Religion in Laic Turkey: The Case of Alevis

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The end of the Ottoman Empire gave way to the birth of Turkey as a country, which had to forge an identity for itself and unify different communities living in the territory. The reforms and laicization process fulfilled this function over a majorly Sunni Muslim population. This process gave religious minority groups in Turkey the chance to live freely, among them the Alevis, who have their own traditions and customs. Throughout history, the coexistence of the Sunni majority and the Alevis has resulted in multiple conflicts, which today the Turkish government is endeavouring to overcome. Nevertheless, social awareness must be advanced in order to solve problems both politically and on a daily basis.

Ziya Gökalp (1877-1924), who is considered the founder of Turkish nationalism, said that in times of great political disasters national feeling gains utmost ascendancy (quoted by Cagaptay, 2006:8). This was during the period when Turkish nationalism discovered Turkishness and the notion of Turks sharing a common past and territory (Anatolia and Thrace) spread among the Turkish Muslim ethnie[1] of the Empire. It can be said that the idea of newborn nationalism, which includes Islam, was affected by outside aggression. In the last decades of the Empire, when it was at its weakest, the people of Anatolia united around religious identity, i.e. Islam, against hostile Christian countries. The plans of western states to invade Anatolia after the First World War brought about the transformation of the Turkish Muslim ethnie into a national community.

After the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922), a new form of state began to be established that required the creation of an identity. During the Ottoman Empire, it was not possible to express any concrete concept of identity or citizenship. All people living under the sovereignty of the Empire were the subjects (*teb'a*) of the Sultan. According to the Millet System, all religious groups were recognised by the law and had their own law in the Ottoman period; consequently, this heterogeneity made the religious groups relatively free within their own homogeneity. After the dissolution of the

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1. Anthony Smith defines ethnie as a pre-modern ethno-religious community "that possesses a common ancestry, myths and historical memories, a shared culture, a link to a historic territory and some measure of solidarity."

Ottoman Empire, there was nothing to encourage people to mobilise and identify themselves other than religion.

In order to create a new identity, the ruling group (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his companions) sought to embed the concept of Turkishness in the minds of citizens in the newborn Republic. But the idea of new nationalism started to be owned by the Muslim ethnie and, accordingly, they became the dominant group. In order to define Turkishness, religion (in other words, Sunni Islam) was used as an important component and this favoured Muslims in society.

Sunni Islam is distinguished because of the sociological reality of Turkish society. If one mentions Islam in Turkey, it is understood as Sunni Islam almost without exception. As it is always said, the "Republic of Turkey is a laic state with its 99% Muslim society." This is true but one thing has always been denied: this 99% does not share the same set of beliefs. Muslims here are not just those who follow the Sunni Islamic order but also include the Alevis, who make up a significant part of this percentage. With the cultural dominance of Sunni Islam in Turkey, the Alevis have been forgotten and have not been officially recognised by the state.

The Establishment of the Laic Republic

The Ottoman Empire used to consist of different confessional communities and, out of necessity, the Empire developed its own system called the Millet System. Under the sovereignty of the Empire, apart from Muslim subjects, there were three non-Muslim Millets: Greek-Orthodox, Jews and Armenians. According to this system, the Millets were the autonomous and self-administering communities who were required to obey the rules and pay a special tax, which formed an important portion of

Ottoman state revenue. Moreover, they were allowed to practise their religion according to their own customs. They were free to establish their own education system and have power of control over their social and legal affairs, such as civil law, including marriage, family law, inheritance and inter-community affairs (Atasoy, 2009:38). In short, each community was accustomed to living under its own legal and cultural system.

