

THE NATION CONTESTED: ALEVI IDENTITY AS A RESPONSE TO TURKISH NATIONALISM

SAMUEL WATTERS, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY (2015)

I. INTRODUCTION

A sense of anguish had replaced the exuberance typical of the heart of the İstanbul district Beşiktaş. Streets that normally bustled with lively commotion sulked beneath banners, mourning martyrs, and decrying complacency. The football matches and boisterous cheers that usually roared from nearby bars drowned under the cries of protestors calling on the Turkish state to recognize and account for massacres that have occurred throughout its history. Although the police officers surrounding this protest only observed silently, violent clashes erupted between protestors and security forces elsewhere in the city.¹ The protests across İstanbul and the rest of Turkey on that hot July day commemorated the Sivas massacre, a 1993 incident in which thirty-seven individuals—most of whom were Alevi intellectuals and artists—perished in a hotel set on fire by a fundamentalist Sunni mob during an Alevi cultural festival.²

Only a short walk from this tense protest, however, I encountered a strikingly different portrayal of relations between the Turkish state and the Alevi population. At the top of a steep hill in a nearby park stood a nondescript building, its presence revealed only by an occasional stream of people passing through its doors or a small group of children playing in its courtyard. Conversations with local residents taught me that the modest building was a *cemevi*, a house of worship and center of community organizing for Alevi communities. While its plain exterior and lack of minarets distinguished the *cemevi* from the grandiose mosques found across the city, it was its interior that would truly impress upon me the gulf separating Alevism from the Sunni Islam observed by the majority of the Turkish population and the complicated relationship between the Turkish state and the Alevi population. Alongside portraits of the religious figures Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli hung a portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey.³ Having witnessed the fiery protests on the anniversary of the Sivas massacre, this

reverence for a figure so central to the Turkish state struck me as a seeming contradiction.

Indeed, the Alevi population occupies a perplexing place in modern Turkey. An estimated twenty percent of the population, the Alevis comprise the second largest religious community in Turkey after Sunni Muslims and one of its largest minorities, alongside the Kurds.⁴ Despite the large proportion of the population that adheres to Alevism, the beliefs and practices of the Sunni majority sharply diverge from those of the Alevi population. Whereas Sunni practitioners pray separated by gender in mosques led by imams trained by the state, Alevi men and women pray alongside one another in *cemevis* under the leadership of the *dede* (literally “grandfather”), a figure determined by familial lineages of spiritual authority.⁵ Beyond these forms of worship, Alevis revere a number of Shi’i and Sufi figures not recognized in Sunni Islam, such as Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli, and disregard many of the rituals and traditions held sacred by Sunni Muslims, such as the daily prayers and pilgrimage to Mecca.⁶ Alevis often attribute these differences to the emphasis Alevism places on the allegorical and hidden dimensions of Islam, rather than the legalistic and literal Sunni tradition.⁷ As a result of these differences, the position of Alevism within Islam has proven controversial, with some even contending that it is a separate religion.⁸

These religious divisions have inspired political tensions. As one of the largest groups to migrate from Anatolia to the cities of western Turkey, Alevis have grown increasingly visible in the country’s public and political life in recent decades. This greater presence in Turkish society, coupled with the emergence of the Alevi revival movement in the 1980s, has exacerbated historical tensions between the Alevi population and the state that stretch back into the Ottoman period as Alevis demand official recognition and accommodation similar to those received by Sunni Islam.⁹ Due to increased pressure from the secular opposition and the European Union in addition to the Alevi revival movement itself, the Turkish state

has haltingly sought rapprochement with the Alevi population, first in 2007 with the “Alevi Opening,” a series of workshops initiated by the dominant *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (“Justice and Development Party,” hereafter referred to as the “AKP”) that aimed to address Alevi grievances, but was ultimately condemned as a failure.¹⁰ Despite such moves, discrimination by the state and resistance by the Alevi population continue.

Scholars turn to Turkish nationalism in order to better understand the contradictory behavior of the state toward its Alevi population. Although the new state, built atop the ruins of the fallen Ottoman Empire, was declared a secular republic, scholars conclude that the nation designed by that state took on an ethnic and religious identity—specifically, a Turkish and Sunni one. As such, scholar of citizenship and identity in Turkey Başak İnce notes that, although Turkish nationalism “appear[s] to be defined as political nationalism based upon citizenship...in reality an ethno-cultural nationalism based upon race is promoted,”¹¹ while scholar of Turkish nationalism Şener Aktürk argues that the modern Turkish nation is a continuation of the Muslim *millet* from the Ottoman period, a legal Muslim community that imposed a *Hanefi* interpretation of Sunni Islam on all Muslims in the Empire.¹² Recognizing Alevis as ethnic Turks but religious outsiders allows the state to portray the Alevis as, Aykan Erdemir writes, a “noble savage,” the bearer of a genuine Turkish cultural tradition who is nonetheless mired in antiquated superstition.¹³ Reflecting on these conflicting views of the Alevi population, Fethi Açıkel and Kazım Ateş describe Alevis as “ambivalent citizens” subject to “constant oscillation... between *genuine selfness* and *heretical otherness*... a symptom of lack of recognition, but at the same time... a symptom of lack of total exclusion.”¹⁴ But while scholars explore the attitude of the Turkish state toward the Alevi population at length, only a few examine the response of the Alevi revival movement to the nationalism that shapes identity politics and state policy in Turkey.

In this article, I seek to address this gap in the literature by analyzing the identity formation process within the Alevi revival movement as a response to Turkish nation-building policies. To do so, I address the following question: to achieve recognition by Turkish state and society, does the Alevi revival movement pursue assimilation and present Alevi

identity as a facet of the Turkish and Sunni identity privileged by the state, or does it pursue resistance and challenged the state as a minority whose differences must be respected? Simply put, do Alevis respond to their ambivalent position in the Turkish nation as insiders or outsiders?

At first glance, it appears that the Alevi revival movement does both. Many symbols and narratives employed by the movement locate Alevism within an ethnic conceptualization of Turkish identity and identify Alevi beliefs with civic values. At the same time, however, Alevis resist assimilation by emphasizing the stark differences between Alevi beliefs and practices and those of the Sunni Islam supported by the state.¹⁵ Yet these seemingly contradictory approaches do not reflect an ambivalent response. In fact, the movement asserts that Alevis are an integral component of the Turkish nation rather than a minority outside of it.¹⁶ In doing so, Alevi leaders and institutions contest the meaning of the Turkish nation itself, arguing that the religious dimension of the Turkish identity fostered by the state is an aberration from the legitimate Turkish nation liberated by Atatürk. This true nation, the movement contends, is one grounded in Turkish culture and ethnicity, and shaped by civic values and secular principles.

As symbols are fundamental to the identity formation processes of social movements, such as the Alevi revival movement, in the first chapter, I seek to analyze what a symbol is. I begin the chapter by reviewing the relevant literature to arrive at a suitable definition of symbols. With this understanding, I then examine how states use symbols to construct national or majoritarian identities and how minority groups excluded from those identities respond. This analysis leads me to three courses of action available to responding minority groups: assimilation, exit, or resistance.¹⁷ This assessment offers us frameworks to understand the processes of identity formation at the levels of the Turkish state as it constructs a national identity and the Alevi revival movement as it responds with an Alevi identity.

In the second chapter, I build on this understanding of symbols and identity in an examination of the symbols and narratives available to the Alevi revival movement by reviewing the historical development of the Alevi population. I examine three periods of time: the Ottoman period during which the heterodox sects that would later give rise to modern

Alevism took shape in Anatolia; the early Republican period, stretching from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War to the democratization of Turkish politics in 1950; and the decades following democratization, a period marked by the resurgence of religion in public and political life and the ascent of identity-based movements, including the Alevi revival movement. This review offers a greater context of the relationship between the Alevi population and the state and an understanding of the symbols available to the Alevi revival movement as it articulates an Alevi identity.

Having described this history and its resulting symbols, I analyze Turkish nationalism in the third chapter. Turkish nationalism is articulated through two distinct understandings of identity, one ethnic Turkish and the other Sunni. What interests us here is not only how the state constructs identity, but also how the population perceives and responds to that identity. While scholarly literature recognizes the ethnic and religious components of Turkish nationalism, there is a third component absent from policy but present in official rhetoric, a civic nationalism. In understanding national identity as political and rhetorical influence on the population, I offer a modified model of Turkish nationalism.

In the fourth and final chapter, I return to the Alevi revival movement. To examine Alevi identity as a response to Turkish nationalism, I turn to the symbols utilized by the movement in the political demands articulated by Alevi leaders, the cultural figures and narratives lifted from history by Alevi institutions, the poetry written by Alevi intellectuals, and the beliefs and practices promoted by Alevi leaders. This analysis of the substance of Alevi identity reveals instances of both assimilation and resistance, oftentimes by the same actors within the movement. Although these processes seem contradictory at first, a more careful reading reveals that they complement one another as the Alevi revival movement contests the meaning of Turkish identity. Disputing the role of religion in Turkish nationalism as an aberration from the nation liberated and led by Atatürk, the movement depicts a nation defined by civic values, secular principles, and a Turkish ethnic and cultural heritage—a nation in which the Alevis are a central component. With the growing prominence of the Alevi population in Turkish politics, an understanding of the Alevis is critical to an understanding of

modern Turkey.

II. THEORIES AND SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY

Scholar of nationalism Ernest Gellner once remarked that “one of the most important traits of a modern society” is “cultural homogeneity, the capacity for context-free communication, the standardization of expression and comprehension.”¹⁸ The cultural homogeneity Gellner describes results from a shared symbolic discourse, a common cultural language that unifies the experiences, values, and beliefs of a people. Yet despite the prominence of symbols in literature examining identity, symbol as a term has become diluted and problematic. Reviewing this literature, Zdislaw Mach thus observes that although “[i]t has become commonplace that...we think and express our thoughts and feelings through symbols, and that culture is a symbolic construction... the concept of symbol is not clearly defined and is understood in many different ways.”¹⁹ In this chapter, I develop a definition of symbols that will allow us to better understand the processes of identity formation occurring at the levels of the Turkish state and the Alevi revival movement.

a. Symbols

Two aspects comprise a symbol: an image that provides its form and a concept that defines its meaning. Whereas the image is simple and readily understood, the complex, abstract concept that it signifies proves more evasive. C. J. Jung thus considers an image “symbolic when it means more than it denotes or expresses...has a wider ‘unconscious’ aspect—an aspect that can never be precisely defined or fully explained.”²⁰ Because of this distance between the image and the concept, Roland Barthes describes the image as “analogical and inadequate” for the concept, going on to write that, for example, “Christianity ‘outruns’ the cross.”²¹ As such, the concepts that symbols communicate escape words due to their nuances, subtleties, and intricacies but can be conveyed or implied through imagery. Although the traditions, narratives, and values that comprise Christianity are expansive and surpass the cross in significance, the cross succinctly expresses the essential meaning and ideas of Christianity. This disparity between the simplicity of the image and the complexity of its implications defines the symbol and gives it importance.

Despite the importance of symbols in com-

munication, their meanings are not constant. Frank Hartung writes that, “the meaning [of a symbol] is derived from its [sociohistorical] context, and cannot be derived from either its physical qualities or the sensory experience that it may cause.”²² A cross on its own does not convey the concepts associated with Christianity; rather, it has been adopted as a symbol of Christianity due to its role in Christian narratives. Further, for those without access to the narratives that give the cross symbolic meaning for Christians, the cross has no religious significance. An image may gain symbolic meaning through happenstance or historical incidents, as is the case with the cross and Christianity, or a social or cultural group may deliberately seize upon a symbol and transform the meanings associated with it. For example, though Mount Fuji was originally a sacred icon particular to the religious traditions of its immediate region, it was later adopted by the Meiji state as a symbol of Japanese ethnic identity and the triumph of Japan over foreign domination.²³ This fluidity of symbols is significant for identity formation as it allows social or cultural groups to develop images that communicate the content of their identities.

In addition to communicating the content of identity, symbols also delineate its boundaries. Stuart Hall explains that the process of identity formation “operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries.”²⁴ Boundaries are necessary as, Hall continues, “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out... Every identity has at its ‘margin’ an excess, something more,” that excess being what he refers to as the “constitutive outside,” the cultural other against which a group defines itself.²⁵ As it symbolizes the narrative of Christianity, the cross suggests that those who do not follow that narrative are not Christian. Similarly, Mount Fuji defines the constitutive outside of Japanese identity as “foreign,” that is, those who are not ethnically Japanese. Symbols thus not only communicate what an identity is, but also what it is not.

b. States and Nations

In the contemporary world, nationalism has emerged as the predominant force by which states cultivate popular loyalty. Gellner offers one of the most enduring definitions of nationalism: “a political

principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent... a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones.”²⁶ What results from this principle, Benedict Anderson writes, is an “imagined political community,” an understanding among a population that it is united by a shared national identity that is realized in a nation-state.²⁷ Nationalism legitimizes the state and communicates its power as it is seen as the political and territorial manifestation of the nation. As a result of this legitimacy, it is in the interest of the state to construct a cohesive and homogenous nation.

The state thus acts as the agent of nationalism, developing the symbols that build national identity and propagating them throughout society in order to construct what Geisler calls a “shared mythic past,” a narrative that presents citizens as part of a historical community that ultimately culminates with the state.²⁸ The symbols that compose national identity are drawn from historical or cultural sources and constructed by the state itself, as Eric Hobsbawm explains: “[e]xisting customary traditional practices... [are] modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes” and “entirely new symbols and devices [come] into existence as part of national movements and states, such as the national anthem... the national flag... or the personification of ‘the nation’ in symbol or image.”²⁹ The variety of symbols employed by states building nations is vast, demonstrated by the following expansive list of examples offered by Anthony Smith:

flags, anthems, parades, coinage, capital cities, oaths, folk costumes, museums of folklore, war memorials, ceremonies of remembrance for the national dead, passports, frontiers... national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, fairy tales, forms of etiquette, styles of architecture, arts and crafts, modes of town planning, legal procedures, educational practices and military codes...³⁰

These symbols crystallize identities around attributes such as religion, ethnicity, civic values, or territory, and tether these attributes to historical and cultural narratives.³¹ These narratives, in turn, cultivate feelings of loyalty among citizens by placing them within a shared community bound together by a grandiose past and represented by the state, thus creating the nation.

