

Alevi under the shadow of the Turkish Islamic Ethos

Hayal Hanoglu¹

Introduction

This article focuses on the challenges Alevis experienced after the foundation of Turkish Republic through crucial occasions that influence the formation of Alevi identity and social organisation of Alevi communities with particular attention to Alevi Kurds due to their ethnoreligious identity subjected double discrimination. The first section explores the influence of Turkish-Islamic ethos and secularism dominated the founding of the Turkish Republic through nation-building process that aimed to homogenise the ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of Anatolia. The second section pays attention to Alevi Kurds those affected by centralisation and homogenisation process severely comparing the Alevi Turks. Finally, in concluding discussions, I will give a brief look into the results of Turkey context for Alevis in general, which pave the way for moving abroad.

Alevi are a wide population settled in a large area from Balkans to Mesopotamia², forming the second-largest religious minority in Turkey. Due to oppression and marginalisation that forced Alevis to hide their identity, there

1 - Hayal Hanoglu is a PhD candidate in Migration Studies at the University of Kent. Her PhD thesis focuses on the diasporic transformation of Alevism and Alevi communities with an attention to its influence on the religious landscape of the rural Alevi areas in Turkey.

2 - This article focuses on Alevis in Turkey, however, it is useful to mention that apart from Turkey, the Middle East, especially Syria and Lebanon also host Alevi population that named Alawites.

is no reliable data on the Alevi population and their exact number, though estimated one-fourth of the population in Turkey is Alevi. Ethnically and culturally pluralised Alevis are a multi-cultural population; there are diverse Alevi communities that rituals and practices show internal differences. Ethnic and linguistic sub-categories and regional differences along with variations of ritual practices, create obstacles or difficulties for making generalisations. Bruijnen (1996) defines Alevis through four ethnolinguistic groups. The smallest group is Azerbaijani Turkish speaking Alevis in North-East Turkey; the second small group is Arabic speaking Alevis³ living in Southern Turkey, especially Hatay and Adana provinces. Turkish and Kurdish speaking Alevis are the largest populations in Central and Eastern Anatolia.

As the term Alevism covers various interpretations and practices, the vast majority of the Alevi population in Turkey are of Kizilbash and Bektashi origins. Melikoff (2007) defines the distinction through the old Ottoman period and distinguishes these two groups as nomadic or semi-nomadic Kizilbashis and Bektashis those settled around Tekkes. Both Kizilbashis and Bektashis believe in virtually the same faith, however, structured separately through history. Bektashi belief is presumed to have their origins in Central Asian Turcoman culture (Melikoff, 2005), while many studies emphasise the origin of Kizilbash Alevism around the Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Bayrak, 1997; Kutlu, 2007; McDowall, 2004).

The term Kizilbash, literally redhead in Turkish, emerged in the second half of the fifteenth century, first used to define the groups that members wore twelve sliced red hats and later identified as the Batiniyya communities who aligned with Safavids (Melikoff, 2007). Similarly, it has been suggested that Kizilbashis consist of Turkmen and Kurdish tribes that became adherents of the Safavid Sufi Order of Persia (Moosa, 1987). Kizilbashism originated long before Islam around Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Bayrak, 2004; McDowall, 2004; Melikoff, 1998a), however, after the spread of Islam in the region, a tension began and changed its destiny. From the Seljuk Empire to the Ottoman Empire -and later the Turkish Republic-, Alevis have been seen as 'others' and marginalised as 'infidels' and 'heretics'. Throughout history, subjecting to prejudice and discrimination, Alevis suffered acute social rejection and physical violence, sometimes culminating in quasi-genocidal massacres. It is this historical context prevented Alevis from expressing their identity and practise their faith openly; therefore, Alevism secretly practised and belief and teachings transmitted only through traditional oral elements.

3 - Whereas Arab Alevis are a small population in Turkey, they are a wider ethnic population in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and a smaller population in Lebanon

Debates on Alevism have controversial characteristics as they concentrated on its connection with and distinction from Islam. While some scholars generally have an agreement on defining Alevism as a unique belief system distinct from Islam, others defend the idea that Alevism is a heterodox form of Islam. This idea of Islamic heterodoxy, as encouraged by the official discourses, mostly lied on the Islamic customs adopted by Alevis as an outcome of long-term assimilation policies. It is also an undeniable fact that in addition to Shamanism and Zoroastrianism, Alevism has traces of Islam, as all these and other religions lived in a mutual region and influenced each other at different levels. Due to the difficulty of reaching a general agreement in this debate, Alevis, often choose the way of responding to the question of 'what is Alevism' with 'what it is not'. Therefore, the five pillars of Islam that Alevis do not practise become a crucial point manifesting a precise distinction between Alevism and Islam.