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The first Constitution was declared in 1921 during the Turkish War of Independence, without any definition of a type of state but asserting that the new government did not recognise the Ottoman Dynasty or its government. The war ended with victory for the Turks, and the Treaty of Lausanne, important to the minority issue as the basic document on the subject, was signed in order to officially end the war. According to the Treaty, as previously mentioned, the non-Muslim Millets of the former Ottoman Empire were the new official minorities of the new state. It can be argued that religion was chosen as the main component of being a minority because of the lack of any national awareness. For instance, the Greek people under Ottoman sovereignty were distinguished by their Orthodox rather than their Greek identity. As quoted by Caglar Enneli (in Dönmez, 2010: 145), according to Rifat N. Bali, minorities were granted a significant number of positive rights under the Treaty of Lausanne, as they had been during the Ottoman Empire within the Millet System.

While the new official structure was being formed, society was also undergoing sociological transformation. The non-Muslim Millets were recognised as the minorities and Muslim

subjects were predominantly a majority in society. Furthermore, they had constitutional support after the Constitution of 1924, which stated in article 2 that "The religion of the state is Islam, the official language is Turkish and the capital is Ankara." However, the government intended to secularise the form of the Republic and isolate it from the influence of Islam and Islamic tradition.

The revolution of laicization started with social life. The legislative, constitutional and social changes were applied in the same year as the new Constitution.

Before the new Constitution, the Islamic seminaries (*medreses*) were closed and most importantly the Caliphate was abolished in order to prevent any possible obstacle to reform. The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey was opened to control religious affairs but it became the focus of critics who questioned laicism, which will be examined later. After the Constitution, the reform process continued with the shift into "modern" westernised clothes, the annulment of Shari'a (Islamic) Courts, the approval of a secular civil code on the issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption, the abandonment of the Arabic alphabet, and the change of weekly holidays from Fridays to Saturdays and Sundays. But the most considerable aspects concerned the elimination of a "state religion" from article 2 in 1928 and the inclusion of "secularism" in this article in 1937.

The Predominance of Islam

Article 88 of the Turkish Constitution of 1924 states: "The name Turk, as a political term, shall be understood to include all citizens of the Turkish Republic, without a distinction of, or reference to, race or religion. Every child born in Turkey, or in a foreign land of a Turkish father; any person whose father is a foreigner

settled in Turkey, who resides in Turkey, and who chooses upon attaining the age of twenty to become a Turkish subject; and any individual who acquires Turkish nationality by naturalization in conformity with the law, is a Turk. Turkish citizenship may be forfeited or lost in certain circumstances specified by law."

The two aforementioned articles caused confusion because, although being a Turk is not related to being Muslim as article 88 states, why was Islam mentioned as the state religion in article 2 for more than half a decade? While the arguments about the identity components of a Turk were on the agenda, the article had been changed and the part concerning *state religion* was excluded. However, it did not resolve the confusion over the usage of the word Turk. For instance, throughout the 1930s, Turk was generally used instead of Muslim for immigrants who until a few months before would have been registered as Muslims. Soner Cagaptay supported this idea with a few examples (2006: 78-83). A document dated 4th March 1933 stated that "23 Turks will be granted Turkish citizenship" and, by late 1933, Turk was used more often. For example, a decree on 14th April 1933 stated that "277 Turks from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania would be naturalized." Another document stipulated on 5th August 1933 that "165 Turks from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania will be given Turkish citizenship." According to government archives, it is clear that Muslims living in the territories of the collapsed Ottoman Empire were described as Turks.

Moreover, the confusion and the idea of creating a Turkish-Muslim society caused a number of unfair applications in some mutual agreements. For instance, in 1936, an immigration treaty was signed with Romania and stated that "the Muslim-Turkish population living in Dobrudja" would be allowed to immigrate to Turkey. The specific description of the Muslim-Turkish population excluded the Greek-Orthodox Gagavuz Turks from the emi-

gration framework. The government favoured the Muslim community even though they were all Turks.