Despite the diversity of the symbols and attributes that compose national identity, there are only two fundamental varieties of nations. In his study of nationalism, Rogers Brubaker describes these types as a “state-centered and assimilationist” French model of nationalism and a “*Volk*-centered and differentialist” German model of nationalism.³² The French model, he writes, is grounded in “a political and territorial conception of nationhood,” which asserts “that the state can turn strangers into citizens, peasants—or immigrant workers—into Frenchmen” through assimilation into a set of values and norms.³³ As such, the state develops symbols that emphasize social and political values and the state as the center of national identity rather than ascriptive characteristics such as ethnicity, seeking to create what Cécile Laborde describes as a “superior public identity” that requires citizens to “not only to leave behind, but often transcend, their particularisms.”³⁴ In contrast, the German model is based on ascriptive characteristics, the particularisms that the French model seeks to escape. In German nationalist thought, Brubaker writes, “nations are conceived as historically rooted, organically developed individualities, united by a distinctive *Volksgeist* and by its infinitely ramifying expression in language, custom, law, culture, and the state.”³⁵ One cannot assimilate into the German nation as descent determines membership. Whereas the state stands at the center of the French nation, Smith explains that the ethnic nationalism of German thought “start[s] from a pre-existent homogenous entity, a recognizable cultural unit,” and desires that a state protect and privilege that group.³⁶ Accordingly, the symbols found in the German model seek to create ancient communities bound by blood and history.³⁷ Whereas membership in the French civic nation is accessible to any individual who supports the values of the state, birth determines membership in the German ethnic nation.

c. Minority Groups and Movements

Of course, not all nationalist movements obtain their own states, and the borders of states rarely align with their supposed nations. One need not look further than Turkey, where the Kurdish nationalist movement contests the state for greater political autonomy, to understand that Gellner’s understanding of the nation-state as a congruence of the boundaries of the nation and that the state is more an ideal than

a reality.³⁸ Discrepancies between the boundaries of the nation and the state produce minority groups—those groups whose identities place them outside the national or majoritarian identity privileged by the state. Three courses of identity are available to minority groups confronted with this dilemma: assimilation, exit, and resistance.³⁹

A minority group that pursues assimilation seeks to renounce attributes that separate it from the national or majoritarian identity or emphasize its attributes that are congruent with that identity. In some cases, members of the minority group reject the minority identity in its entirety and wholeheartedly adopt the symbols and values of the national or majoritarian identity.⁴⁰ Members of the minority group may also pursue only partial assimilation, abandoning certain aspects of the minority identity while preserving others that are significant or not in conflict with the national or majoritarian identity.⁴¹ Nimmi Hutnik describes these individuals as those “who may be well acculturated or even assimilated into the surrounding culture, but who may nevertheless feel very strongly identified with their ethnic minority group in terms of their self-categorization.”⁴² Yet assimilation is not always possible. If a national or majoritarian identity is grounded in ascriptive attributes, such as ethnicity or religion, individuals without those traits cannot assimilate. Even some supposedly civic nations exclude individuals based on such attributes, one prominent example being the repression of African-American citizens in the United States.⁴³

A minority group that either refuses or is denied assimilation may choose to exit the nation-state. If mobility is not a barrier, members of the minority group may physically exit and move to a more accepting place.⁴⁴ Physical exit is not always an option, however, as the minority group may not have sufficient resources, or the land the minority group inhabits may have cultural or historical significance.⁴⁵ When physical exit is not an option, the minority group may pursue secession, which allows the group to exit the nation-state while retaining its territory, but requires it to legitimize its claims to statehood, convince the international community to support its claims, and wrest control of the territory from the nation-state—all difficult tasks.⁴⁶ Instead of exiting through emigration or secession, the minority group may pursue sociocultural exit by remaining within

the boundaries of the nation-state but exiting public and political life by isolating themselves into cultural enclaves or masking their identities with dissimulative practices.

Minority groups may also pursue resistance by articulating an identity distinct from the nation or majority and demanding accommodation from the state. The nature of these demands varies with the situation of the minority group, its level of organization, and its relationship with the state. In many cases, the minority group may only pursue limited objectives, such as autonomy in sociocultural matters like the language of instruction in schools in its territory.⁴⁷ In some cases, however, the minority group may demand and obtain great autonomy, seen with the devolution of political power in the United Kingdom.⁴⁸ To challenge the state for accommodation, the minority group must construct an identity and build a movement around that identity capable of challenging the state. Critical for the success of this process of identity formation is the development of social and political networks. Often grounded in religious associations and cultural organizations, these networks act similarly to a state as they articulate the content of identity, propagate their own symbols, and provide the structure necessary to mobilize the minority group.⁴⁹

Resisting minority groups develop the symbols that constitute minority identity through three methods. First, the minority group may draw symbols from the attributes that separate it from the nation or majority, such as language, religion, or ethnicity.⁵⁰ Second, symbols may emerge out of interactions between the minority group and the state or majority, which are often repressive or violent acts. These symbols build solidarity among members of the attacked group, direct outrage from the incident toward the state, and legitimize claims that the minority group needs accommodation to defend itself.⁵¹ Third, the minority group may contest symbols used by the state or majority, particularly symbols that denigrate the minority group, through means such as the reclamation of terms or images. These methods of symbol production cultivate feelings of solidarity among the minority group and mobilize it as a movement capable of challenging the state.

Symbols are critical for identity formation. For states building nations, symbols comprise the foundation of national identity as they forge notions of

solidarity among citizens and loyalty toward the state as the representation of the people. For minority groups building movements in resistance, symbols allow the minority group to distinguish itself from the national or majoritarian identity. This chapter offers frameworks through which we can analyze the nation-building policies of the Turkish state and the identity formation process of the Alevi revival movement. In constructing a nation, the Turkish state may pursue an inclusive civic nation or an exclusive ethnic nation. In responding to that nation-building process, the Alevi revival movement may pursue assimilation, exit, or resistance. In the next chapter, I offer a review of the historical development of the Alevi population in Turkey in order to describe the potential symbols available to the Alevi revival movement and give greater context to the modern relations between the Turkish state and the Alevi population.

III. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ALEVISM

Before examining the historical development of Alevism, it is important to acknowledge that the term Alevi does not refer to a single, monolithic group, but rather to a multitude of groups that emerged in Anatolia in the late Seljuk and early Ottoman periods. The term Alevi encompasses groups as varied as the Kurds of Dersim, who suffered violent reprisals by the Turkish state shortly after the war of independence; the followers of the Mevlevi order, who enjoyed privileged relations with Ottoman elites; and the nomadic Turkmen tribes, who warred with the Ottoman state. Ideological and political cleavages continue to fragment the Alevi population as their institutions struggle to find a shared definition of their identity.⁵² Since a comprehensive analysis of these varied groups exceeds the scope of this work, I focus on the historical and cultural developments that broadly affected the groups now considered to comprise the Alevi population.

a. Islamic Heterodoxy in the Ottoman Empire

As much of the pre-Islamic traditions of the Turkic peoples persist in modern Alevi beliefs and practices, distinguishing Alevis from Sunnis, it is necessary to first examine the ancestral traditions of the Turkic peoples that migrated into Anatolia. These traditions were characterized by the belief in the immanence of divinity in all things and the veneration of nature.⁵³ From these animistic beliefs

emerged the “shaman,” a religious leader who performed rituals, provided medical treatment, and served as an intermediary between the living and the dead.⁵⁴ As nomadic peoples who migrated along the trade routes of Asia, the Turkic peoples encountered Neoplatonism, Christianity, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism, among other religious and philosophical systems.⁵⁵ This legacy remains visible in Alevism, reflected in Hülya Küçük’s observation that, “incarnation, metamorphosis, battles with dragons and some motifs from the fire cult heavily influence these religions” while “‘watch your hand, tongue and sperm,’ one of the main moral principles of Bekāshism, is no different from the ‘Three Seals’ in Manichaeism.”⁵⁶

Fluidity and syncretism thus defined the approach of the Turkic peoples to religions they encountered, and Islam proved no exception. As the Turkic tribes that migrated into Anatolia in the medieval period converted to Islam, striking similarities emerged between the Turkic shamans and the Islamic mystics of Anatolia: they wore outfits adorned with similar religious iconography, were both associated with miracles connected to nature, and performed shamanistic rituals even in opposition to Islamic tenets.⁵⁷ In addition to this continuation of pre-Islamic practices, these Islamic mystics adopted the syncretism of the Turkic traditions. The mystic poet Muhammad Jalal al-Din Balkhi (popularly known as Rumi), for example, asserted that truth exists in all religions.⁵⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz similarly describes the Islam that emerged from these developments as “nonliteral and inclusive,” one that emphasized belief over ritual and love over law.⁵⁹

With time, the syncretic traditions surrounding these wandering mystics coalesced into a number of orders (*tarikats*). High levels of variation already existed among the orders, with some more closely adhering to orthodox interpretations of Sunni Islam and others more wholeheartedly embracing the pre-Islamic Turkic traditions. Nevertheless, all of the orders generally exhibited the syncretic and fluid perspective of a “nonliteral and inclusive” Islam. Certain orders remained rural, flourishing among the Turkic tribes of central Anatolia and defined by secrecy and a mistrust of centralized governance. Other orders emerged in the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire, constructing highly developed organizations and enjoying elite patronage.⁶⁰ These more urban

orders exercised strong influence on the state despite ideological conflict with the Sunni *ulema*, as Küçük explains that “mysticism [became] a main element in the thought of the Ottoman intellectual elite and was not confined to the popular beliefs of the Sufi orders.”⁶¹ The more syncretic and mystic Bektāşi order, for example, gained popularity among the elite Janissary corps as it expanded deep into the Balkans.⁶² The Mevlevi order enjoyed similar prestige among Ottoman bureaucrats.⁶³ Despite a then-nominal support for the *Hanefi* interpretation of Sunni Islam, the Anatolian heterodoxies enjoyed wide support among both rural populations and urban elites.

However, relations between the orders and the state would eventually sour. As the rural orders viewed the centralized state with suspicion, economic distress or political disputes often inspired rebellions in the late Seljuk and early Ottoman periods.⁶⁴ With the dramatic rise of the Safavid Empire under the leadership of an order heavily influenced by Shi’i traditions to the east of Anatolia, these tensions adopted a religious character as the rural orders adopted Shi’i traditions, such as the veneration of Imam Ali.⁶⁵ Ultimately, the rural orders loyal to the Safavid state came to venerate its founder Isma’il as a messianic figure.⁶⁶ Alongside this religious influence, troubles due to crop failures, plague, and rising taxation by the centralizing Ottoman state compelled the Turkic tribes of the rural orders to support the Safavid Empire, and in 1511, the tribes instigated uprisings across Ottoman Anatolia.⁶⁷ The response by the Ottoman state was vicious, with the state relying on the orthodox Sunni *ulema* to condemn the rural orders as heresy, legitimizing massacres of the Turkic tribespeople that left tens of thousands dead.⁶⁸ By the end of the sixteenth century, the Turkic tribes and rural orders had retreated into the mountains of Anatolia far from the reach of the Ottoman state.⁶⁹ As the Ottoman state increasingly embraced orthodox Sunni Islam after these wars, the isolation of the rural orders allowed them to develop the more systematized, distinctive, and hereditary traditions that would become modern Alevism.⁷⁰

b. The National Struggle and the Early Republic

The demise of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of the Republic in the wake of the First World War seemed to herald a new era of relations between the Alevi population and the state.

The Turkish War of Independence, often known as the National Struggle (*Milli Mücadele*), crystallized under the leadership of Atatürk in response to the division of Ottoman territories by the Entente powers and the Greek invasion of Anatolia in 1919.⁷¹ As the nationalist government that would become the Republic emerged in Anatolia, the Ottoman government remained in İstanbul under heavy influence by the Entente powers.⁷² The National Struggle thus became not only a war to seize territory from invading powers, but also one to wrest sovereignty from a state that had for centuries legitimized itself through military force and religious authority.

While the campaign against the Greeks revealed the military prowess of the nationalists, Atatürk sought to build religious legitimacy to cement loyalty among Muslims in Anatolia and abroad as well as to delegitimize the Ottoman Caliphate. To develop this legitimacy, nationalist elites frequently affirmed their loyalty to the Caliphate.⁷³ Nationalist members of the *ulema* issued *fatvas* proclaiming the weakness of the Caliphate under European control, portraying the nationalists as religious warriors fighting to save the institution of the Caliphate from infidels.⁷⁴ At the same time, the nationalists surrounded the burgeoning nationalist parliament in Anatolia, as Küçük writes: “Debates were conducted on whether it was suitable to write verses and *hadiths* in newspapers or to make Friday a day of rest...Laws were made in accordance with the *Shari’a*, such as the law to prevent the use of alcohol, and so on.”⁷⁵ Although the Republic would later impose a harsh secularization, its foundations rest in religious symbols and collaboration with religious elites.

While such appeals targeted the orthodox Sunni *ulema*, nationalist leaders also recognized the importance of Alevi support. Atatürk advised military commanders to forge alliances with Alevi authorities in Anatolia, and he even met with the two principle leaders of the dominant branches of the Bektāşi order at their man lodge (*tekke*), earning their support for the remainder of the war.⁷⁶ As a result of this effort, the Alevi population largely supported the nationalists, offering *tekkes* as spaces to support the smuggling of arms and serve as hospitals and mobilizing Alevi to fight in the nationalist army.⁷⁷ Beyond the military effort, Alevi leaders supported the political project of the nationalists. For example, nine prominent Alevi leaders from various orders participated

in the first meeting of the National Assembly in 1920 to demonstrate their political support.⁷⁸ In return, Alevi hoped to witness the establishment of a state that would welcome them as equal citizens rather than condemn them as heretics.