However, like every faith, Alevism has been transforming since its existence and undertook serious structural changes through historical processes. The spread of Islam in Anatolia and Mesopotamia was the first rupture in the historical trajectory of Alevism due to its influence on the core beliefs and teachings. Consequently, the pre-Islam form of Alevism subjected remarkable changes that I described as evolution somewhere (see Hanoglu, 2016). The second rupture was the development of Turkish Islamic ethos in the period from the ending of the Ottoman era to the Turkish Republic, which left a strong mark on the social and political formation of Alevis, as discussed in the following section.

Turkish Islamic ethos and Republican Secularism

Alevis were systematically oppressed and isolated throughout the Ottoman period. However, during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, they were subjected to particular assimilation strategies run by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) (*Ittihat ve Terakki Komitesi*) founded in 1889. The CUP gained power after the rebellion of nationalist Young Turks (against Sultan Abdulhamid II) in 1908 which made the party as an essential role-player during the ending period of the Ottoman Empire. The theory of Turkish-Islamic synthesis introduced in this period dominated by the policies of the CUP; as part of the nation-building process in place of the 'ummah' of Ottoman, the CUP aimed to homogenised the cultural diversity of Anatolia under Islamic Turkishness, initiated cultural destruction of diverse communities including the Alevis. This period accompanied by the persecution of non-Muslim and non-Turkish minorities exemplified by the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

Turkish - Islamic synthesis of the CUP aligned Alevis with Shamanism and Bektashism and endeavoured towards Turkishness. As Bektashism had widespread acceptance within Turkish Islam, the CUP deliberately tried to depict Alevism as part of Bektashism. The link between Alevism and Bektashism facilitated pushing Alevism under a Turkish Islamic framework. Built on such distortions, the most widespread belief about Alevism linked its origin to Khorasan in North-Eastern Iran. Despite its weak foundations, this claim strongly supported by the official Sunni- Islam ideology (Bayrak, 2013). This manipulation by the CUP contributed to considering Alevism as a form of Shamanism to prove its Turkmen background and endeavoured towards Turkishness. It is a well-known fact that Alevism carries traces of Shamanism; however, associating Alevism directly with Shamanism was a deliberate attempt to confine its origin to Turkishness.

This period significantly influenced Alevism and Alevi communities. As a result of the manipulation and assimilation strategies, the debates on the origin of Alevis have increasingly shifted towards the Turkish- Islamic dimension, and a large number of Alevis increasingly adopted Islamic tendencies in their beliefs and practices. This period also marked with political-ideological divisions among Alevi population along with deepening ethnic separation among Alevi Turks and Kurds. While Alevi Turks, due to their ethnic belonging and the influence of Bektashism, were more easily absorbed into the Turkish-Islamic ethos, Alevi Kurds were less affected by this due to their ethnoreligious characteristics. Began in this period, the long-term Turkish- Islamic propagation that continued during the Republic, resulted in the spiritual and mental separation of Kurd and Turk Alevis from each other despite their belonging to the same faith. The positionality versus Islam also became a subject of ideological division among Alevi communities. Moreover, adopting the name Alevism is also believed to be an outcome of this period. Humiliation and negative labelling in the Ottoman era (Baltacioglu-Brammer, 2014) may come forward as a plausible argument for the devaluation of the name Kizilbash; and subsequent adoption of the name 'Alevi' later in modern history.

Alevi history scholar Karakaya-Stump defines an Alevi phobic heritage that transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. The identification of Sunniism through a very strict and sharp anti-Kizilbashism led the foundation of Alevi phobia in the society in the Ottoman period and advanced in the Turkish Republic. Establishment of Turkish identity on Sunni - Islam since the Ottoman period, but particularly in the Republican period, while eased the integration of Bosnians, Albanians, Circassians, and Georgians, who migrated from the old Ottoman lands to Anatolia in the 19th and 20th centuries, same

integration process did not apply to Alevis despite their support to the secular Republic (Karakaya-Stump, 2016).