For a long time, "identity" discussions seemed to vanish but the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis changed the situation with an increase of Islamic predominance over society. During the 1980s, Süleyman Yalçýn referred to the cultural nationalism in which culture used to mean religion. The new concept of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis consists of nationalism and Islam (meaning Sunni Islam) as the basic components for combining the reorganisation of the public space with a generic understanding of the Islamic religion. With the spread of the Muslim citizen concept, individuals started to describe themselves with reference to the new Islamic values and, accordingly, the rest of society not living as Muslims started to be excluded.

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Since the 1980s, with the conceptualisation of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, it has been possible to talk of a significant predominance of Sunni Islam in Turkish identity. Since then the number of mosques, courses on the Quran and special vocational schools (*Ýmam Hatip Liseleri*) has increased and political Islam has not only been one of the important Turkish policies but a significant component of all policies. For instance, in 1983 the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs was set up under the authorisation of the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey in order to unify the Turks who are living abroad within a framework of Sunni-Islamic religious identity, as if it were an obligatory requirement of being a Turk.

After the 1990s, the Islamist movements developed and promoted an alternative national identity that defines the nation as an essentially Ottoman Islamic civilisation, in contrast to the official West-oriented laic identity of the nation (Çýnar, 2005: 30). Since then, a dispute has developed between laicists and Islamists. For instance, the secular vantage point has characterised Islam as the traditional, the uneducated, the backward, and the lower class. Therefore, within the secularist discourse, Islam and secularism, Islam and modernity, Islam and westernism cannot go together. The presence of one is predicated on the absence of the other. Secularism is public, Islam private; secularism is knowledge, Islam is belief; secularism is modern, Islam is traditional; secularism is urban, Islam is rural; secularism is progress, Islam is reactionary (*irtica*); secularism is universal, Islam is particular (Çýnar, 2005: 47). In contrast, the republican laics were blamed for undermining Turkish civilisation, which was referred to as being Turkey's own Ottoman-Islamic civilisation as the true source of Turkish national identity (Çýnar, 2005: 160).

In June 2001, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), which was the continuation of the banned Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi,* the member of the coalition government in the 1990s), was banned by the Constitutional Court and party members divided into two groups in order to establish two different political parties and, under the leadership of the current Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoðan, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkýnma Partisi, AKP*) was established in August 2001. After 15 months the first elections had been held and the AKP government era started. Today, the 61st Turkish and 4th AKP government is in power in Turkey.

The AKP has been established with new policies, such as abandoning the National View (*Milli Görüº*), which reflects a nationalistic-religious vision and has been the key concept

in the ideology of Islamist parties in Turkey (Çakoglu and Rubin 2006: 63). Meanwhile, the party chairman, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, declared the "conservative democratic" identity of the AKP.[2] However, since its establishment, the party has been considered as the pro-Islamist/Islamist[3] party with Islam-sensitive policies (Atasoy, 2009: 5).

Secular society always has doubts about the party; indeed, it has always been the centre of discussions for undermining the laic structure of the Republic. For instance, because of the party's Islamic discourses and being the centre of anti-secularist activities, the Chief Prosecutor applied to the Constitutional Court in 2008 in order to close down the party and disqualify 71 party members from politics.[4] However, the closure proposal was rejected and, instead, half of the treasury's financial support was cut.

The AKP has the support of half of Turkey but discussions about Islamist discourses meet with the displeasure of the secular side of the state.

A Different Interpretation of Islam: Alevism

"Currently and also throughout history, Islam has been understood as Sunni Islam in the Republic of Turkey."[5]

Since the beginning of the Republic, Islam has meant a unique type of belief which serves only Sunni Islam. The use of Islam in legal implementations referred to Sunni Muslims who go to mosques in order to practise their religious rituals, need imams in order to lead the community in a religious ritual, celebrate Ramadan, pray five times a day and so on. However, Alevis, as distinct from Sunnis, do not have the same ritualistic needs in order to practise their belief. So who are the Alevis? What are the main differences between Alevis and Sunnis? What do they believe and how do they practise their religion?