Indeed, the republican state that emerged triumphant from the National Struggle sought to abolish the institutions that represented the relationship between religion and state in the Ottoman Empire. In November 1922, the nationalist government began to dismantle the Ottoman state by separating the Caliphate and the Sultanate and abolishing the latter.⁷⁹ The Caliph was thus reduced to a powerless figurehead. Nonetheless, the Caliphate would meet the same fate as the Sultanate, however, with the parliament abolishing it on March 3, 1924, less than one year after the proclamation of the Republic.⁸⁰ The institutions that symbolized the religious identity of the state—the *Şeyhülislam*, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations (*Şeriya ve Evkaf Vekaleti*), the *şariat* courts, and the *medreses*—were similarly abolished. The Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereafter referred to as the *Diyanet*), a new institution that represented the power of the state over religion, replaced them.⁸¹ Upon adopting almost direct translations of the Swiss civil code and Italian penal code in 1926, the state completed the abandonment of Islamic law for Western law.⁸² By 1937, *laiklik*, the aggressive secularism of Turkish thought, had become enshrined in the constitution as a central tenet of the Republic.⁸³ The state no longer sought to implement religious tenets, but rather to restrain and control religion.

This aggressive secularization did not remain confined to political and legal institutions, but instead penetrated the whole of society. As Turkish *laiklik* drew its inspiration from anticlerical French, the state desired not only the removal of religious influences from the state, but also, as Ioannis N. Grigoriadis writes, “its eradication from the public sphere and its limitation into a very narrowly defined private sphere.”⁸⁴ While some policies prohibited numerous Islamic symbols and practices such as the wearing of the veil in public, others imposed a Western lifestyle, such as the replacing of Islamic timekeeping with the Western calendar and international clock.⁸⁵ Denouncing the Arabic script used in Ottoman Turkish as “incomprehensible,” Mustafa Kemal initiated language reforms that replaced the Arabic script with

the Latin alphabet and purged it of many Arabic and Persian influences, severing ties between Turkish citizens and the Ottoman past.⁸⁶ Moving beyond social practices, the state sought to crush Islamic institutions with Law 677, which shut down the dervish lodges, prohibited Islamic titles and dress, closed tombs of Sultans and mystic orders, abolished the profession of tomb-keeping, and imprisoned or fined anyone who transgressed these laws.⁸⁷ As such, the aggressive secularization of the state brought about a renewed repression of heterodox Islam. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi explains that after the reforms, “state trespasses on Alevi religious gatherings occurred frequently” and “Alevi *dedes*, easily identifiable by their long beards and untrimmed moustaches, were often arrested because of illegal religious and ‘superstitious’ activities.”⁸⁸ Among state elites, debates emerged surrounding the closing of the lodges and orders and the prohibition of Anatolian Islamic practices—focusing on a perceived disloyalty of the orders and thus more reminiscent of the vitriolic rhetoric of the sixteenth-century Ottoman state than the nationalist government several years earlier during the National Struggle—and shaped policy toward religion.⁸⁹ Yet for many Alevis, this period of transition was a period of hope as, after centuries of violent repression by the Ottoman state, nationalist elites reached out to the Alevi population and invited them to join the project to build a new nation founded not on Sunni Islam, but secular republicanism.⁹⁰

c. Developments Since 1950

The urbanization and democratization that occurred after 1950 fundamentally altered the place of the Alevi population in Turkish state and society. As mass migrations swept a significant proportion of the Alevi population into the large and wealthier cities of western Turkey, village networks and traditional institutions dissolved, leaving a weaker population in the less developed provinces of central and eastern Anatolia and a population without an organized community in the urban western provinces.⁹¹ As democratization in 1950 encouraged political parties to appeal to a largely Sunni Muslim population, political parties, particularly rightist parties, came to represent Sunni Islam.⁹² Left in the midst of a predominantly Sunni society in the western cities and agitated by the return of Islam to politics, Alevis overwhelmingly joined leftist organizations that

promised egalitarianism and secularism.⁹³ Tensions between leftists and ultranationalists grew through the 1970s, ultimately erupting into ideological warfare that bloodied Turkish cities and sectarian tensions in rural provinces between Alevis and Sunnis and Turks and Kurds.⁹⁴ Many of these attacks directly targeted Alevis, the largest massacres occurring in Sivas in 1978, Kahramanmaraş in 1978, and Çorum in 1980.⁹⁵ As the government proved incapable of containing the violence, the state and society came to blame Alevis for this political instability.⁹⁶ Seeking to restore stability, the military staged a coup on September 12, 1980, ending democratic politics until 1983 and leaving a curtailing of political freedoms that is long lasting.⁹⁷ The state no longer perceived Alevis as a bastion of Kemalist support, but rather as a grave threat.

In response to the divisions that had erupted in the years leading to the coup, the military government adopted the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, a theory of Turkish identity developed in 1973 by the nationalist and Islamist *Aydınlar Ocağı* (the Hearth of Intellectuals). Mustafa Şen explains that “[t]he basic assertion... is that Turkishness and Islam are two essential components of the national culture, and Islam is the best suited religion to Turkish culture and identity... Islam is the only religion in which Turkish culture found its best and the most correct expression.”⁹⁸ Abandoning the Kemalist repression of religion, the military government sought to foster a religious camaraderie that could transcend the polarizing divisions of the 1970s.⁹⁹ As such, the state initiated the construction of numerous new mosques and religious schools, increased its control over the messages given in religious texts and mosques, and mandated religion courses that taught a nationalist Sunni Islam.¹⁰⁰ This welcoming of religion into public life by the state enabled the emergence of political Islam, first indicated by the dramatic success of the Islamist Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*) after the resumption of democratic politics.¹⁰¹

A number of identity-based movements have emerged alongside the Islamist movement since the resumption of democratic politics in 1983, however. Among these movements are the feminist movement, Kurdish movement, and the Alevi revival movement examined here.¹⁰² Erman and Göker find three causes for the emergence of the Alevi revival movement: “the fall of Communism... the rise of

Sunni political Islam... and the military confrontation between the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers Party) and the Turkish forces.”¹⁰³ Concerning the first, Reha Çamuroğlu writes, “socialism, which in the previous two decades had an indisputable authority as an ideological alternative for the young and middle generations of Alevi, lost its former importance.”¹⁰⁴ The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis contributes heavily to the second cause as the state opened space for the rise of Islamism and imposed Sunni Islam on the Alevi population through the construction of mosques in Alevi villages, the imposition of mandatory religious courses in schools that teach Sunni Islam, and the declaration that Alevi are Sunni Muslims with differing practices, thus politicizing religious identity.¹⁰⁵ As a sizeable proportion of the Alevi population is Kurdish, the emergence of the Kurdish movement additionally contributed to politicization.¹⁰⁶ Having described the historical developments that have led to the modern Alevi revival movement, I will now conclude the chapter by describing the movement itself.

The population the movement purports to represent is divided along ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic lines. While the majority of Alevi identify as ethnic Turks and reside in central Anatolia and the cities of western Turkey, Kurds comprise twenty percent of the population and are concentrated primarily in eastern Anatolia, while a much smaller Arab population exists in southern Turkey.¹⁰⁷ The migration of many Alevi into western Turkey has introduced a new division between a rural population confronted by the disintegration of their villages and an urban population building new institutions no longer reliant on village networks or traditional *dede* figures.¹⁰⁸ This urbanization also contributed to a growing wealth disparity as the western provinces prospered while eastern Anatolia lagged behind, resulting in the growth of an urban Alevi elite as many others suffered from poverty and downward mobility.¹⁰⁹ These divisions manifest themselves in ideological cleavages, represented by various institutions in the movement, such as the Cem Foundation (*Cem Vakfı*), known for its loyalty to Kemalist principles, and the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (*Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği*), which preserves the leftist sentiment of the 1970s.¹¹⁰ The largest division exists between what Bayram Ali Soner and Şule Toktaş describe as the “traditionalist-religious”

wing, which understands Alevism as a “pure form of Islam” and desires reconciliation with the state, and the “modernist-secularist” wing, which sees Alevism as “outside Islam... a syncretic belief system, a philosophy, a culture as well as a lifestyle constructed originally as the community interacted with various religions” and calls on the state to sever all ties with religion, although scholars recognize smaller branches as well, such as a Sufistic branch and another close to Iranian Shi’ism.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Soner and Toktaş note that all branches of the movement “reject Sunni-Islamic principles, interpretations and practices.”¹¹² In other words, Sunni Islam forms the constitutive outside that binds the movement together.

The leadership of the Alevi revival movement is, however, relatively homogeneous. Since the traditional village institutions disintegrated with the mass migrations of Alevi into Turkish cities and the poor languished after the collapse of the left, the urban Alevi elite in western Turkey and across Europe has built the movement, its institutions, and its identity.¹¹³ With traditional leaders unable to adapt to urban life, Vorhoff explains, the movement “was not realized by the traditional Alevi institutions and religious elite but by a new, Western-educated elite, via modern media and secular forms of organization; associations, foundations, concerts, staging of the traditional rites, public conferences and, last but not least, the huge mass of publications on Alevism.”¹¹⁴ Sefa Şimşek thus describes the Alevi revival movement as a “middle class movement” reliant on the “material and intellectual resources [of] the educated and better off Alevi.”¹¹⁵ This elite faces little competition as Kurdish Alevi often identify with the Kurdish nationalist movement, traditional leaders flounder, and poor Alevi support the egalitarian messages of the leadership.¹¹⁶ As a result of this poor inclusion of Kurdish, rural, and lower class elements, many accuse the Alevi revival movement of exclusivity. Erman and Göker, for example, charge that “[w]ithout acknowledging the class division, as well as the ethnic issue, Alevi politics cannot be fully democratic.”¹¹⁷ Thus, despite the diversity of the Alevi population, the image of Alevism presented by movement leaders is urban, Turkish, educated, and middle class.

With their return to public and political life, the Alevi population has suffered attacks from Sunni fundamentalists. Whereas attacks before the 1980 coup were primarily motivated by ideology, attacks since

then have been driven by religion as Sunni mobs perpetrated attacks on Alevi communities in Sivas in 1993 and Gazi in 1995.¹¹⁸ Further, the attacks have become more threatening due to the perceived complicity of the state. Anthropologist of Turkish Studies Martin van Bruinessen explains that in the 1993 Sivas massacre, “[t]he involvement of local police and civil authorities in the violence was also significant, as was the inability of the central government to neutralize them.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, sociologist and researcher of Turkish and Kurdish issues Jongerden finds that in the 1995 Gazi massacre in İstanbul, “police deliberately escalated a violent incident into a massacre” by antagonizing and firing on Alevi protestors after a shooting at a coffee shop popular with Alevis.¹²⁰ Examining language the police used, van Bruinessen asserts that, “many of the police were acting out of aggressive hatred towards the Alevis.”¹²¹ The period since democratization has thus left the Alevi population with both a return to narratives of repression, but also the resources and levels of organization to address that repression as a movement. With this understanding of the history surrounding Alevis, the next chapter examines the Turkish nationalism that confronts the Alevi population.

IV. TURKISH NATIONALISM AND SOCIETY

Prior to the Ottoman Empire’s final century, the state made no effort to construct a national identity. Instead, the *millet* system divided the population into communities delineated by faith that governed themselves in accordance with their own religious laws.¹²² With the reforms of the *Tanzimat* era (1839–1876), however, the Ottoman state sought to introduce a civic nationalism by proclaiming legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, abolishing the *millet* system, and replacing religious identities institutionalized by the *millet* system with Ottomanism, a superior public identity.¹²³ In response to these reforms, the reactionary Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876–1909) supported an Islamic religious nationalism in an effort to strengthen the Caliphate and unite the Muslim populations of the Empire as nationalist movements emerged in the Christian regions of the Empire.¹²⁴ With the development of the ethnic nationalism of the German model, however, an ethnic Turkish nationalism developed alongside religious nationalism, with intellectuals building ties with Turks in Central Asia in order to construct a

pan-Turkish identity.¹²⁵ Describing the nationalism that resulted from these civic, ethnic, and religious currents, the Ottoman ideologue Ziya Gökalp wrote: “the Turkish nation today belongs to the Ural-Altai group of peoples, to the Islamic community, and the West internationally.”¹²⁶

With the proclamation of the Republic, however, it seemed as if civic nationalism would triumph. Atatürk suggested so much during the National Struggle, declaring to the parliament: “I am neither a believer in a league of all the nations of Islam, nor even in a league of the Turkish peoples.”¹²⁷ Similarly, the early Republic defined the nation as a “political and social community formed by citizens bound by the unity of language, culture and ideal”—a civic conceptualization of the nation.¹²⁸ Despite these declarations of a civic nationalism, however, the ethnic and religious streams of thought present in late Ottoman nationalism persevered. This chapter describes these ethnic, religious, and civic dimensions of Turkish nationalism articulated by the state and received by the population, to better describe how Turkish nationalism affects the Alevi population and how Alevis understand the identity presented by the state.

a. Ethnic Nationalism

Despite proclamations of a civic nationalism, Turkish nationalism quickly developed an ethnic character as the state sought to present the Turkish nation as a primordial community with ancient origins. To craft the narrative of this nation, Atatürk established the Turkish Historical Society in 1931, which developed the Turkish History Thesis, a fantastical theory that asserted that the ancient Turks heavily influenced early civilizations across the world after their own ancient civilization in Central Asia collapsed due to climatic disasters.¹²⁹ With its claims that the Sumerian and Hittite civilizations of ancient Anatolia were of Turkish origin, this theory transformed the Turks from a people that settled in Anatolia only in the medieval period to a people with a long history in Anatolia that stretched into time immemorial.¹³⁰ The Sun Language Theory, developed by the Turkish Language Society after its foundation in 1932, offered a twin narrative, arguing that all languages descended from the language of the ancient Turks, making modern Turkish, Hugh Poulton writes, “the most aristocratic, powerful,

lively and ancient of languages.”¹³¹ This reimagining of the Turks as an ancient race with Anatolia as their adopted homeland built a nation united by territory, history, and descent—an ethnic nation—despite the falseness of the claims.