During the conversion from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, although the official policy on religion revised, Islam-centred discourses and policies had been transmitted. The conceptual Turkish-Islamic framework and assimilation strategies developed by the CUP became the official policy of the Turkish Republic founded in 1923 following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Dressler, 2013). The transmission of the policies and strategies accompanied by an alliance between the CUP and the new Republic. It was a collaboration between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the CUP began with the *Kuvayı Millîye* movement that considered as the first step in the establishment of the Republic and sustained during the Republic, as many of the survived members of CUP continued their political carriers as members of CHP (Republican People's Party) established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Akal, 2014; Aksin, 1998).

The Republic adopted Western institutions of nationalism to make a 'modern' national culture (Robins, 1996) and widely accepted as more progressive by the minorities including the Alevis due to highlighting secularism as a value. The religious verdicts (fatwas) and mass violence Alevis experienced in the Ottoman era made secularism a necessary condition to escape from Islamist discrimination, which justified Alevi support to the Republicans (Akdemir, 2016). However, despite this support for secularism against the fundamentalist Islamists, Alevism has not been recognised by the Turkish Republic. Alevism, praised by Kemalist elites 'as a Turkish version of Islam without Shariah and a useful ally against 'irtica', yet 'de facto discrimination and suspicion of Alevis as potentially subversive continued for most of the Republican period' (Bruinessen, 2018:12).

In the first years of the Republic, many reforms were launched as part of modernisation and secularisation process. Mustafa Kemal and the nationalist elites separated religion from the state with a revision in the Constitution (1921) in 1928, and removed the articles declaring '*Islam to be the official religion of the state*' and the '*duty of the parliament to apply Sharia's law*', subsequently, in 1930, the Sharia courts abolished (Parrilli, 2018:18). Though the abolition of the Caliphate and Sultanate was a certain step towards secularisation, the banning of all tekke (dervish lodges) and zawiyyas (shrines) and the creation of a state-managed Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*⁴) in 1924, made Sunni-Islam the officially promoted religious identity within the Turkish nationalist frame (Dressler, 2010; Göle, 2010; Zürcher, 2004). Consequently, issues concerning religious minorities, including Alevis, fallen under the

4 - From now on will be referred as Diyanet

authority of Diyanet, the advocate of Turkish Islam, instead of a secular law safeguarding the religious pluralism. Diyanet was a crucial channel to uniformise religion for the sake of the nation-building process.

Translation of the Quran into Turkish due to its language (Arabic) that not readable by large masses, as suggested, was for its reinterpretation through Turkish-Islamic ethos. More importantly, except for Hanafi school, other Islamic beliefs and teachings were not taken into consideration in this new interpretation (Bayrak, 2011). Indeed, with the new reforms, while mosques remained untouched, closing Bektashi and Kurd lodges, tekkes and shrines may indicate the desire to portray the Hanafi sect of Islam as an official religion. It was a combination of Hanafi sect of Sunni Islam with Turkishness that Kemalist elites composed to create a nation-state on the idea of a homogenous society encompassing one nation, one religion and one language against the rich ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of Anatolia.

As a consequence of these reforms justified as secularisation, no space left for religious minorities and religious pluralism, because the form of secularism Turkish Republic adapted does not mandate the separation of religion from the state; in contrast, the religious domain subjected to state control which played a crucial role in the nation-building process (Bruinessen, 2018; Göle, 2010). Sociologist Nilüfer Göle speaks of the different formations and manifestations of secularism depend on historical, and religious contexts and highlights Turkish type of secularism adopted in the nation-building process 'in relation to Muslim genealogy' (2010:43-45). Turkish secularism as a state ideology proceeded 'within the frame of the politics of uniformisation and homogenisation of a national culture against the legacy of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman Empire', so that did not 'enacted as a guarantee of religious pluralism' (2010:44). The process of creating a homogenous Turkish – Sunni nation-state implied the elimination and assimilation of non-Muslim groups; consequently, Sunni-Islam was in practice sanctioned as the majority religion.