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Just as it is not possible to think about a unique form of Islam, it is also not possible to think about a unique form of Alevism. The most significant difference comes from ethnic origin, but on this it will be beneficial to make a linguistic point which includes a distinction between Turkish and other languages. In Turkish, both an Alevi of Anatolian origin and an Alawi of Arab origin are called Alevi without any difference, and, in order to differentiate one from the other, the words Nusayri or Arab Alevi are used for an Alawi, which is understood as a discriminatory action that will be examined later. For instance, if one uses the term Alevi, it means all Alevis and Alawis in Turkey regardless of any difference with reference to their origin. However, in our study, Alawis will be referred to as Nusayris *just to differentiate* them from Anatolian Alevis.

Just as the origin of the Alevis and the Nusayris is different, the historical evolution also has a clear distinction. Before the specific definitions of Alevi beliefs and rituals, it will

2. Fatma Sibel, "AKP'nin Yeni Zarfý", *Radikal*, 26th December 2003, http://www.radikal.com.tr

3. Amberin Zaman, "Erdogan's Islamist Party Wins Turkey's Election", *The Telegraph*, 23rd July 2007, http://www.telegraph.co.uk

4. "AKP Savunmasýný Verdi", *Hürriyet*, 16th June 2008, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr

5. Mustafa Şen, Associate Professor, Doctor in Sociology, Middle East Technical University (Ankara), personal interview, 14th April 2011.

be beneficial to briefly explain their historical background.

During the immigration flows of nomadic Turkmen tribes from Central Asia to the West, the groups advanced their traditional belief systems with different religious components by affecting the local belief systems along their route which starts from Khorasan and Iran, passes through Mesopotamia and arrives at Anatolia. These nomadic groups are called *Kýzýlbaþ* (literally, Red-Headed) as they were the followers of the Safavid Sufi order during the 15th and 16th centuries. They were called Red-Headed because of the red turbans worn by the army of Safavid Sultan Ismail and the similarity comes from the interaction between the Ismail Shia belief and Anatolian Alevism. This name is used in Turkey although it is not considered respectful.

On the other hand, the Nusayris originate in the territories of Yemen. Historically, the immigration flows headed to the north, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and to the southern borders of Turkey. As mentioned, the Nusayris faced discriminatory attitudes regarding their name, which comes from the best follower and the pupil of the 11th Twelvers, who was called Muhammad ibn Nusayr. As he was a significant person in the history of Alawism, the Alawis were called Nusayris and accused of being the followers of Muhammad ibn Nusayr, even of being non-believers.[6] Accordingly, use of the name Nusayri does not please Alawis but, as stated, it is commonly used in Turkey in order to make a distinction.

Ali Balkýz, the author and former Chairman of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, cites four different descriptions of Anatolian Alevism (Balkýz, 1999: 87). First, Alevism is the core of Islam and includes Allah, the Quran and *Ehl-i Beyt* (Ahl al-Bayt, which had meant the family, the people of the house, during pre-Islamic time, although after Islam it is used to refer to the family of the Prophet Muhammad). Second, it is the Anatolian perception of Islam. Third, it is a religion itself, which is affected by Islam. And fourth, it is a culture, a way of life and a philosophy, an approach with its Anatolian origin, which belongs to Shamanism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. They were blended together with its pre-Turkish-Anatolian culture and emerged in Anatolia despite the Arab pressure on the region.

Alevism generally refers to Islam, but it has its own rituals, customs and traditions. There are many differences between Sunni Islam and Alevism

Clearly, Alevism (apart from the third explanation) generally refers to Islam, but it has its own rituals, customs and traditions. There are many differences between Sunni Islam and Alevism. Moreover, it would also be wrong to think that Alevism is part of Shia Islam because even Alevism includes similarities to it from the Safavid time. Shia Islam cannot go beyond being a component of Anatolian Alevism just like the other religious systems.