As discussed in the first chapter, the ethnic nation employs symbols that focus on this grand past and emphasize ascriptive characteristics. As such, the banks founded by the young republic bore names such as *Sümerbank* (Sumerian Bank) and *Etibank* (Hittite Bank) after the supposedly Turkish empires of ancient Anatolia.¹³² Similarly, the presidential seal adopted in 1922 and still in use today features sixteen stars that represent the “sixteen great Turkish empires” that preceded the Republic of Turkey, presenting the modern republic as the culmination of a long history.¹³³ The language reforms mentioned in the previous chapter sought to purge the “foreign” influences from the Turkish language by replacing Arabic and Persian words and grammatical structures with Turkic equivalents, imbuing the language with an ethnic dimension in an effort to distinguish Turks from the Arabs, Persians, and Kurds.¹³⁴ Such theories and symbols were propagated throughout Turkish society through academic conferences and institutions in which scholars sought historical evidence that would support the Turkish History Thesis, school and university curricula that taught these theories to Turkish youth, and museums that propagated the claimed linkages between modern Turks and the ancient Sumerian and the Hittite empires.¹³⁵

Ascriptive nationalisms, such as ethnic nationalism, cannot accommodate assimilation by outside groups, the ethnic stream of Turkish nationalism has proven hostile toward ethnic minority groups in the country. Resettlement laws in the early years of the Republic divided Anatolia into zones determined by ethnic composition in order to organize the resettlement of Turks into the Kurdish east and non-Turks into the ethnically Turkish west.¹³⁶ Alongside resettlement, the state used military service, “People’s Houses,” which disseminated Turkish values and history, and schools to assimilate ethnic minorities into a Turkish ethnic identity and transfer them to Turkish areas.¹³⁷ Repressive language policies now dominate these ethnic nation-building policies. Article 42 of the Turkish constitution, for example, forbids the teaching of languages other than Turkish as a mother language.¹³⁸ Other policies—such as the ban on

Kurdish in speech, cultural performances, political organizations, and other settings introduced after the 1980 coup, and only lifted in 1991—expressly prohibited minority languages.¹³⁹ In order to belong as a member of the Turkish nation, one would have to adopt an ethnic identity defined by a shared history and common language.

This ethnic nationalism, however, does include Alevi in the Turkish nation. As nationalists sought to construct an ethnic nation, they viewed the Alevi population as representations of a genuine Turkishness untouched by Arab and Persian influences.¹⁴⁰ In their efforts to reform the Turkish language, the nationalist elites thus adopted Alevi poetry and music, bringing Alevi poetry and songs into the body of Turkish national folklore.¹⁴¹ Nationalist elites similarly viewed Alevism as a reflection of ancestral Turkish beliefs and practices. To secular nationalists, Açıkel and Ateş write, “the Alevi version of Islam was the least Arabized and the least cosmopolitan and one that kept intact successfully the ancient democratic traditions of the Turks.”¹⁴² To a state searching for ties to an ancestral past, the Alevi population descended from the nomadic Turkic tribes offered those connections. Although the significance of ethnicity has waned, this stream of nationalism offers one pathway by which the Alevi population could belong in the Turkish nation.

Although the more extreme elements of ethnic nationalism have been gradually abandoned since the death of Atatürk in 1938 and democratization in 1950, ethnic conceptions of Turkish identity continue to shape Turkish nationalism. Even with the end of fanciful depictions of Turks as founders of world civilization in the 1940s, F. Keyman and Tuba Kancı explain that, “the focus on the ethnic origins of national identity in the mythical motherland of central Asia persist[s]” in textbooks, and “the geographical territory of the state continue[s] to be imagined as ethnically Turkish since time immemorial.”¹⁴³ Even as repressive policies of linguistic assimilation have been replaced by gradual reforms, such as 2013 reforms permitting political parties to campaign in languages other than Turkish and lifting restrictions on the letters q, w, and x, the state continues to discriminate against non-Turkish languages.¹⁴⁴ A law that allows private courses in Kurdish, for example, stipulates that those courses may only be taught by native Turkish speakers for a maximum of eighteen

hours each week for only ten weeks, while a policy allowing the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation to broadcast in Kurdish restricts such broadcasts to two hours each week.¹⁴⁵ Although state rhetoric and policy are now moving toward a greater openness toward ethnic minority groups, continued appeals to ethnic identity and setbacks confronting reforms indicate that ethnicity remains a central component of the nationalism constructed by the state.

b. Religious Nationalism

Alongside ethnic nationalism, a similarly ascriptive religious nationalism has historically guided Turkish nation-building policies as a product of the particularly aggressive interpretation of French *laïcité* adopted by the Turkish state. As scholar of Alevism Markus Dressler explains, Turkish secularism seeks to not only expunge religion from public and political life, but also demonstrates an “interest in controlling the content and boundaries of religion.”¹⁴⁶ To accomplish this objective, as described in the previous chapter, the young republic both abolished the centuries-old religious institutions of the Ottoman state and reached into society in order to institute reforms proscribing religious practices and forbidding traditional Islamic institutions. In the place of these Ottoman institutions, the state established the Diyanet, a large bureaucracy that seeks to develop an Islam supportive of Turkish nationalism and secularism, an Islam that Candaz Pinar describes as “anti-clerical, Sunni (not Sufi or Alevi), Turkish (not Arab), progressive (not backward), and rational (not superstitious).”¹⁴⁷ As such, David Shankland explains that sermons in Turkish mosques, written by Diyanet officials and delivered by state-trained imams, emphasize “the importance of belief to the individual, the importance of respecting the secular basis of the law of the land and the role of the mosque in fostering a collective spirit in the community.”¹⁴⁸ For these policies to succeed, however, citizens must adhere to the Sunni Islam espoused by the Diyanet, worship in its mosques, and follow its values. As a result, Sunni Islam has become critical to Turkish nation-building.

Much as the ascriptive ethnic nationalism developed by the Turkish state is hostile toward ethnic minority groups, religious nation-building policies are exclusive of religious minority groups. Population exchanges between Greece and Turkey after the National Struggle, for example, transferred approxi-

mately 500,000 Muslims from Greece to Turkey and 1,500,000 Christians from Turkey to Greece, revealing religion as the determiner of Turkish identity and reducing the non-Muslim population in Turkey.¹⁴⁹ Other policies similarly affirmed this relationship between Islam and Turkish identity, such as the rejection of the Gagauz Turks (ethnically Turkish Christians) and the acceptance of non-Turkish Muslims from Europe.¹⁵⁰ Non-Muslim citizens at the time suffered intimidation campaigns, harsh taxes, and discrimination in the state and military,¹⁵¹ despite requirements in the Treaty of Lausanne that the Turkish state protect its religious minorities.¹⁵² Although recent reforms pursued by the state are improving the situation for non-Muslims, religious homogenization persists as the state interferes with non-Muslim religious institutions, prohibits the training of non-Muslim clergy, and allows discriminatory attacks to continue.¹⁵³

Unlike ethnic Turkish nationalism’s accommodation of Alevis, however, religious nation-building policies harshly reject Alevi identity. The Diyanet distinguishes its interpretation of Islam from Anatolian traditions through the construction of symbols of what it defines as legitimate Islam. The most visible symbol has been the mosque, which the Diyanet defines as the house of worship for Muslims regardless of sect.¹⁵⁴ Turkish politicians show a similar regard for the mosque, illustrated by comments from AKP parliamentarians that “[n]either the *cem* houses nor *mevlevihane* are alternatives to the mosque.”¹⁵⁵ Açıkel and Ateş explain that the state’s stance toward Alevism is “similar to those discourses which perceived the Kurds as ethnic mountain Turks...the religious nationalists implied that the Alevi were in fact ‘mountain Muslims’ who had lost touch with the genuine orthodox Sunni tradition.”¹⁵⁶ This approach has resulted in what Karin Vorhoff describes as “quite paternalistic attitudes, when [Sunni officials and writers] explain what Alevi as humble Anatolian countrymen, cut off from Islamic civilization and learning, got wrong in their understanding of Islam.”¹⁵⁷ As such, Janina Karolewski states, “[t]he Alevi tradition is not accepted...but the Alevis themselves are considered to be Muslims who would be accepted as such if they only observed the obligations of Sunni Islam.”¹⁵⁸ Without doing so, Alevism is seen as a heretical deviation, yet one that can be corrected by acceptance of the Islam of the Diyanet.¹⁵⁹

With the democratization of Turkish politics in 1950 and the subsequent adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis after the 1980 military coup, religion has come to define the content of Turkish nationalism. Prior to this period, religion determined the boundaries of membership in the Turkish nation but not its content. As described earlier, however, the democratization of Turkish politics in 1950 required political parties to respond to a conservative Muslim population, thus reintroducing Islam into public and political life. The strength of this religious influence rose with the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, which has been followed by a more aggressive religious homogenization through the increased construction of mosques, growth of the Diyanet, and mandating of religion courses in primary and secondary schools.¹⁶⁰ Islam is no longer an implicit component of Turkish nationalism, but rather a central means by which the state defines identity.

c. Civic Nationalism

Despite these processes of homogenization, the state defines the nation in civic terms. Article 66 of the constitution defines Turkish citizenship as follows: “Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk.”¹⁶¹ Further, the Turkish Citizenship Law states that citizenship may be acquired by fulfilling certain criteria, none of which concern ethnicity or religion.¹⁶² Neither the constitution nor the Turkish Citizenship Law refers to ethnic or religious identity in determining citizenship. Indeed, Article 10 of the constitution declares that “[e]veryone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.”¹⁶³ State rhetoric also describes Turkish identity in civic terms. In 1931, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People’s Party, hereafter referred to as the CHP) Secretary Recep Peker defined membership in the nation as follows:

We consider as ours all those of our citizens... who belong politically and socially to the Turkish nation and among whom ideas and feelings such as Kurdism, Circassianism, and even Lazism and Pomakism have been implanted... We want to state just as sincerely our opinion regarding our Jewish or Christian compatriots. Our party considers these compatriots as absolutely Turkish insofar as they belong to our community of

language and ideal.¹⁶⁴

Much like the civic nation that admits any individual who accepts the values of the state, this understanding of nationalism in the early Republic seemingly admits anyone regardless of their ethnic or religious identity so long as they accept the language and values of the Turkish nation. Decades after these early proclamations, Turkish politicians still express the same sentiment today. From the earliest years of the Republic to its most recent, notions of civic nationalism shape the official language of membership and belonging in the Turkish nation.

Similarly, many national symbols cultivated by the Turkish state emphasize the state as the center of identity. The Turkish flag represents the historical narrative of the establishment of the state—the field of red symbolizes the blood spilled by Turkish soldiers fighting against the invading forces in the First World War and National Struggle, during which the blood supposedly ran so deep on battlefields that it could reflect the moon and stars.¹⁶⁵ Much like the national anthems of civic nation-states such as the United States and France, the Turkish national anthem describes the warfare that led to the creation of the state and focuses on the flag as a symbol of the country rather than describing an ancestral community.¹⁶⁶ The national holidays of the country also focus on the history of the state as they commemorate military victories, the establishment of the Republic, and the death of its founder.¹⁶⁷ These symbols seem to depict a civic national identity.

As the analysis of Turkish nationalism in this chapter demonstrates, however, taken together, Turkish nation-building policies do not construct a civic nationalism. The same state that proclaims it does not privilege one ethnic group over another continues to reject ethnic difference through repressive language policies and religious difference through assimilative religious policies. The same national iconography that contains the civic nationalist flag also contains the presidential seal that refers to an ethnic legacy of Turkish empires. The same textbooks that present Turkish students with the civic nationalist anthem also define the nation as, İnce writes, “a unity of language, religion, race, history, and culture.”¹⁶⁸ Civic nationalism, while present in state rhetoric, is absent from policy as ethnic and religious nationalism guides Turkish nation-building.

The nationalism received by the population is

not only ethnic and religious. Undoubtedly, the population perceives these two components of Turkish nationalism. As evidenced, minorities have certainly been made to understand that they fall outside the Turkish nation. Similarly, the population responds to the civic nationalism found in state rhetoric but not policy, evidenced by protests against mandatory religion courses that utilize phrases such as, “[d]emocratic struggle against sectarian education.”¹⁶⁹ A model of Turkish nationalism is thus not simply a model of ethnic and religious nationalism, but rather one that includes ethnic, religious, and civic nationalism. As the identity built by the Alevi revival movement is constructed in response to Turkish nationalism, it is crucial to recognize this difference between the Turkish nationalism constructed by policy and that received by the population. With this distinction, in the fourth chapter I utilize the theories described in the first chapter to assess identity formation within the Alevi revival movement, drawing from the potential symbols examined in the second chapter in relation to the Turkish nationalism described in this chapter.

V. RESISTANCE, ASSIMILATION, AND CONTESTATION

Having examined the historical and cultural development of the Alevi population and the nation-building policies confronting it, I now turn to the Alevi population and analyze the patterns of identity formation occurring within it. In this chapter, I address the question posed at the beginning of this work: Does the Alevi revival movement respond to the mixed messages of Turkish nationalism as an insider or outsider of the nation? To answer this question, I survey a broad range of symbols circulated prominently throughout the movement in the iconography and narratives of institutions, the demands and slogans of Alevi political actors, and the literature and art of Alevi intellectuals. I assess these varied symbols found across the movement using the framework of minority identity formation introduced in the first chapter, determining whether the Alevi movement demonstrates assimilation, exit, or resistance. Throughout the period between the retreat of the Turkic tribes into the mountains of Anatolia in the sixteenth century and the mass migration of Alevis to the urban centers of western Turkey in the mid-twentieth century, Alevis largely pursued exit.

