge that the colonial legacy has often undermined.

The UK Alevi community has made significant strides in addressing Sökefeld's (2008) criteria for recognition in British society (Cosan Eke et al. 2025; Cetin and Jenkins 2024b; Hanoglu 2021). We continue work on the Alevism lessons and are examining the 2021 National Census data on Alevis who answered the religion question to see if we can generate a demographic description of the community and consider how to increase the response rate for the next census. While there is less talk now about Alevi youth as disaffected, there are still occasional deaths of young men by suicide and community leaders continue to worry about their lack of engagement with Alevism and the Alevi movement. They are committed to finding solutions, which stem from a profound desire to ensure the continuity of Alevism in the United Kingdom, a concern reflected transnationally (Gültekin 2024; Cosan Eke 2017). This is our next collaborative project with the İAKM-C to explore youth engagement with Alevism and the movement in greater depth to identify possible social justice outcomes.

What makes our collaborative work decolonial, entangled and ethnographic is the depth of our long-standing relationship with the community and our success in achieving social justice outcomes together, as seen with the Alevism lessons. They regard and treat us as members of the community and partners rather than external professionals whose skills and advice can merely be hired for their purposes. Moving forward, we hope to have illustrated how our decolonial entangled ethnographic engagement fuels our commitment to social justice and the community. Our collaborative research is ongoing, and there remains much to be done, but youth engagement continues to be a significant concern for the Alevi movement, not just in the UK but also in the wider European diaspora. It is the community-led nature of our research, with its knowledge co-production and exchange, transformative outcomes and our commitment to social justice, that makes it so worthwhile. We suggest that a decolonial

entangled ethnographic approach can provide a conceptual framework for future research with marginalised groups, and the question remains whether or how we will apply it in our future work.

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The authors have nothing to report.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Endnotes

¹ This project can serve as a model for other minoritised religions seeking inclusion in the RE curriculum. For more details, see Jenkins and Cetin (2018); <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/minority-ethno-faith-communities-and-social-inclusion-through-collaborative-research>.

² This became more of an issue when we started to conduct our Alevi Survey in 2016–2017 which included questions from the National Census.

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