Similarly, as Parrilli (2018) suggests, the Turkish secularism combined European models of state-religion relations with the legacies of the Ottoman approach to religious minorities. Inspired by French secularism (*laïcité*), the Republic adapted it into the characteristics of its own country and the needs of the period, namely the requirements of the nation-building project. Eventually, secularism placed in the Constitution as an essential condition of democracy in 1937 with a so-called securing statement: '*no interference whatsoever of sacred religious feelings in state affairs and politics*' (cited in Parrilli, 2018:19), however, manifested an institutionalised state control over religion along with the Turkish Islamic nation-building process (Dressler, 2010; Göle, 2010; Köse, 2013).

It is in this context, religion became 'a matter of national security' (Bruinessen, 2018:2) and subsequently, safeguarding of secularism left to the Turkish military due to its justified role as the guardian of national values (Dressler, 2010:132-133). The role Turkish Military plays in Turkish politics is a well-known reality as the military whenever considered 'necessary', conducted a coup, took over the government and legitimised it under protecting Turkish democracy. Hence, the history of the Republic filled with military coups and memorandums intruding into Turkish political life.

One of these military coups took place in 1980 left a significant mark on the social and political life until the present. Before the coup, in the 1970s, the leftist political movement caught momentum and a tension raised between far-right and leftist groups. On 12 September, the National Security Council declared a coup d'état and martial law throughout the country, revoked the parliament and the government, cancelled the Constitution and banned all political parties and organisations. It was the third and the bloodiest coup in Turkey history, led to most brutal and traumatic events; as a result, 50 were executed, 500 thousand arrested, hundreds died in prisons due to brutal treatment and widespread torture, and 30 thousand went abroad as political refugees (Massicard, 2007; Zürcher, 2004).

Closing all political parties and imprisoning political activists, the military intended to design de-politicisation later furnished with Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Vorhoff, 2003). While Turkishness endorsed against Kurdish activism, Islam was promoted 'as an antidote to socialism' (Akdemir, 2016:72). With the rise of Islamic sentiment fostered by the military and civilian authorities (Şahin, 2005), the Islamisation of the public sphere accelerated in the post-1980. Therefore, the expansion of Diyanet in the 1980s is not surprising as political Islam has become a vital role player in Turkish politics after the military coup (Bruinessen, 2018; Dressler, 2010). Subsequently, religious lessons which impose 'Turkish Islam' became compulsory, and new textbooks containing passages that were marginalising Alevism produced by Sunni nationalists (Bruinessen, 2018). These offensive post-1980 policies against Alevis were not limited to religious education, also accompanied by building mosques in Alevi villages and appointing imams, even though there was no one praying in those mosques. This period continued with the exile of Alevi teachers and other civil servants with their families from their regions to ease the assimilation policies. Dersim, as the central region of Alevi Kurds, was the most affected region from exiles of native teachers.

As mentioned before, Alevi history manifests a historical phobia against Alevis that feed by the maintenance of a Sunni-Turk official identity. It is 'Ale-

vi phobia' that defines an Alevi opposition has always been existed but never named in Turkey. Alevi phobia represents a widespread 'hate speech' and prejudices against Alevis in society, labelled them as 'enemies of the state and religion' accompanied by other kinds of insulting accusations (Karakaya-Stump, 2013). One particular derogatory phrase, '*mum söndü*' (blowing out the candles) is a striking example, related to the fact that when outsiders came, Alevis had to switch off the light (blowing out the candles in that period) to hide their cem rituals. This notorious insult accuses Alevis of sexual impropriety in cem gatherings that are not open to outsiders, as Alevi men and women worship together in contrast with Sunni tradition (Collins, 2001; Tas, 2016). It is due to the way of worshipping secretly, Alevis labelled as 'impure'. Accompanied by official discrimination, these feelings and attitudes that aim to exclude Alevis from social, economic and political life, are sometimes empowered radical Islamist groups to impose mass violence against them. There is a long history of cruelty towards Alevis in the Republic era sometimes perpetrated by military forces (Koçgiri-1921 and Dersim-1938) but often by radical (or nationalist) Islamists civilian groups; Elbistan (1967), Maraş (1978), Malatya (1978), Çorum (1980) and Sivas (1993). The mutual point of all Alevi massacres is that the perpetrators were not punished and commemorations have not been allowed in Turkey until recently.