But now, with Alevi actors and institutions growing increasingly visible in public and political life, it has become evident that exit has largely been abandoned. As such, I analyze the symbols and narratives used by the movement for signs of assimilation and resistance.

a. Resistance

The Alevi revival movement is fundamentally political as it challenges the state. Although the reemergence of Alevi practices during the 1980s and 1990s first represented an effort to construct cultural communities by urban Alevis bereft of traditional village ties and suffering discrimination by the Sunni majority of western Turkey, this growing awareness of Alevi identity developed into a political movement in response to the perceived threat posed by the dramatic rise of Islamism.¹⁷⁰ Reflecting the politicization of Alevis in response to Islamism, the Alevi manifesto that proclaimed the movement with its publication in the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in 1990 accused the Turkish state of privileging Sunni Islam and demanded that it cease the construction of mosques in Alevi villages, remove required religion courses from schools, and promote a greater understanding of Alevi traditions in media and education, among other demands.¹⁷¹ As the state has not substantively addressed these Alevi demands with reforms, demands for accommodation rather than cultural awareness or community building continue to define the objectives of the movement, as indicated by this collection of demands presented by researcher Fazilet Ahu Özmen:

Alevism must be accepted as an association of belief and must be secured against discrimination in all areas by the laws.

Compulsory religion classes must be abolished (the fact that the lessons are only Sunni Islam-oriented in this country poses a problem for the Alevis.

Cem houses must be recognized as official places of worship.

The religion section of the identification cards must be removed.

Actual equality must be obtained by the laws and law enforcement.

‘Religion and ethnics’ classes must be excluded from compulsory classes and must be established as elective courses.

Building of mosques in Alevi settlements must be put to an end.

Tekkes must be taken from the Ministry of Tourism and must be assigned to the management of Alevi foundations.

The presidency of Religious Affairs must be closed down or must integrated [*sic*] the Division of Religious Affairs of Alevism.

The Sivas Madımak Hotel must be made into a museum.¹⁷²

As described in the first chapter, the development of a movement based on minority identity in order to demand accommodation by the state reflects patterns of resistance.

As the movement challenges the state and Sunni majority for accommodation, it has sought to emphasize characteristics of Alevi identity that distinguish it from the Sunni Muslim identity it asserts that the state privileges. As such, Alevi institutions adopt symbols representative of Shi'i Islam or the heterodox Anatolian mystic traditions separate from, and historically persecuted by, the Turkish state and Sunni majority. Similarly, the Alevi movement emphasizes traditions found in Shi'i Islam but not Sunni Islam, such as the mourning of the twelve imams or the battle of *Kerbala*, rituals popular in Anatolian Islam but not orthodox Sunni Islam (such as the *semah* dance

(such as the consumption of alcohol). Figures 1 and 2, banners from websites for the Cem Foundation's *cemevi* in Beşiktaş and the Şahkulu Sultan Dervish Lodge (*Şahkulu Sultan Dergağı*) respectively, indicate this cultivation of symbols that draw boundaries between Alevism and Sunni Islam, with both featuring the Shi'i figure Imam Ali and the medieval Anatolian mystic Hacı Bektaş Veli and the Cem Foundation banner including images of the *semah* dance.

Similarly, a poem written by a *dede* involved in the movement during its early years defines Alevi identity through references exclusively to those aspects of Alevism that diverge from Sunni Islam:

We (*Biz*)
 congregate together (*cem eyleriz*)
 We perform the ritual dances (*semah yürürüz*)
 And play the ritual music (*Saz çalarız*).
 We sing songs, hymns and incantations (*Türkü, deyiş, nefes söyleriz*).
 We drink wine (*Dem içeriz*)
 We mourn for the twelve imams (*On iki imam yası*),
 We keep the *Muharrem* (*Muharrem orucu*),
 And *Hızır* fasts (*Hızır orucu tutarız*).
 We perform the yearly sacrifice (*Yıl kurbanı*),
 The votive sacrifice (*Adak kurbanı*),
 The social sacrifice (*Musahiv kurbanı*),



Figure 1. Banner for the Beşiktaş *cemevi* administered by the Cem Foundation (<http://www.cemvakfibesiktas.org>)



Figure 2. Banner for the Şahkulu Sultan Dervish Lodge (<http://www.sahkulu.com/>)

and accompanying *saz*, a traditional string instrument, music), and practices forbidden by Sunni Islam

The sacrifice of atonement (*Düşkün kurbanı keseriz*).

We recognise no *kadı* (*Biz kadı bilmeyiz*).

Do not ask our sect (*Sorma sofu bize mezhe-bimizi*).

We recognise no sects (*Biz mezhep bilmeyiz*)ç

We say, “we have our path” (*Yolumuz vardır, deriz*).¹⁷³

The institutions and individuals within the movement thus employ symbols to construct the content of Alevi identity—its rituals, traditions, and icons—while drawing sharp boundaries between it and its constitutive outside, its foreign other. For the movement, that other is Sunni Islam.

Some symbols employed by the movement to distinguish Alevism from Sunni Islam have become politicized themselves. On the one hand, the *cemevi* and the *dede* are central institutions of Alevi identity and community formation. As the rituals and traditions of Alevism typically took place in private homes in Anatolian villages, the establishment of the *cemevi* in cities resulted from the need for new spaces to practice Alevi faith.¹⁷⁴ As such, the *cemevi* serves as a location for both religious rituals and the articulation of Alevi identity with publications, discussions, performances, and celebrations concerning Alevism, often open to Alevis and non-Alevis alike.¹⁷⁵ The Alevi revival movement similarly reimagines the role of the *dede*, discarding its social and legal functions not suited to urban life and instead focusing on its

roles in officiating rituals and serving as a symbol of social solidarity.¹⁷⁶ But while these two components of Alevi traditions transformed out of need, they also serve as symbols of resistance. As the Turkish state considers the mosque and the imam symbols of proper Islam, the development of the *cemevi* and *dede* as symbols of Alevism challenge the Sunni religious dimension of Turkish nationalism.

As the state institution responsible for implementing policies of religious homogenization, the Diyanet has also been challenged as a symbol of identity. As demonstrated in the demands of the movement, a desire to transform the Diyanet is common across all branches. Alevi institutions typically either accept the Diyanet as a legitimate institution and seek the incorporation of Alevis or reject it and demand its abolishment.¹⁷⁷ The Cem Foundation has even responded to the Diyanet by constructing its own symbol of institutionalized religion, the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam (*Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı*), an act Dressler states “challenges the monopoly of [the Diyanet] and is a reaction to the state’s refusal to formally acknowledge Alevis and provide them with a share of [Diyanet’s] competence and budget.”¹⁷⁸ This rejection of the Diyanet in its current form alongside efforts to appropriate it for Alevi needs reflect the adoption and



Figure 3. Above. An advertisement for a fund in honor of Berkin Elvan (“Berkin Elvan Bursu,” Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Associates USA, September 12, 2014, <http://www.pirsultanusa.com/>)

Figure 4. Right. A banner of Elvan with the phrase “Berkin Elvan is immortal” at June 2014 İstanbul protest for the Sivas massacre



transformation by the resisting minority group of symbols employed by the state or majority.

Alongside these symbols that distinguish Alevism from the Sunni majoritarian identity, the movement has developed symbols of repression by the state and majority. As explained in the first chapter, symbols representing repressive acts by the state or majority strengthen a social movement by building solidarity, legitimizing demands for protection, and preserving the feelings of outrage associated with the instance of repression, thus creating a more powerful and united movement. The massacres perpetrated against Alevi communities by nationalists, and Islamists have become some of the most prominent symbols of repression, with the 1993 Sivas massacre being the most frequently mentioned. Reflecting the power of the Sivas massacre as a symbol of repression, protests occur across the country on its anniversary (as mentioned at the beginning), while Alevi institutions and leaders have long called for the Madımak Hotel attacked in the incident to be preserved as a museum in its memory.¹⁷⁹ Alevis killed in these massacres and other attacks have also become prominent symbols, due to what Randall Collins describes as their representation of the “the moral power of the movement...the feeling that the movement will ultimately win out.”¹⁸⁰ During protests commemorating the Sivas massacre, for example, the names of those who died are often read and protesters often carry photos of them.¹⁸¹ The Gezi protests of 2013, while not tied directly to Alevi issues or demands, have similarly produced martyrs adopted by the movement. During a 2013 protest commemorating the Sivas massacre, for example, Alevis chanted the name of Ethem Sarısülük, an Alevi killed in Gezi Park protests in Ankara, along with slogans denouncing the AKP.¹⁸² These symbols illustrate to both the movement and those outside it that the state and majority have proven hostile to the Alevi population, and, as a result, the Alevi population must have greater protections to defend its practice and identity.

Berkin Elvan has emerged as among the most potent of these symbols. Reflecting the importance of these symbols in continued mobilization, Elvan’s death nearly a year after the Gezi Park protests instigated widespread protests denouncing the AKP and police, featuring slogans that demonstrate the power of his memory such as “Berkin Elvan is immortal.”¹⁸³ As shown in Figure 3, Alevi institutions have adopted

Elvan as a symbol of oppression and solidarity. Calling Elvan “our brother Berkin” and providing the narrative of his death, the advertisement for a fund in his honor sponsored by the American branch of the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association proclaims: “May children not be murdered; may our children who are our future go to school and smile with hope at the future!”¹⁸⁴ Berkin Elvan thus does not represent a single incident, but rather the threat faced by all Alevis that suffer from persecution. Actors within the movement combine the symbol of Elvan with images of the massacres described earlier, demonstrated by the black banner featuring an image of Berkin Elvan and the phrase “Berkin Elvan is immortal” hung at a protest commemorating the June 2014 Sivas massacre shown in Figure 4. By combining images of Alevis killed during the Gezi Park protests with commemorations of past massacres, the Alevi revival movement anchors its identity in an ongoing narrative of oppression.

Such narratives of oppression are not limited to the years since the Alevi revival movement emerged, but rather reach far into history. The movement traces the origins of the Alevi population to the Turkic tribes that rose against Seljuk and Ottoman rule and faced persecution, as described in the second chapter.¹⁸⁵ These narratives, Vorhoff writes, depict a

...society divided into two categories of people: on the one side there are the humble nomads, the modest farmers, the workers, the urban poor, the weak and underprivileged. They all appear as innocent, just, good, righteous and at the same time as ready to suffer for their ideal—a democratic society based on equality, justice, freedom, and solidarity... these men and the common people are the ones who are discriminated against, suppressed, exploited and murdered by an unscrupulous caste of despotic, cruel rulers and rich, treacherous merchants... every past era has produced its heroes and villains, each representing the opposing principles of Good and Evil. In such a confrontation, the oppressed appear most often as a non-Arab people, particularly Turks; the oppressors are Arabs, or ‘degenerate’, ‘decadent’ Turks such as the Seljuks or the Ottomans.¹⁸⁶

To the Alevi revival movement, Alevi identity is thus grounded in the history of a people who suffered persecution by oppressive states that governed Anatolia throughout their history and continuing into the present. Such historical narratives of oppression under the Sunni majorities of the Ottoman Empire and modern Republic describe an ethnically unique Alevi people descended from the Turkic tribes, distinguish the Alevi population as the oppressed beneath the oppressive Sunni majority, and also incorporate Alevi preoccupations with class that linger from the leftist past of the Alevi population.¹⁸⁷ Alevi institutions develop religious narratives of persecution alongside these historical narratives by placing the Alevi population into Shi'i narratives of oppression by Sunni states. This religious persecution is often compared to present conditions, as demonstrated by this excerpt from an Alevi poem written about the Sivas massacre:

The incident set the world in a state of turmoil,
Wasn't there a military regiment in Sivas?
People were burned and there was dancing,
Why are you chasing [us], you bloody Yezid?¹⁸⁸

As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the central figure of Shi'ism, Imam Ali, is also one of the most revered figures in Alevism, figuring heavily into Alevi imagery as depictions of him adorn *cemevs* as well as the private homes of Alevis.¹⁸⁹ The movement interprets him as a symbol of resistance against injustice.¹⁹⁰ With these narratives, Alevis in the movement thus claim, Göner explains that, "Alevism [is] the cultural echo of resistance to all kinds of inequality and injustice."¹⁹¹ Ethnic narratives of the oppression of the Turkic people and these religious narratives of the oppression offer the movement narratives of resistance against oppression by Sunni states and societies.

This focus on resistance as a central component of Alevi history and identity is found in other prominent symbols as well. The Anatolian mystic-poet Hacı Bektaş Veli, widely venerated by the movement, is described as a symbol of the triumph of good over evil, a symbol of hope and perseverance for a long-oppressed people.¹⁹² As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, Imam Ali, a symbol of resistance against injustice, and Hacı Bektaş Veli, this symbol of the triumph of good, are central to Alevi identity. Indeed, Kehl-Bodrogi writes, "[e]ntering the living room of a house inhabited by Alevis, colour prints of Ali and Hacı

Bektaş will inevitably leap to the eye."¹⁹³ Similarly, Pir Sultan Abdal, whose legacy is celebrated in the names of multiple Alevi institutions and an annual cultural festival in Sivas, is revered for not only his mystical poetry, but also his manner of death—execution by the Ottoman state during the sixteenth century for rebellious behavior.¹⁹⁴ Many of the legends that surround Pir Sultan Abdal accordingly emphasize his rebellious rejection of the oppressive Sunni governor of Sivas and his loyalty to Shah Isma'il of the Safavid Empire, transforming him into a symbol of both Alevi ethnic identity as a member of the rebellious Turkic tribes and Alevi religious identity as a mystic-poet.¹⁹⁵ Reflecting the themes of oppression and resistance and Shi'i imagery that feature heavily in his celebrated poetry, an excerpt from one poem follows:

Ever enduring I die from this malady
If you love Ali don't touch my wound
I devote myself to the way of Ali
If you love Ali don't touch my wound
...
I am Pir Sultan, Haydar, we are Nesimi
Even from eternity we are given to the Shah
The twelve imams, our place of dwelling
We are martyrs and Ali our commander¹⁹⁶

These symbols surround narratives of oppression with a past of resistance against injustice. The prominence the Alevi revival movement gives these figures reveals the centrality of rebellion against injustice to Alevi identity. Indicative of patterns of a minority group resisting state and society in the pursuit of accommodation, the Alevi revival movement has portrayed the Alevis as a group long oppressed by Turkish states, but one with the will to challenge such injustices.

b. Assimilation

Despite these patterns of resistance, the Alevi revival movement rejects classification as a minority group. After a report by the European Union described the Alevis as a "non-Sunni Muslim minority" in 2004, the Turkish state immediately protested the claim, with both Kemalist President Necdet Sezer and Islamist Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the time asserting that the Alevi population is not a minority group but rather a part of the majority.¹⁹⁷ That the state would oppose the classification of Alevis as a minority group should not be surprising given its denial of Alevi difference. Yet the Alevi revival move-

ment also emphatically rejected this classification.¹⁹⁸ Some Alevi justify this claim by explaining that only non-Muslim populations may be considered minority groups in Turkey, often out of a fear that classification as a minority group would lead to greater suspicions that Alevi are not loyal to the state and, as a result, increased discrimination.¹⁹⁹ Leaders in the movement have given an additional reason, however. Denouncing the classification of Alevi as a minority, İzzettin Doğan, head of the Cem Foundation, proclaimed that, “Alevi are not a minority, they are part of the founding elements of this country,” a sentiment widely shared within the movement.²⁰⁰ Indeed, as the Alevi revival movement resists Turkish nation-building policies, it seems to also assimilate into that Turkish national identity.