While Sunnis believe in Allah as their God and Muhammad as their Prophet and repeat it in their Shahada (ᵃehadet), Alevis believe in the trinity of Allah-Muhammad-Ali, which is considered as their Shahada (Hacý Bektaþ Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfý Genel Merkezi, 2005: 29). As in Islam generally, the Alevis believe in four holy books which are the Torah, Psalms, Bible and Quran but the Quran has a different meaning for them. The Quran that Alevis believe in is called the Quran-e Natik (the Quran which was memorised by Caliphate Ali), which is seen as different from the Quran-e Samit (the

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6. Ahmet Özuðurlu, Arbiter of the Nusayri Community, personal interview, 18th April 2011.

Quran which was written by Caliphate Osman and the one that is being used) because they do not believe in the originality of Quran-e Samit.[7] Apart from a distinct belief in the Quran, the Alevis do not practise other basic Sunni Islamic rituals, such as Ramadan, prayers five times a day and special prayers on Friday. However, they do have their own practices. For instance, instead of Ramadan, they fast for 12 days during *Muharrem* and close the fasting period with a special dish which is called *Aºure*. It is a special sweet soup with many different ingredients, such as fruits, nuts and grains. In addition to the Fast of *Muharrem*, there is another type of fast called the Fast of *Hýzýr*, which is practised by people suffering for any reason in order to obtain relief. Personal moral purification plays a significant role in the fasts, which is why it is believed that telling anyone about the fast is inappropriate.

In Alevism, the form of God is quite different from the Sunni Islamic belief. The concept of a God figure that provokes fear does not exist and, consequently, they are not afraid of their God. According to their faith, every single person and all other creatures are part of God, so there are no limits between creator and creature and, accordingly, they have a questioning approach. Within this relationship, they do not believe in any reward (heaven) or punishment (hell) system which would come from God as a result of their obedience or disobedience (Hacý Bektaþ Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfý Genel Merkezi, 2005:30-31). A significant difference in Alevism is that they believe in reincarnation instead of death. Life has an immortal nature and the *can* (literally, soul) changes only its temporary possesser.

The best known Alevi ritual is the *cem* ceremony, which is not only a religious ceremony but also a social and a judgmental meeting. The *cem* ceremony is led by the *dede* (the spiritual leader of each Alevi community) in a place called the *cemevi* and they perform the *semah*, which can be described as a set of mystical and aesthetic body movements in rhythmic harmony performed by *semahçý* (semah dancers), accompanied by the *Zakir* (musical performers in *cem* rituals) playing the saz in order to be unified with God and purified from the material world.

Apart from a distinct belief in the Quran, the Alevis do not practise other basic Sunni Islamic rituals, such as Ramadan

Thus far, this article has tried to describe the basic differences between Alevism and Sunni Islam, but the most significant difference concerns the egalitarian structure of Alevism between men and women. While Sunni Islamic rituals are performed only by men, Alevi rituals and ceremonies are performed by both men and women. This is what makes Alevism "the belief of equality." For instance, as mentioned, the community can be led by a *dede*, who is a male figure, as the spiritual leader, while a woman can be an *ana* and perform the same functions as the *dede*. This specification of Alevism makes it more liberal than Sunni Islam.

On the other hand, the Nusayris are very different from Alevis and closer to the Sunni and Shia Muslims. The best way to explain this complexity is to use the expression that the Nusayris use for themselves, where Alawi probably refers to a Shia Muslim: "We are neither Alawi nor Sunni; we are both Alawi and Sunni."[8] This reference can be supported by their accounts of their historical scholars. For example, Said b. Ahmed b. Mekki en-nili

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7. Ercan Geçmez, Chairperson of the Hacý Bektaº Veli Anatolian Foundation, personal interview, 12th April 2011.
8. Ahmet Özuðurlu, personal interview, 18th April 2011.

el-Mueddib, who was one of the Shia authors, is said to be one of the most important Nusayri men of letters (Es-Salih, 2007:73). They possess the Shia authors, lecturers or men of letters as if they are also Alawis. This is one of many possible examples of how they compare themselves with the Shia Muslims.