Alevi Kurds and the Republic

The history of minorities in Turkey marked with their 'troubled relationship' with the state; throughout history, minority groups experienced systematic persecution and mass violence that was not only targeted those officially recognised ethnoreligious minorities (such as Armenians, Greeks and Jews) but also those have not been recognised, such as Alevis and Kurds (Gunes, 2020:72). In general, both groups (Alevis and Kurds) do not meet the 'ideal' form of citizenship that built on the Turkish-Islamic ethos, therefore, took their share from official discrimination, oppression and violence severely. Muslim Kurds due to their religious belonging, and Alevi Turks due to their ethnic belonging, to some extent, affiliated themselves with the Turkish and Muslim majority. However, Alevi Kurds remained in the most disadvantaged position that does fit into ethnic and religious characteristics of the dominant identity; therefore, experienced double discrimination.

Gültekin defines Kurdish Alevi identity through the intersection of 'cultural boundaries between Alevism and Kurdishness', which forms 'a unique cultural identity' that 'new socio-political and ethnoreligious aspects' involve

(2019:5). Alevi Kurds, though have many similarities with other Alevi communities, their socio-religious organisations, worshipping practices, myths and beliefs show substantial differences. Similarly, they show significant cultural differences with other Kurdish communities. Their 'twice minority' position, also determined ideological-political disagreements with both Kurdish and Alevi population, for example, they experienced a separation with Islamist Kurds on secularism and with Alevi Turks on nationalism (Köse, 2013).

Comparing Turkish speaking, Turkmen origin Alevis that constitutes the majority of Alevi population in Turkey (Andrews & Benninghaus, 1989), Kurmanji and Zazaki (regionally named Kırmanç or Dımılı) speaking Alevi Kurds⁵ practised the project of centralisation and homogenisation entirely different. Less affected by the Turkish Islamic ethos due to politically 'oppositional' characteristics and geographical positioning, Alevi Kurds more subjected to oppression and violence. They experienced mass massacres during the first periods of the Turkish Republic, which justified by the government as military campaigns against local rebellions. Koçgiri (1921) and Dersim (1937-38) were mass killings of local people linked with tribal ties determining their Alevi and Kurdish identity. Here, a particular attention is given to Dersim due to its central importance for Alevi Kurds.

Dersim is the only place in Turkey, where Alevi Kurds constitute the majority. It is also an essential place for Alevism because of its cultural geography where traditional religious institutions (Ocaks) concentrated. Ocak, literally hearth, defines extended family claimed to be descended from a holy lineage. They are leadership institutions of Kurdish Alevism in which religious knowledge is passed down through these families who were responsible for the religious and social leadership of the community. Alevism traditionally proceeded on a chain of spiritual ties between followers and ocaks they affiliated. Therefore, Dersim formed a central reference point for religious cosmology and practices as all sacred lineages of Alevi Kurds claim ancestral ties with Dersim (Gültekin, 2019). However, implications of Turkish Islamic ethos deliberately excluded Dersim-centered links from official discourses due to its ethnoreligious domination. Over the last decade, scholars increasingly highlight the vital role cultural geography of Dersim has played in the creation and transmission of Kızılbaş Alevi culture and heritage, which destroyed significantly after 1937-38 massacres (see Çem, 2000; Deniz, 2019; Gezik & Özcan, 2013; Gültekin, 2019).

5 - The definition I used here 'Zazaki speaking Kurds' is a debated matter. While some argue that Zazaki is a dialect of the Kurdish language, others claim that Zazaki and Kurdish are different languages. Those who consider Zazaki as a different language with its own dialects, consider Zazas as a unique form of ethnic belonging consists of Alevi and Sunni population and distinguish it from Kurds and Turks. These different approaches to Zazaki and accordingly Zazas manifest a differentiation in political positionality in regards to the Kurdish identity movement.

In the first period of nation-building process that required social engineering to homogenise the multi-cultural Anatolia, Dersim took attention because of its long history of opposition to official authority. It has been indicated that Dersim remained as a place of historical resistance since the Seljuk, the Turkish states could not get authority over Dersim until 1937 (Bruinessen, 1997a; McDowall, 2004). According to Bruinessen, 'Dersim was the last part of Turkey that had not been effectively brought under central government control' (1997a:145). Dersim region, therefore, was far from fitting under the framework of new 'modern' nation-state in every sense, seen as an 'ill' legacy transferred from the Ottoman. In an official report of the Interior Ministry, Dersim called as 'abscess' (*çiban*) that the government 'would have to operate upon in order to prevent worse pain' (Halli, 1972 cited in Bruinessen, 1997b:4).