Although narratives developed by the movement portray the Alevi population as oppressed by the Turkish state, it also describes Alevi identity as Turkish. As stated in the preceding section, the movement traces the origins of the Alevi to the Turkic tribes that migrated into Anatolia from Central Asia and employs Turkic mystic-poets and rebels as some of its most revered symbols, constructing an ancestral Turkic identity. This narrative comes as a response to the incorporation of Alevi into the ethnic Turkish nationalism discussed in the third chapter. This identification of Alevism as genuinely Turkish does not stop at ethnicity, however, as Açıkel and Ateş write that “[f]or secular ethno-cultural nationalism, the Alevi’s understanding of the Islamic faith represents a specifically Turkish interpretation of Islam... [as] the Alevi successfully conserved the spirit of the ancient Central Asian and Anatolian belief systems.”²⁰¹ Both Alevi institutions that consider Alevism an interpretation of Islam and those that consider it outside Islam portray Alevism as a pure Turkish tradition in contrast with Sunni Islam, which they denounce as corrupted by Arabic and Persian influences in the Seljuk and Ottoman periods.²⁰² The prominent Hacı Bektaş Veli Cultural Association (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür Derneği*), for example, describes Alevism as a tradition founded in thirteenth century Anatolia with roots in Central Asian, Anatolian, and Near Eastern traditions, such as “Greek philosophy, Hittite and Mesopotamian religions, ancient Turkic shamanism, ancient Iranian Mazdakism, Manichaeism, [and] Zoroastrianism,” a tradition with the same roots as the Turkish identity

cultivated by the state.²⁰³ The movement thus locates Alevi identity within the Anatolian and Turkic identity promulgated by the state.

The most widespread symbol of this identity cultivated by the movement is Hacı Bektaş Veli, the celebrated medieval mystic-poet. As explained, his image is a central symbol within the movement, found in Alevi websites, publications, institutions, festivals, and even homes. Elise Massicard explains that he is so highly revered for a number of reasons:

Hacı Bektaş is a central figure of Alevism, since it is through him that Anatolian Alevism can be most clearly distinguished from Syrian Alawism or from the Twelver Shi’ism in Iran; he also permits the making of a direct link between Alevism and Bektashism, which are quite different sociological realities. Moreover, he is also respected by Sunnis, which is important in relation to outside society... he is also quite a consensual figure among Alevi, because most of the other figures of Alevism have a more precise significance: Pir Sultan Abdal is distinguished by a more left-wing connotation since the 1960s...²⁰⁴

Although there exist many competing narratives of his life as little is known for sure, the movement has broadly adopted Hacı Bektaş Veli as a symbol of the Turkish and Anatolian heritage of Alevi identity.²⁰⁵ In addition to representing the triumph of good over evil, the Alevi revival movement celebrates Hacı Bektaş Veli for supposedly defending the Turkish language from being submerged beneath and extinguished by Arabic and Persian as he chose to write and deliver religious messages in Turkish.²⁰⁶ Further, although Hacı Bektaş Veli came to Anatolia in the thirteenth century, Ataseven explains that Alevi institutions and leaders understand his “love message” to be “specifically Anatolian,” meaning that “Anatolian Turks are more related to the Hittites than the Central Asian Turks, which suits the Kemalistic idea of a clearly delineated nation with a rich cultural heritage specific for this geographic area.”²⁰⁷ Hacı Bektaş Veli thus links the Central Asian and Anatolian legacies of this ethnic Turkish-Alevi identity in one symbol.

Alongside ethnic narratives of identity, the Alevi revival movement also presents Alevism as central to the civic narratives of Turkish nation-building policies. As described in the second chapter, the Alevi population broadly supported the nationalist movement that would establish the Republic, hoping

that the new state would bring an end to centuries of repression. Although the reforms introduced by the republican state repressed Alevism, they also initially repressed public demonstrations of Sunni identity, suggesting an equality of treatment under the new state.²⁰⁸ With the incorporation of Alevis into political life after centuries of exclusion and the destruction of institutions that repressed Alevism, the period of the National Struggle represents liberation from Ottoman oppression and unity as a nation. Excerpts from a poem by an Alevi intellectual from the early 1980s titled “The Epos of the Liberation” (“*Kurtuluş Destanı*”) thus follow:

We were invincible, we became one and complete,
 We were undividable, we were together with Ata[türk],
 Not as captives, if we had died we would have been free,
 The brave men said [this is] the time and place,
 and they became heroes.
 ...
 Our Ata[türk] said: “Let slavery end!”
 “Let the enemy go [back] the way he came!,”
 “Let freedom smoke in the extinguished hearths!,”
 The hearths burned, his word became the principle.²⁰⁹

As reflected by this poem, the discourse surrounding the National Struggle within Alevi narratives is one of liberation and national unity under the figure of Atatürk. The National Struggle represents a moment in which the population—both Alevi and Sunni—united as it rose against the collapsing Ottoman state and invading foreign forces. Ataseven explains that Alevi institutions thus assert that “the Turkish nation owes its existence largely to the Alevis” due to their role in the nationalist movement.²¹⁰ Indicating this view and the importance of the National Struggle to understandings of Alevi identity, Alevi institutions often include descriptions of the National Struggle in their websites and publications.²¹¹ As an integral component of the war that established the Republic, the Alevi revival movement contends, they are an integral component of the Turkish nation and not a minority group.

Owing to his role in the National Struggle and the establishment of the secular republic, Atatürk has become one of the most prominent symbols of the

movement. As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrated earlier, his image is found on the banners of Alevi websites. As seen in Figure 5, his image is even found in *cemevis* alongside religious figures, such as Hacı Bektaş Veli and Imam Ali. Illustrating the extreme importance his image holds within these religious settings, the heads of the Hacı Bektaş Foundation, the Hubyar Sultan Alevi Cultural Association, and even the leftist, anti-state Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association balked at a suggestion that portraits of Atatürk be removed from *cemevis*.²¹² This extraordinary reverence for Atatürk comes from his symbolic role as the liberator of the Alevi population. Indeed, Kehl-Bodrogi explains that Atatürk “stands for the end of a period which began in the time of Shah Isma’il, when Alevism became a community nearly hermetically sealed to the outside...the reign of Yezid seemed to be over” with “the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the disestablishment of the Islamic *ulema*” he brought.²¹³ There is in fact an almost religious personage attached to Atatürk. One Bektaşî poem written during the National Struggle, which uses the word *nefes* (“hymn,” used for religious poetry) in the title, goes:

He saved this oppressed nation from all the chains of slavery,
 This is the hero of God who conducts holy conquests in a way that moves the heart
 This leader is the revered crown of the world of



Figure 5. An Ankara *cemevi* featuring the Atatürk, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Ali (“Alevis divided on Atatürk portraits in *cemevis*.”)

Islam,
 This is the decree of fate for those enemies who were after him.
 Today the sun of independence, O Asım, rose over the world of Islam,
 And showed its fair face; what a beautiful beloved.

... This is just a prayer for Kemal Paşa [who is] of pure character.²¹⁴

Such religious themes surround the memory of Atatürk in modern Alevi poetry as well, with poems referring to him as the “hero of the last days,” the *Mahdi*, or the “lion of God;” invocations of “[t]he law of Atatürk” and his sword in opposition to Islamism; and demonstrations of yearning reverence for him in poetry written using mystic styles and themes.²¹⁵ Some Alevis consider Atatürk to have been an Alevi himself, although many others do not support such theories. For the Alevi revival movement, Atatürk has thus become a central symbol as the liberator of the Alevis. By invoking his image as a symbol of liberation in the National Struggle, the Alevi revival movement locates the historical narratives surrounding Alevi identity in the heart of the civic narratives of Turkish identity.

Alongside portrayals of Alevi narratives of identity as congruent with ethnic and civic nationalist narratives, the Alevi revival movement emphasizes Alevi beliefs and practices that reflect the modernist principles of Kemalism. Secular nationalists have long upheld Alevism as an example of liberal Islam, despite their dismissal of aspects they deem archaic such as the *dede* or incompatible with state Islam such as the *cemevi*, illustrated by Pinar’s explanation that “Alevism embodies many of the virtues of Kemalist Islam... and the general liberalism of the [Alevi] community, reflected in its stance on alcohol and gender relations, indicates a modernism that impressed Kemalists.”²¹⁶ Even in its earliest years the Turkish state utilized Alevism to assert that, Erdemir writes, “the authentic values of the Turks were no different from Western values.”²¹⁷ Embracing this positive reception by early nationalists, Alevi institutions present Alevi beliefs as similar to the principles promoted by the state. In her analysis of modern interpretations of Alevi values, Vorhoff offers one particularly compelling example of this practice:

The central ethical norm of Alevism that demands ‘*eline, diline, beline sahip ol*’ (be master of your hands, your tongue and your loins” refers... not merely to the banning of theft, envy, lying, telling of the secret teachings of Alevism, slander, adultery and intercourse with Sunnis, but also to the obligation to defend the fatherland (*el*), to preserve the (Turkish) mother tongue (*dil*) and to keep one’s own blood brothers (*bel*).²¹⁸

Alongside such nationalistic values, the Alevi revival movement promotes understandings of Alevism as a tradition that represents progressivism. As Göner explains, since the rise of the Alevi revival movement, many Alevis have come to consider Alevism a “universal religion... which defines itself in terms of universal values, such as equality, democracy, justice, human rights, freedom, cooperation, women’s rights, and environmentalism.”²¹⁹ By characterizing Alevi beliefs as representative of modern values, the Alevi revival movement locates Alevism within the stream of civic nationalism present in state rhetoric.

This new focus on the modernity of Alevi beliefs and practices has even led to a redefinition of central Alevi symbols. Although Hacı Bektaş Veli is celebrated as a symbol of ancestral Turkish values and traditions, Vorhoff writes, many within the movement claim that his message of love “include[s] elements of every people, culture and faith that has ever flourished in Anatolia,” thus presenting him as “a man devoid of any racial marking, who was a master of synthesis... melding [these peoples, cultures, and faiths] into a deeply humanitarian, peace-loving and egalitarian faith and ethic.”²²⁰ The institution of the *dede* has additionally come under attack by elements in the Alevi revival movement due to its emphasis on lineages of descent, an institution many deem incompatible with the modern and inclusive ideology they seek to develop.²²¹ Responding to these accusations, the Cem Foundation now offers courses that allow one to become a *dede*, redefining a position based on lineage into one anyone can attain.²²² This opening of the institution of the *dede* signals a transition from ethnic, ascriptive conceptualizations of the *dede*—and by extension Alevism—to an understanding of the *dede* that embraces republican and civic values of inclusiveness. This new interpretation of Hacı Bektaş Veli and criticism of *dedes* reflects the abandonment of attributes of the minority group incompatible with national or majoritarian identities as well as an emphasis on attributes of minority congruent with that identity, in this case a civic Turkish identity.

Although women are not readily visible within the leadership of the movement, Alevis identify the place of women in Alevism as symbolic of progressivism and adherence to civic values in a conservative Sunni society. Unlike Sunni Islam, Alevism does not demand the separation of men and women during worship, nor does it mandate the headscarf; further,

as the Alevi population practices monogamy rather than polygamy and had lower rates of divorce, the movement claims that it treats women in a modern manner in comparison to the comparatively conservative Sunni Islam that dominates majoritarian understandings of Turkish identity.²²³ In an interview, for example, Alevi activist Reha Çamuroğlu explained that, “if a male Bektâşi²²⁴ beats his wife you would be surprised. Because such a thing is not... possible in Bektâşism.”²²⁵ Asserting the historical acceptance of women within Alevism as well as distinguishing Alevi identity from Sunni identity, an Alevi institution based in Australia declares that, “[f]or over 2000 years women have been regarded as divine within the Alevi/Bektashi order” and attributes the suppressed position of women in Turkish culture to the “Arabic harem culture” that it claims corrupted the Ottoman Empire.²²⁶ Within Turkey, Alevi institutions demonstrate an open support for women, illustrated by Cem Foundation’s dedication of an entire section on its website to issues and events concerning women.²²⁷ Through this emphasis on beliefs and practices considered more modern, the Alevi revival movement seeks to locate itself within the civic values supported by the secular and republican foundations of the Turkish state as it rejects religious Turkish nationalism.