Discrimination against Alevis[9]

It can be said that the Alevis have historically been faced with discriminatory attitudes. During the Ottoman Empire, under the Millet System they used to be included within Sunni Muslims. In the censuses of minorities of 1927 and 1935, the Islamic faith was considered as one religion, regardless of any differences.[10]

With urbanisation and domestic immigration flows, after the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s Alevi identity started to gain ground

Even the Alevis were disappointed by the censuses and the new regulation passed on 30th November 1925 on the closure of *tekkes*, dervish lodges and shrines (because this regulation caused not only the *cemevi* to be closed but also the *dede* to be disqualified from leading their community) and the opening of the Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.[11] This can be considered one of the basic components of the assimilation policy of the Republic (according to declarations made and the personal interviews carried

out). Meanwhile, other laicist initiatives also met with the approval of the Alevis, such as the new civil code and the egalitarian objectives of the government for men and women, strongly supported by the Alevis given their similarity with their own culture. Perhaps for these reasons it is possible to say that a secular Sunni Muslim feels closer to Alevism.[12]

With urbanisation and domestic immigration flows, after the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s Alevi identity started to gain ground (Dönmez, 2010: 23). During the transition from an agriculture-based society to an economically-developing society, the changes were significant for both sociological and cultural life. Within these changes, the Alevis, who used to live under poor economic and social conditions before, started to join the immigration flows to the provinces from their villages and consequently their system broke down. In the provinces, under the conditions of urban life, the traditional rituals were no longer sufficient or feasible. Furthermore, with the on-going trend of the aforementioned Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, adopted by the government after the 1980 coup d'état as an unofficial state policy, the predominance of Sunni Islamism regained its power with new initiatives, such as the obligatory religious ethics class during primary and secondary school, which is considered the second most important part of the assimilation policy (according to our interviews). With the increasing numbers of mosques[13] (Korkmaz, 2008: 46) all over the country and most significantly in Alevi settlements (Balký z, 1999: 131), the Alevis started to feel more psychological

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9. Alevis here refers to both Alevis and Nusayris.

10. For more information about religious minorities on the censuses, see Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, Oxon, Routledge, 2006, pp. 66-69.

11. Tamer Kaya, representative of Mersin Cemevi, personal interview, 19th April 2011.

12. Mustafa Şen, personal interview, 14th April 2011.

13. For more information about the numbers of the established mosques, see Yusuf Ziya Özcan, "A Quantitative Study of Mosques in Turkey", http://www.candundar.com.tr/_media/camilesme.pdf

pressure. On this point, it would be important to highlight the difference between the Alevis and the Nusayris. While the Alevis are completely against to the idea of having a mosque in their villages or towns, the Nusayris think that they have been discriminated against by not having mosques in their cities as a result of not being considered Muslims. According to them, if you are Muslim, you need a mosque to practise your rituals.[14] These two distinct opinions make the problem more complex to solve.

With the aim of "defending Islam from unbelievers" the attacks caused the death of many Alevis. Propaganda made people mobilise with the same intention

Apart from these laws, with the rising predominance of Islam, referring to Sunni Islam as it is always in Turkey, between the 1970s and the 1990s the Alevis were subjected to several attacks: in Kahramanmaraº (1978),[15] Malatya (1978),[16] Çorum (1980)[17] and most recently in Sivas (1993).[18] With the aim of "defending Islam from unbelievers" the attacks caused the death of many Alevis. Propaganda made people mobilise with the same intention. The Alevis were considered by fundamentalist Sunni Muslims as perverted groups that have no relation with Islam. In some of the fatwas it

was said that the Alevis are "required to kill."[19] For instance, during the Kahramanmaraº *Massacre* the imam told his community that "if a Muslim kills an Alevi, the reward will be equal to five Hajj pilgrimages."