The Republic began to create a new future for Dersim by first introducing two new laws particular to Dersim. The first was the 1934 Resettlement Law (*İskan Kanunu*), signalling the beginning of the Turkification process. The Resettlement Law aimed to legitimise the depopulation of regions for political and military reasons. The second was the Law on Administration of the Tunceli Province (*Tunceli Vilayetinin İdaresi Hakkında Kanun*), passed in 1935, commonly known as Tunceli Law (*Tunceli Kanunu*). Dersim was a historical name of vast geography in Eastern Anatolia, however, with the Tunceli Law, its border changed significantly; northern part now sat within the Erzincan Province, and eastern and southern regions became parts of Bingöl and Elazığ provinces, and the central Dersim was renamed 'Tunceli' (Kieser, 2011; Lundgren, 2007). 'Dersim' is now used as a synonym for Tunceli, particularly to express political opposition against the Turkish state.

However, the Tunceli Law was not limited to geographical regulations; the region became ruled by a military governor and entered upon the state of emergency, therefore, seen as the beginning of the military campaign that followed. The government had announced it as a 'disciplinary campaign' implemented to address the civilisation and Turkification operation and to gain control of the region where Alevi Kurds avoided building a relationship with the authority (Bruinessen, 1997a; Leezenberg, 2003; McDowall, 2004). The military campaign justified as a 'civilisation mission' requiring social engineering of the 'enlightenment vision' through control and education of the indigenous people (Bozdoğan & Kasaba, 1997; Torne, 2015) as praised by the press of the time. For example, one particular headline of a newspaper on 17 September 1937 read; 'the primitive people living here for centuries, now getting the light of civilisation' (Baran, 2014).

However, what this civilisation campaign meant for Dersimis was consecutive massacres, a pogrom in a period from 1937 to 1938. As a result, estimated 40,000 civilians killed, and thousands deported by military forces. The massacres were the most brutal and traumatic mass killings since the foundation of the Republic. During the atrocity, Dersimi civilians suffered severe human right abuses; villages were bombed by army aircraft, people including women and children who hid in the caves were poisoned with gas and many other speechless brutalities toward women, girls and children (Aksoy, 2020; Bruinessen, 1994). However, despite the scale of these brutalities, none of the involved officers was punished (Kieser, 2011; McDowall, 2004). On the contrary, as the perpetrators were the government military forces, many of the individuals given the title of national heroes, and airports, high roads, schools and hospitals named in their honour.

One of these heroes famous for her ‘successful’ attack to Dersim by bombing villages and mountains, was Sabiha Gökçen, the adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the first women warplane pilot in Turkey. Due to her contribution to the military campaign in Dersim, various public places named in her honour, even in recent years, her name given to the second airport in Istanbul. In an interview when explaining her memories from the military, Gökçen talks about the Dersim operation days with a pride: ‘You throw the bombs first, then when you see a live target, switch to the machine gun. I cannot forget the excitement of the first bombardment in Dersim⁶. Such shockingly evident and offensive expression reveals the level of official hostility towards Alevi Kurds.

That period was one of the very first events caused a certain distinction between Alevi Kurds and the Turkish Republic. The trauma of this atrocity left an open wound in the collective memory of Alevi Kurds and transmitted across generations (Celik, 2011). The systematic killings of large tribal families and the level of brutalities as manifested genocidal massacres, when began publicly discussed, created a challenge about the definition of what happened in Dersim. There has been a long-lasting debate whether the continuous mass killings in the period between March 1937 to September 1938 was genocide or not, as it was a systematic destruction of Alevi Kurd tribes from seven to seventy (Boztaş, 2015; Bruinessen, 1997a; Hanoglu, 2015).

Moreover, since then, Dersim Alevis experienced displacement and exile waves from their hometown with many occasions. A significant number of extended families exiled before and after the massacres in 1937-38; a large number of local teachers and other civil servants exiled with their families in 1980s

6 - Cited in ‘Sabiha Gökçen, Dersim’i bombaladı mı?’ Oral Çalışlar, Radikal, 22/12/2012

following the military coup; and more recently, a noticeable number of villages evacuated and settlers ordered to leave along with the village and forest burnings in the 1994 (Bruinessen, 1995; Jongerden, de Vos, & van Etten, 2007; Van Etten, Jongerden, de Vos, Klaasse, & van Hoeve, 2008).