Reflecting the emphatic assertions that the Alevi population does not constitute a minority group, much of the symbolic discourse surrounding Alevi identity indicates assimilation into the Turkish identity constructed by the state. In response to the embrace of Alevism by Turkish secular nationalists as a Turkish Islam untouched by Arab or Persian influences, the movement emphasizes the Turkic and Anatolian roots of Alevism. Symbols such as Hacı Bektaş Veli and discourses on elements of Alevism, such as its syncretic aspects thus describe an ethnic narrative of Alevi identity grounded in Anatolia and Central Asia and a religious narrative depicting a faith loyal to Turkish values. Understanding these Turkish values to be the modern, republican values of civic Turkish nationalism, the Alevi revival movement assimilates into a civic Turkish identity as it identifies those attributes of Alevism that are congruent with this civic identity. These processes of civic assimilation have also led the movement to renounce or redefine certain symbols. This understanding of Alevism as central to Turkish nationalism has led to

an Alevi interpretation of the National Struggle that describes the Alevis as integral actors. As the Alevi revival movement locates Alevism within ethnic and civic streams of Turkish national identity, the process of identity formation occurring in the movement reflects patterns of assimilation.

c. Contestation

At first glance, these findings leave us without a satisfying response to the question posed at the beginning of this work: Does the Alevi revival movement respond to the mixed message of Turkish nationalism as an insiders or an outsider of the Turkish nation? The analysis of Alevi identity offered here reveals an apparent coexistence of resistance and assimilation present across all branches of the movement. On the one hand, institutions within the movement reject the Sunni identity constructed by the Turkish state. They emphasize those elements of Alevi beliefs, practices, and history that distinguish it from Sunni Islam with some even locating Alevism outside Islam entirely, reflecting a process of boundary formation indicative of a resisting minority group. On the other hand, however, the movement seems to assimilate into Turkish nationalism through the construction of symbols that present Alevi identity as congruent with ethnic and civic Turkish nationalism. Looking at this seeming contradiction, one might ask: Is the Alevi revival movement pursuing both resistance and assimilation? If so, how does this dualistic strategy contribute to its goals of recognition and accommodation?

Perhaps the Alevi revival movement is pursuing neither. Reflecting on the analysis of apparent resistance and assimilation within the Alevi revival movement undertaken in this work, I contend that the movement is neither resisting against the national identity constructed by the Turkish state nor assimilating into it. Both processes require the minority group to recognize that it exists outside the national or majoritarian identity of the nation-state, that it is instead part of its constitutive outside. In many ways, the Alevi population is a minority group, as it is significantly smaller than the Sunni majority and, much like a minority group building a social movement, seeks to construct an identity distinct from that majority. Yet Alevi institutions couch their narratives and demands in a majoritarian rhetoric that emphasizes Alevi belonging within ethnic and civic concep-

tualizations of the Turkish nation while rejecting the religious Sunni dimension of Turkish nationalism. A careful reading of the symbolic discourse surrounding Alevi identity reveals that, instead of resisting or assimilating, the Alevi revival movement contests the meaning of the Turkish nation, arguing that the Alevis represent the genuine Turkish nation built by Atatürk and the state is the deviant that has veered away from this true Turkish nation and receded back into the oppression of the Ottoman period. I will now analyze together the symbolic narratives of resistance and assimilation described above to elucidate this process of contestation.

As described in the analysis of patterns of resistance in the Alevi revival movement presented earlier in this chapter, the discourse surrounding Alevi identity is depicted in a dualistic framework between the oppressed and the oppressor. As Vorhoff explains, the narrative of Alevi history described by the movement “evokes a kind of Manichaean world view... the oppressed appear most often as a non-Arab people, particularly Turks; the oppressors are Arabs, or ‘degenerate,’ ‘decadent’ Turks such as the Seljuks or Ottomans... [that] no longer counted as Turkish because they uncritically adopted Arabic and Persian culture and despised Turkishness in every respect.”²²⁸ To the ideologues of the Alevi revival movement, the Islam of this historical oppressive elite is therefore not the Islam of the Turks; as the preceding analyses indicate, the movement asserts that Alevism is the interpretation of Islam that genuinely represents Turkish values. Instead, the movement contends that the Sunni Islam of these elites is a corruption introduced by the Umayyad Empire. As one *dede* states: “The Umayyad family introduced political controversies to the religion and they corrupted the Prophet’s path... Sunni Islam is the Arabic and Umayyad understanding of Islam.”²²⁹ To defend this claim, Alevi ideologues argue that Sunni practices such as daily prayers were introduced for social control rather than by the Prophet Muhammad and that the Koran is incomplete as many references to Imam Ali have been purged, among other assertions.²³⁰ On the other side of this historical divide exist the Turkish people, represented by the Turcoman tribes with an ethnic legacy in Central Asia and a religious legacy stretching to Imam Ali. As described, the Alevi revival movement constructs this identity through narratives that identify the oppressed Alevis as the once-op-

pressed Turcoman tribes and symbols of Turcoman resistance such as Pir Sultan Abdal. According to these narratives, a bleak reality dominated for much of the history of this constructed Alevi people.

The Alevi revival movement states that the balance between the oppressor and the oppressed only shifted with the emergence of Atatürk as the liberator of this Turkish people. Indeed, as the poems provided earlier in this chapter demonstrate, Mustafa Kemal is not simply the founder of a new state, but rather a liberator of the Turkish people from not only invading foreign forces but also centuries of oppression. As such, the vice president of an Alevi foundation comments: “The Alevis have only come out victorious once. We won one time with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk... Atatürk saved us from the sultanate, religious bigotry, and economic and political oppression.”²³¹ The symbolic discourse surrounding Alevi narrative thus locates the Alevi people in the Turkish nation-state established following the National Struggle and takes Mustafa Kemal as the sacred symbol of the liberation of that nation.

As described in the third chapter, Turkish nationalism during the early republic was ethnic, territorial, and ferociously secular. The Turkish nation-building policies and the fantastical theories of the Turkish History Thesis and Sun Language Theory underpinning them portrayed the Turkish nation as one with origins in an ancestral Turkic people that left their original homeland in Central Asia to establish a new one in Anatolia. This early nationalism married these ethnic beliefs with civic nationalism by asserting that ancestral Turkish values are the beliefs in republicanism and modernism that guide the Turkish state. As demonstrated in the analysis of patterns of assimilation within the Alevi revival movement, it is the ethnic and civic dimensions of Turkish nationalism that the movement embraces. Although the movement today considers this period to represent the liberation of the Turkish people and thus locates itself within this nationalist discourse, incidents that occurred under Atatürk such as the Dersim operation, during which the Turkish military massacred an estimated ten percent of the population of the province to pacify rebelling Alevi Kurds, and the closing of the dervish lodges with Law 677, which continues to prohibit state recognition of *cemevis* and *dedes*,²³² make obvious that that the Kemalist nation-building project was not as friendly to the Alevi people as the

movement suggests. For this reason, leftist elements in the movement have become critical of this period of time and argue that the oppression of the Alevis returned while Atatürk was still alive.²³³ Nonetheless, such perspectives are marginalized, reflected by a broad denial that Atatürk was involved in incidents such as the Dersim operation while Alevis accept religious repression so long as all religious expression is proscribed.²³⁴ The movement thus locates the genuine Turkish nation within the nationalism of the early republic.

Because the genuine Turkish nation is taken by the Alevi revival movement to be an aggressively ethnic and staunchly secular interpretation of Turkish nationalism, the movement identifies the reemergence of Islam as a political force that occurred with democratization as the point at which the oppressive forces of the past engulfed the Turkish nation once again. Reflecting on the ascent of Islamism, one Alevi poet laments, “The Arabs drag the country into darkness... [Atatürk’s] country is buried in darkness.”²³⁵ Indeed, Köse explains that the most prominent view of the movement asserts that, “the Turks’ understanding of Islam was Sunnified, politicised and contaminated during the Seljukid period, Ottoman times and the multi-party period of Republican Turkey, starting

interpretation in a comment on the debate on the headscarf, one Alevi institution asks: “Is it not so ironic that today’s incumbent AKP government in power are [*sic*] taking Turkish stature back to the dark days of fourteen centuries?”²³⁸ Condemning AKP efforts to build relations with the Alevi population through the Alevi opening, the chairman of another Alevi institution similarly declares: “It is an AKP project that portends new steps towards Sharia-type rule,” the Islamic law abolished by Mustafa Kemal.²³⁹ For the Alevi revival movement, Islamism symbolizes the return to Ottoman oppression.

In its rhetoric and discourse surrounding identity, the Alevi revival movement thus responds to Turkish nationalism by locating Alevi identity as constructed through symbols and historical narratives produced by the movement within what it considers to be the Turkish nation. The Turkish state since the democratization of Turkish politics in 1950 is thus attacked as an illegitimate representation of this nation, a state that does not represent its people but rather the forces that have historically oppressed them. To meet this objective, the Alevi revival movement emphasizes aspects of Alevi identity congruent with the ethnic and civic streams of Turkish nationalism that dominated the early discourses of the Republic



Figure 6. An Alevi protest against compulsory religious courses in schools (“Alevis protest compulsory religion classes at Turkish schools,” Today’s Zaman, October 12, 2014, <http://www.todayszaman.com/>)

from the early 1950s and continuing after the 1980 military coup.”²³⁶ As such, Alevis claim that Islamists are the heirs of the oppressive Ottoman, Seljuk, and ultimately Umayyad traditions.²³⁷ Reflecting this

while rejecting religious aspects introduced with the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, reflecting a pattern of contestation that rejects this religious nationalism as the resurgence of Ottoman forces. Its political demands

attack institutions and practices that affiliate the state with religion. As Figure 6 shows, the symbols surrounding political demands thus reflect notions of belonging in the Turkish nation through the Turkish flag and rejection of the Sunni identity increasingly adopted by the state through symbols of a distinct Alevi religious identity understood to be an ethnically Turkish identity. Although we may conclude that the Alevi revival movement is a movement of resistance that seeks accommodation like a minority group, unlike a minority group, the identity it constructs in response to the national or majoritarian identity is not one of separation, but rather one of belonging in a redefined nation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Alevi revival movement thus offers a case study of the relationship a minority group may forge with the nation-state in which it resides. In many ways, the Alevi revival movement is a resisting minority group. With most estimates considering the Alevi population to compose between fifteen and twenty-five percent of the Turkish population, the Alevis are by no means an insignificant component of the Turkish population.²⁴⁰ Similarly, a long history of exclusion by Anatolian states that identify with Sunni Islam—the Republic included—and a population hostile to Alevism indicates that the majoritarian community of the country considers the Alevi population to be a rejected minority group. Indeed, even as the Turkish state claims that the Alevi population is a component of the majority, it only permits Alevis to enter the majoritarian community if they renounce aspects of their religious identity that separate them from official interpretations of Sunni Islam. The Alevi revival movement itself behaves like a resisting minority group, constructing an identity around those attributes that distinguish Alevi identity from the majority. Yet with assimilationist imagery and rhetoric also featuring in Alevi conceptualizations of identity, it is not so clear how the Alevi revival movement understands Alevism relative to the majority, to the Turkish nation. This work thus asks: does the Alevi revival movement assimilate or resist?

To address this question, I first examined the role of symbols in the formation of identity within states building nations and minority groups building social movements. This analysis resulted in a model that describes three potential courses of response to

minority groups confronted by national or majoritarian identities. As I described, the minority group may assimilate into that identity by either renouncing those attributes that distinguish it from the majority or identifying attributes of the minority identity with the majority. A minority group that does not or cannot pursue assimilation may exit the nation-state, abandoning the national or majoritarian community through either physical migration, secession, or a sociocultural exit in which the minority group isolates itself from the majoritarian community. Lastly, the minority group may pursue resistance, forming a collective identity and challenging the state for accommodation. Although the Alevi population pursued exit for much of its history since the massacres of the sixteenth century, with the formation of a social movement active in public and political life, it can no longer do so. But does this social movement pursue assimilation or resistance?

The effort to address this question took me through the historical development of the Alevi population in Turkey as well as the evolving Turkish nationalism that shapes the relationship between the state and this religious community. This first analysis of the history surrounding the Alevi population produced numerous potential symbols of identity that told both a history of brutal repression by the former Ottoman Empire and modern Republic as well as a history of cultural and philosophical development built on a foundation of syncretism and mysticism that makes itself known through a rich body of poetry and traditions. This second analysis developed a model of Turkish nationalism as it acts on the Turkish population and is received by that population. This nationalism is one grounded in first an ancestral, sometimes fantastical, Turkish nation stretching far back into time and united by the shared language, descent, and civic values attached to that primordial identity. As the Turkish state democratized, however, it came to respond to the character of its predominantly conservative Sunni population. By building an identity defined by Sunni Islam, the state has condemned assimilative practices associated with its ethnic nationalism. With this shift, the Alevi population saw itself change from a perceived member of the ethnic nation as the descendants of the Turkic tribes to a part of the constitutive outside of that nation as a heterodox sect. Although such religious practices have always been present in Turkish nationalism, as

explained in the second and third chapters, under the early Republic, religion defined the boundaries of membership in the nation whereas ethnic attributes defined identity. In other words, before 1950 and the later adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the 1980s, to be a member of the Turkish meant to be a Muslim, but to be Turkish itself meant to be part of an ethnic group reaching to the Turkic peoples of Central Asia.

With this transformation of conceptualizations of Turkish nationalism came the rise of the Alevi revival movement to protest these perceived changes. Indeed, one scholar of the movement comments, “What pushed [the Alevi population] into this situation is a fear that Sunni Islam may come to power.”²⁴¹ But does the Alevi revival movement respond to this changing nationalist discourse? Examined with the model of minority group response, the symbols and narratives the Alevi revival movement draws from its history, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions to construct an Alevi identity seem to suggest that the movement pursues both assimilation and resistance. Upon closer analysis, however, it becomes apparent that the Alevi revival movement utilizes these processes of identity formation not to situate itself outside national identity and demand accommodation, but rather to situate itself within the Turkish nation and condemn the Turkish state as having succumbed to the historical forces that once oppressed this Turkish people with the reentry of Islam into Turkish public and political life. As a result, the Alevi revival movement identifies its identity with the ethnic identity of early Turkish nationalism while at the same time harshly condemning and resisting the Sunni religious identity that the state has constructed since the 1980 military coup. Emphasizing the repressive aspects of *laiklik* rather than its assimilationist aspects and describing the Turkish nation as an ethnic people once oppressed by Sunni empires, the Alevi revival movement denies the position of Sunni Islam within Turkish identity. Perhaps the Alevi revival movement pursues this rhetoric as a reaction to the intense assimilation of Turkish nationalism, which led the state to privilege discourses of unity and belonging, or perhaps it is out of a fear that identification as a minority group could lead to the same violent social, political, and economic exclusion that has almost wiped out non-Islamic minority groups in Turkey. Regardless of the reasons the Alevi

revival movement has chosen its rhetoric of belonging in a nation no longer represented by the state, it is this symbolic discourse of contestation that defines the process of identity formation in the Alevi revival movement today.