Moreover, in Sivas, while the fourth annual Pir Sultan Abdal Festival was being held in the city, some local newspapers published counter-news against the events. The daily newspaper *Hakikat* asked on 2nd July 1993: "Were the Events of Pir Sultan Abdal organised with the purpose of promoting anti-religious activities? If so, we would say that we have already prepared ourselves for these kinds of attitudes. We will not let anyone sell snails in Muslim territories. We will never ever allow any propaganda against religion" (Balkýz, 1999: 267). While Otel Madýmak[20] in Sivas was burning, the same protesters were yelling that "the Republic was established here and will be demolished here too."[21] Consequently, 35 people died in a fire in the hotel. Recently, one of the demands was for the Otel Madýmak to be a museum for the Memorial Day (2nd July 1993).[22] However, they were refused[23] and instead were given a special place in a corner on one of the walls of the hotel bearing the names of those who died, including 35 people in the hotel and the two protesters outside.[24] This caused consternation among the Alevis,

14. Ahmet Özuðurlu, personal interview, 18th April 2011.

15. Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association Branch Office of Antalya, "Maraº Katliamý", http://www.psakd.org/maras_katliami.html

16. Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association Branch Office of Antalya, "Malatya Katliamý", http://www.psakd.org/malatya_katliami.html

17. Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association Branch Office of Antalya, "Çorum Katliamý", http://www.psakd.org/corum_katliami.html

18. Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association Branch Office of Antalya, "Sivas Madýmak Katliamý", http://www.psakd.org/sivas.html

19. Ali Balkýz, former Chairman of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation, personal interview, 12th April 2011.

20. The Otel Madýmak was the site of the Festival and the place where 35 people died in the fire started by the radical Islamists.

21. Sivas is one of provinces M.K. Atatürk and his colleagues organized a congress in 1919 to mobilise people against the hostile forces to wage the Turkish War of Independence.

22. Artýk "Yeter" Diyoruz, *Milliyet*, 22nd November 2010, http://www.milliyet.com.tr

23. Alevi Çalýþtayý Nihai Raporu Yayýnlandý, *Aktif Haber*, 31st March 2011, http://www.aktifhaber.com

24. 33 Aydýnla 2 Gösterici Ayný Panoda, *Ntvmsnbc*, 30th June 2011, http://www.ntvmsnbc.com

who were not content to be mentioned on the same list as the protesters in the same memorial and, accordingly, the Alevis declared their displeasure via newspapers, new meetings and, most importantly, during the commemoration ceremonies on 2nd July 2011.

The current government is the first to pay serious and official attention to the Alevi issue and planned a series of workshops to achieve a solution

It is important to emphasise that the current government is the first to pay serious and official attention to the Alevi issue and planned a series of workshops to achieve a solution, although the methodology and sincerity have been strongly disputed.[25] The responses to Alevi demands were discussed widely in society because the results were considered inefficient, such as the decision concerning the Otel Madýmak, the list of the names written on the wall, and the decision regarding the Presidency of Religious Affairs which states that all Alevis are welcome. That was certainly a positive approach to the issue but the problem is not about being welcome but concerns the functioning of the Presidency, the laws passed in favour of Sunni Muslims, the budget financed by the taxes of all citizens whether they are served or not and the Presidency having the highest budget of all government offices in recent years.[26] Moreover, within the results of the official reports of the workshops, they could not get a positive response regarding the *cemevi*, which is not considered a place of worship like mosques but remains a cultural foundation.