The destruction of Dersim significantly affected the social and religious organisation of Alevi Kurds due to its central position maintained through traditional religious institutions (Gültekin, 2019). Moreover, that period marked with forced migration was the first internal migration experience of Alevis that followed by a large rural-urban migration since the 1960s in which social and spatial changes commenced a structural transformation of Alevism that later advanced with the international migration.

However, Dersim was not the only atrocity targeted Alevi Kurds. What distinguishes genocidal massacres of Dersim from the others was that the massacre was perpetrated by the state. Alevis in general, but particularly Alevi Kurds, frequently attacked by radical nationalist and Islamists in many occasions. One of these massacres took place in Maraş province (officially Kahraman Maraş) in southern Turkey, where Alevi Kurds suffered a brutal massacre in 1978. It was a planned murder of Alevis in a week from 19-26 December 1978 since the doors of Alevi houses marked with a red symbol weeks before the attack. The massacre lasted one week, 111 were killed, 176 were injured, and 552 houses and 289 workplaces were destroyed (Jongerden, 2003:84; Sinclair-Webb, 2003). After the massacre Alevis started to move neighbourhood cities such as Mersin or Adana, later many turned their way towards Europe.

Considering the consequences of massacres, 1980 coup and rapid urbanisation, Mutluer(2016) describes Alevi collective memory through feelings of both the loss of social and economic security and that of political trust in the state. These collective feelings were what determined their intention to migrate abroad, dominantly to the Western European countries. Now estimated 1.5 million Alevis mostly Alevi Kurds live in more than 17 countries across Europe.

Conclusion

This article tried to give a brief look into Alevis in Turkey through the most crucial occasions that marked the historical trajectory of Alevism. However, understanding the long journey of Alevis require a more detailed account with particular attention to three more periods that could not have a place within the scope of this article. The first is urban migration that oriented the tradition-

onal rural background of Alevi communities into the urban sphere and transformed Alevis into an open community. The second is the Sivas Massacre that significantly influenced the mobilisation of Alevis all over the world and stimulated the 'Alevi revival'. The third is the expansion and electoral successes of Sunni Islamic party AKP in Turkey that conveyed Alevi claims for recognition into a new phase.

What this article tried to reveal is that the characteristics of Turkish democracy and so-called secularism, whether governed by nationalists or Islamists, never maintained an Alevi-friendly atmosphere that meets their claims for equal citizenship and freedom of religion. The historical background of Alevis that consist of struggling for survival, and of suffering discrimination, and threat extermination from radical Islamists, is crucial for understanding the formation of the Alevi population. This context manifesting social, political and economic insecurity became the principal reason pushed Alevis to move abroad.

Here, I will consider migration as the third rupture in the historical trajectory of Alevism due to its significant impact on the social organisation of Alevi communities as well as ritual practices. The spatial and functional changes that significantly affected social and religious institutions and practices, though provoked by the rural-urban migration, shifted and ripened in the diaspora. As a consequence, Alevism adopted a transnational scope that influences the religious and political atmosphere of Alevis all over the world and in Turkey.

Migration transformed Alevis from being an oppressed faith minority into a diasporic group able to access freedom of religion and collective action -which they never had in Turkey. They became visible with political action in the diaspora, as in the last two decades, new Alevi organisations and associations have been built all over the world dealing with the political issues of the Alevi communities. The financial and political power gained simultaneously with institutional developments, made Europe the worldwide organisational centre for Alevism. Establishment of national federations that organised under the umbrella of European Alevi Confederation connect more than 250 Alevi associations in European countries. The national federations that represent Alevi populations in their host countries also create a power to campaign for recognition in Turkey and the international arena, particularly in the European Union and Parliament. As a result of these lobbying activities of the transnational Alevi institutions, Alevi demands and their disadvantaged situation in Turkey constitute a critical element in the EU negotiations of Turkey, placed in the EU reports concerning Turkey's progress on participation to the EU.

Moreover, while their claim for recognition is still an ongoing struggle in Turkey, in six countries of Western Europe Alevism recognised officially, and in some of them such as Germany and the UK, Alevism increasingly gains a place in the curriculums of public schools. Therefore, the transformation of Alevism and Alevi communities that remodelled in the diaspora and its influence on Turkey Alevis needs further attention.

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