As the Alevi population has become increasingly prominent in Turkish politics, with both political actors inside Turkey, such as the Kemalist CHP and outside Turkey, such as the European Union, acknowledging Alevi demands and calling on the Turkish state to respond, this analysis of the Alevi identity formation is vital to understanding the dynamics of the Alevi revival movement. This analysis allows us to better recognize the perspective of this social movement as it challenges the state so that we may more thoroughly understand the nature of their demands and how the Turkish state may pragmatically respond to them. Beyond Turkish politics, however, this process of Alevi identity formation offers a unique case study of simultaneous assimilation and resistance that could assist us with interpreting the politics surrounding “ambivalent citizens”—those citizens Açıkel and Ateş defined as simultaneously existing inside and outside the national identity constructed by the state—elsewhere.²⁴² Moreover, it demonstrates the malleability of not only symbols and identities within a given state, but also the malleability of the nation supposedly uniting that state. As such, this work may hopefully provide a foundation for future research into the identity formation process and politics of the increasingly important Alevi revival movement as well as an understanding of the contestation of symbols and identities surrounding minority groups and other sociocultural communities in similarly troublesome situations.

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 139. Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, “Turkey’s Kurdish Language Policy,” p. 112.
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 147. Candan Pinar, “Religion–State Relations in Turkey since the AKP,” p. 509.
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 150. Başak İnce, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, pp. 49–53.
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 154. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, “AÇIKLAMA – Alevilik,” December 19, 2008, <http://www.diyanet.gov.tr/>.
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 157. Karin Vorhoff, “Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey,” in Tord Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga, and Catharina Raudvere, eds., *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives* (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 1998), p. 33.
 158. Janina Karolewski, “What is Heterodox About Alevism?” p. 455.
 159. Fethi Açıkel and Kazım Ateş, “Ambivalent Citizens,” pp. 726–727.
 160. Başak İnce, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, p. 150; Gönül Koca, “Only Christian, Jewish children exempt from Turkey’s religious education,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/>; Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, m. 174.
 161. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, m. 66.
 162. *Turkish Citizenship Law*, Law 5901 (2009): article 11.
 163. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, m. 10.
 164. Recep Peker, *CHP Programının İzahı* (Ankara: Ulus Matbaası, 1931), p. 10, quoted in Başak İnce, *Citizenship and Identity in Turkey*, p. 42.
 165. Although the crescent is a common Islamic symbol, the founding myth of the Turkish nation–state describes it in nonreligious terms as seen above. (Talip Kucukcan, “Sacralization of the State and Secular Nationalism: Foundations of Civil Religion in Turkey,” *George Washington International Law Review* 41:4 (2010), p. 971; David Straw, *Human Rights Violation in Turkey: Rethinking Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 21).
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 170. Özlem Göner, “The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity,” pp. 120–121; Karin Vorhoff, “Past in the Future,” pp. 94–95.
 171. Hamburg Alevi Derneği, “Alevilik Bildirgesi,” *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi*, May 15, 1990, p. 15.
 172. Fazilet Ahu Özmen, “The Alevi Identity and Civil Rights in the Twenty–First Century,” in Rasim Özgür Dönmez and Pinar Enneli, eds., *Societal Peace and Ideal Citizenship for Turkey* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 86.
 173. Ali Haydar Cilasun, *Alevilik Bir Sır Değildir*, Ceylan Ofset, (no place of publication), 1995, quoted in Faruk Bilici, “The Function of Alevi Bektashi Theology in Modern Turkey,” p. 53.
 174. Şehriban Şahin, “The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion,” p. 472.
 175. David Shankland, *The Alevi in Turkey*, p. 169.

176. Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," pp. 295-297; Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 102.
177. "Alevi voice unease over lack of promised rights," *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 16, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/>; Yonca Poyraz Doğan, "Alevi leader Kenanoğlu: Discrimination against Alevi increased in 2013," *Today's Zaman*, December 22, 2013, <http://www.todayszaman.com/>; B. A. Soner and Ş. Toktaş, "Alevi and Alevism in the Changing Context," pp. 424-425.
178. Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," pp. 291-292
179. For two examples, refer to the following news articles: "Sivas massacre and anniversary sees mourning and protest ban," *Today's Zaman*, July 3, 2011, <http://www.todayszaman.com/>; "Turkey commemorates 15th anniversary of Sivas massacre," *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 3, 2008, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/>.
180. Randall Collins, "Social Movements and the Focus of Emotional Attention," p. 33.
181. "Thousands march in Sivas for anniversary massacre," *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 2, 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/>; "Crowds gather across Turkey to commemorate 20th anniversary of Sivas massacre," *Hürriyet Daily News*.
182. "Thousands march in Sivas for anniversary massacre," *Hürriyet Daily News*.
183. Elvan is an Alevi teenager who was struck unconscious by a gas canister fired by security forces during a July 2013 protest while buying bread. Later, in March 2014, he passed away, sparking mass protests by Alevi and leftists (Sebnem Arsu, "Across Turkey, New Unrest as Teenage Boy Is Buried," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/>).
184. See Figure 3.
185. The Alevi revival movement further builds on notions of an ancestral community by emphasizing the ties of *dedes* to the Prophet Muhammad through his son-in-law Imam Ali, his second grandson Hüseyin, the Twelve Imams revered in Shi'i Islam, or Hacı Bektaş Veli, although such claims have come under attack by elements within the movement (Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious? Contending visions on the future of Alevi identity," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 19:5 (2012): pp. 583, 591; Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 100).
186. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 104.
187. Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," pp. 103-104.
188. "Dünya'ya ayağa kaldırdı olay/Sivas'da yokmuydu askeri alay/Yakıldı insanlar çekildi halay/Niçin kast edersin ey kanlı yezid[?]" (Fevzi Aslan, *Pir* 1:2 (1995), p. 20, quoted in Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century," pp. 127, 146).
189. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevi," p. 53.
190. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 104.
191. Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," p. 125.
192. İlhan Ataseven, *The Alevi-Bektaşî Legacy*, p. 142; Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 100.
193. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevi," p. 53.
194. Paul Koerbin, "Pir Sultan Abdal: Encounters with Persona in Alevi Lyric Song," *Oral Tradition* 26:1 (2011), p. 195.
195. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-202.
196. "Çeke çeke ben bu dertten ölürüm/Seversen Ali'yi değme yaramal Ali'nin yoluna serim veririm/Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama.../Pir Sultan'ım Haydar Nesim'i yiz/Tâ ezelden Şahîa kurban serimiz/On İki İmamlar dâr meydanımız/Biz şehidiz Ali'dir serdârımız" (Quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 2014).
197. Esra Özyürek, "Beyond Integration and Recognition: Diasporic Constructions of Alevi Muslim Identity between Germany and Turkey," in Thomas J. Csordas, ed., *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 134-135.
198. *Ibid.*, p. 135; Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," p. 128.
199. Fazilet Ahu Özmen, "The Alevi Identity and Civil Rights in the Twenty-First Century," p. 72; Esra Özyürek, "Beyond Integration and Recognition," pp. 135-136.
200. İzzettin Doğan, quoted in Béatrice Hendrich, "Remembering Culture(s) in Turkey - A Brief Survey," in Catharina Dufft, ed., *Turkish Literature and Cultural Memory: "Multiculturalism" as a Literary Theme after 1980* (Göttingen: Hubert & Co., 2009), p. 24.
201. Fethi Açıkel and Kazım Ateş, "Ambivalent Citizens," p. 722.
202. Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious?" pp. 583-587.
203. "Alevi-Bektaşîliğin kökenleri, Anadolu'nun antik çağ, eski yunan doğa filozofları, Hitit ve Mezopotamya inançları, eski Türk inancı Şamanizm, eski İran inancı Mazdek, Mani, Zerdüştlük, Budizm, ayrıca Yahudi, Hıristyan ve İslam'i senkretik-gnostik..." ("Alevilik-Bektaşîlik nedir?" *Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür Derneği*, February 8, 2012, <http://www.hacibektasdernegi.com/>).
204. Elise Massicard, "Alevism as a Productive Misunderstanding: The Hacıbektaş Festival," in Paul J. White and Joost Jongerden, eds., *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview* (Koninklijke Brill: Leiden, 2003), p. 132.
205. Massicard lists socialist and Kemalist imaginings of Hacı Bektaş Veli as only two examples (*Ibid.*, p. 133).
206. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future."
207. İlhan Ataseven, *The Alevi-Bektaşî Legacy*, pp. 142-143.
208. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevi," p. 57.
209. "Yenilmezlik birlik çıkmış vurmuş başına tacı./Bölünmez dil ATA ile bir idik/Tutsak deüilösek dahi hür idik/Erler merdan dedi merdan olmuştul.../Atamız dede ki 'Kölelik bitsin'/Düşman nasıl geldi, öylece gitsin'/Sönen ocaklarda özgürlük tütsün'/Yandı ocak sözü erkân olmuştul" (Atalay, quoted in Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century," pp. 121-122, 143-144).
210. İlhan Ataseven, *The Alevi-Bektaşî Legacy*, p. 9.
211. For examples of Alevi institutions emphasizing the participation in the National Struggle, see: "Aleviler'in Atatürk Sevgisi," *Cem Vakfı*, <http://www.cemvakfi.org.tr/>; "Kurtuluş Savaşında Alevilerin Rolü," *Cem Vakfı Beşiktaş*, 2008, <http://www.cemvakfibesikta.org/v1/>; "Tarihçemiz," Şahkulu Sultan Dergahi, <http://www.sahkulu.com/>
212. "Alevi divided on Atatürk portraits in cemevis," *Today's Zaman*, December 6, 2011, <http://www.todayszaman.com>.
213. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevi," 57-58.
214. "Şâu mazlûm milleti kurtardı her kayd-ı esâretten/Dilberâne gazâlar eyleyen merd-i Huddâ'dır bu/O sever âlem-i İslâma sertâc-ı mükerrerdir/Ana kasdeyleyen düşmanlara hükm-ü kazâdır bu/Bu gün hürşîd-i istiklâl Âşım mülk-ü İslâmâl/Çıkup arz-ı cemâl etti ne hoş bir dil-rübâdır bu...**Kemâl Pâsâ-yı** pâk tıyete ancak duâdır bu" (Asım Kemter Derviş (İzmir: 1922), quoted in Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century," pp. 123-124, 145).
215. Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century," pp. 130, 134, 147-148; Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevi," p. 62. David Shankland, *The Alevi in Turkey*, p. 21.
216. Fethi Açıkel and Kazım Ateş, "Ambivalent Citizens," p. 727; Candan Pinar, "Religion-State Relations in Turkey since the AKP," p. 512.
217. Aykan Erdemir, "Tradition and Modernity," p. 939.
218. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 101.
219. Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," p. 123.
220. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 102.
221. *Ibid.*, p. 99; Reha Çamuroğlu, "Alevi Revivalism in Turkey," pp. 82-83.
222. Özlem Göner, "The Transformation of the Alevi Collective Identity," p. 122.
223. Markus Dressler, "Religio-Secular Metamorphoses," p. 298; Gürcan Koçan and Ahmet Öncü, "Citizen Alevi in Turkey: Beyond Confirmation and Denial," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17:4 (2004), pp. 475-476.
224. Although the Bektaşî order is a specific order and not considered entirely equivalent with Alevism, the Alevi revival movement and Turkish society more broadly consider them together as general "heterodox" groups influenced by Anatolian mysticism, evidenced by the existence of institutions such as the Alevi-Bektaşî Federation.
225. İlhan Ataseven, *The Alevi-Bektaşî Legacy*, p. 195.
226. Veyis Haydardedeoğlu, "Women in Alevi Order," *Haydar-ı Sultan Ocağı*, 2007, <http://www.alevilik.com.au/>.
227. "Kadın Kolları," *Cem Vakfı*, continuously updated, <http://www.cemvakfi.org.tr/category/kadin-kollari/>.
228. Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 104.
229. Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious?" p. 585.
230. Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Tur-

- key," p. 112; Karin Vorhoff, "Past in the Future," p. 105.
231. MK, vice president of an Alevi foundation, quoted in Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious?" p. 586.
232. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis," p. 66; Harald Schüller, "Secularism and Ethnicity: Alevis and Social Democrats in Search of an Alliance," in Stefanos Yerasimos, Günter Seufert, and Karin Vorhoff, eds., *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey* (İstanbul: Orient-Institut, 2000), pp. 210–211.
233. Anonymous Alevi academic, quoted in Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious?" p. 591.
234. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis," pp. 66–68.
235. Yazicioğlu (1994), quoted in Markus Dressler, "Turkish Alevi Poetry in the Twentieth Century," pp. 128, 146.
236. Talha Köse, "Ideological or religious?" p. 584.
237. Talha Köse, "Between Nationalism, Modernism and Secularism: The Ambivalent Place of 'Alevi Identities,'" *Middle Eastern Studies* 49:4 (2013), p. 602.
238. Veyis Haydardedeoğlu, "Women in Alevi Order."
239. Ali Balkız, quoted in James W. Warhola and Egemen B. Bezci, "Religion and State in Contemporary Turkey: Recent Developments in *Laiklik*," *Journal of Church and State* 52:3 (2010), p. 446.
240. Tahire Erman and Emrah Göker, "Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey," p. 99.
241. N. Özkan, "Kemalizm Alevilere İhale Ediliyor," *Nefes* (1995), quoted in Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, "Atatürk and the Alevis: A Holy Alliance?" p. 68.
242. Fethi Açıkel and Kazım Ateş, "Ambivalent Citizens," p. 729.