Moreover, the Alevis have been faced with discriminatory discourses from different levels of society. For example, a list of recommended books for primary and secondary school pupils published in 2007 by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Turkey included two sources which have discriminatory contents concerning the Alevis.[27] A daily newspaper called *Zaman* included a clue in one of its crosswords to a "perverted sect" to get the answer Alevism.[28] On two occasions, two different presenters insulted the Alevis on their television shows in 1995 and 2010 with inappropriate comments based on rumours.[29] Another example concerns the period before the 12th June 2011 elections in Turkey, when the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoðan, used the religious identity of Kemal Kýlýçdaroðlu, who is an Alevi and the leader of the Republican People's Party (the major opposition party), as a political tool, which upset the Alevis.[30] Furthermore, the President of the Republic, Abdullah Gül, once mentioned in a speech that "we have assigned rectors to the universities from Alevi communities."[31] Even though these discourses would be considered well-intentioned, the awareness of religious identity may cause misunderstandings among the target groups and can hardly be considered reasonable in a modern and laic structure.

25 Mustafa Şen, personal interview, 14th April 2011.

26 Can Dündar, "Sayýyla Kendine Gelmek", *Milliyet*, 21st June 2007, http://www.milliyet.com.tr.

27 Nergis Demirkaya, "Taner ve Seyfettin'e Alevilerden Tepki", *Sabah*, 13th February 2007, http://www.sabah.com.tr.

28 "Erdoðan'dan Skandal Savunma", *Milliyet*, 21st January 2011, http://www.milliyet.com.tr.

29 Yeni Haber, "Güner Ümit Konustu", *Sabah*, 8th October 2011, http://www.sabah.com.tr.

30 ªenol Kaluç, "Erdoðan, Kýlýçdaroglu ve Alevilere Dair", *Taraf*, 7th June 2011, http://www.taraf.com.tr.

31 Ýsmet Berkan, "Gül: Haksýzlýk Edilmesin Alevi Rektör de CHP'li Rektör de Atadým", *Hürriyet*, 7th November 2010, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr.

Alevi Meeting (Didem Doganyilmaz).

Conclusion

Since its establishment, the Republic of Turkey has had an unstable history with regards to Islamic discussions. First, laicization had been completed and religion was taken under the control of the state, but then Turkishness was directly related with Sunni Islam as if it were the basic component of Turkish identity.

As mentioned, the Alevis benefitted from the laicist initiatives of the Republic as they would be released from the psychological pressure of the mostly Sunni Muslim society. Accordingly, the predominance of Islamic identity in society both during the first years of the Republic and after the 1970s had caused concerns among the Alevis. For instance, when one takes into account the dates of the attacks on the Alevis and the re-awaking of Islamic identity as a component of Turkish identity, it is possible to see the simultaneity. The increased awareness of Islamic identity, instead of a purely Turkish identity regardless of any religious component, caused more discussions, and with the interaction between the Alevis and the Sunni majority as a result of urbanisation the problem peaked with the attacks in the cities where religious diversities are more significant.

Today the Alevis are asking for their rights in order to be considered as equal citizens with the majority. They want to be recognised by the state with their *dedes* or *anas*, with their *cemevis* and with other cultural values. To achieve their aims, they are mobilising democratically, making official declarations, meeting all over the country and reporting results and, most importantly, they work in collaboration with the state. This collaborative endeavour certainly did not yield concrete positive results regarding Alevi demands, but the first initiative is still significant. Undoubtedly, the Alevis will keep making their demands on the state but it is also important to emphasise that, apart from the state implementations, social awareness will play a significant role in finding a solution. For instance, according to the project entitled Discrimination in Turkey: Within the Alevi Perception 2010, which has been updated through the cooperation between the Middle East Technical University of Ankara and Alevi Foundations with quantitative research methods all over the country, the Alevis, as the sample, mentioned that they believe it is possible to resolve discrimination with the help of social communities (80%) and NGOs (75%) by awakening social awareness and with the help of the state (71.1%). As we can see, the Alevi community believes in the state policies but the role of the social communities is considered more important than anything because the problem can be solved from below by embedding the idea of equality in society with the support of state discourses and implementations.

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