

Citizen Alevi in Turkey: Beyond Confirmation and Denial

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Abstract Critics of the current national citizenship models argue that, although it rests on claims to be inclusionary and universal, it can never eliminate exclusionary and particularistic practices when challenged by those identities excluded from the historical trajectory of "nation building." Turkish citizenship has been a form of anomalous amalgamation since its conception. On the one hand, the state insisted on the pre-emptive exclusion of religion and various communal cultural identities from politics, while, on other hand, it promoted a particular religious identity primarily as a means of promoting cultural and social solidarity among its citizens. Contemporary Alevi movements, representing the interests of a large minority in Turkey, provide a new source of energy for the revision of concepts of citizenship. Alevi have suffered from prejudice, and their culture has been arrested and excluded from the nation building process. They were not able to integrate into the form of national identity based on the "secular" principles that the republican state has provided as a means of promoting solidarity among citizens. What Alevi seek is a revised citizenship model in terms of a system of rights assuring the condition of neutrality among culturally diverse individuals.

Introduction

The structures and relations of citizenship have been the subject of recurrent debate in contemporary political studies, and Turkey has long provided fertile ground for such investigations. Two main approaches can be distinguished in specific approaches to the conceptualization of the citizen and citizenship. The first approach attempts to examine citizenship independently of normative judgments, with an eye to the "truth" and "rightness" of propositions. This approach assumes an epistemological position that opens up a multiplicity of value systems to critical scrutiny and aims to produce a rationally justified value system for the political community (Rawls, 1971; Habermas, 1990). The second approach is concerned with context-bounded issues in assessing and weighing the practices of citizenship from a standpoint of moral and cultural reflection (Geertz, 1979; Rorty, 1991; Tully, 2000; Taylor, 1995). This is a normative approach that aims to evaluate and clarify the issues underlying the structures and relations of citizenship.

In this article, we seek to draw from both the rational and normative approaches of citizenship in order to introduce and

evaluate the social and political mobilization of Alevis, a large minority group in Turkey whose mobilization has begun to question the prevailing citizenship model. Our inquiry allows us to arrive at a particular interpretation of how the rational and normative approaches can be integrated for a particular case, and at how a new bridge can be built between these two viewpoints of citizenship so as to revise criteria of citizenship that exclude cultural diversity. There is a vast amount of theoretical literature on the issue of cultural exclusion providing rich conceptual views for the growing debate on citizenship (see for example, Taylor, 2002, 2003; Derrida, 1997; Benhabib, 1996; Kristeva, 1991; Foucault, 1991). This paper also aims to make a contribution to such debates by providing an illustration of a concrete historical case from the so-called "Muslim World." The politics of citizenship for Alevis illustrate that citizenship has no inherent meaning but is an open-ended political practice. Politics is the realm in which citizenship is embedded and through which it is articulated, and representational and actual modes of citizenship are essentially connected with the power relations of politics. Through these relations, the meanings and practices of citizenship are always contested, and hence are continuously reconstructed.

In what follows, we first present a brief, but general, overview of the constitutive features of the citizenship model in Turkey as it has evolved historically. We then focus on the historical and contemporary themes, discourses and actions of Alevis to provide a basis for our theoretical transition to an integrative evaluation of different citizenship notions. We also consider the democratic sensibility of Alevis in their relation to myth, fate and morality in order to locate an outside point of leverage from which to comprehend and challenge Turkish citizenship. This provides us not only with a critical view of Turkish political life and citizenship, but also an understanding of the integrative and expressive functions Alevi citizenship movements carry out in the polity by way of their differential modes of cultural and political recognition of the existing model of citizenship. Critics of the current national citizenship model argue that although it claims to be inclusionary and universal, it can never eliminate exclusionary and particularistic practices when challenged by those identities excluded from the historical trajectory of "nation building." What is at stake here is whether universality, the very foundation of the citizenship notion in contemporary Turkey, can be relinquished in order to construct a new model of citizenship based on difference. In our conclusion we present our position on this issue, arguing that universality must not be reified in the form of any transcendental truth or value, but must be seen as the ideal or benchmark guiding the

politics of citizenship. The proviso is that citizenship, as a diffused relation, is socially constructed; its representational and actual existence must be reflective of the dynamic nature of social and political interactions in which meanings are continuously negotiated and differentiated. Therefore, citizenship has to be perceived as an ongoing process of dialogue embedded in various power relations in which “there is neither a first nor last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future)” (Bakhtin, 1986: 170).

Constructing Citizenship in the Absence of an “Imagined Nation”: the Republic of Turkey

The nation state is more of a political construct than a social one. In many ways, it can be described as the political construction of a “society” out of different communities. As such, it is a political act seeking to totalize the culture of a population within the boundaries of a state (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). Understood as one “imagined,” homogeneous socio-cultural-political whole (Gellner, 1997; Anderson, 1991), the nation state derives its legitimacy not only from its formal public authority, but also from its population’s sense of identification with that whole (Taylor, 2003). In the absence of this feeling on the part of its people, the nation state’s formation and its permanence rest not on the cohesive consent of the people, but on the coercive force of the state (Öncü, 2003a; Yegen, 2001). The formation of the nation state in Turkey is exemplary in this regard, as it has expected from its citizens an adherence to the civil identity of politically constructed Turkish-ness, even though the majority of the populations had identified themselves in terms of Muslim-ness for centuries (Mardin, 1969; Toprak, 1987). In this context, the political history of the Turkish Republic has been characterized by various attempts to synthesize Islam and the principle of secular nationalism (Mardin, 2000: 16–17, 1989). Nevertheless, Turkish secularism meant neither the separation of religion and the state, nor the abolition of Islamic control over public and private realms, but rather the establishment of state control over religion, and hence a bureaucratization of “Turkish” Islam from above (Stepan, 2001: 245–246; Margulies and Yıldızoğlu, 1988; Geyikdağı, 1984).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the first president of the new state, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, drew on a republican philosophy and sought to form a secular “political community” (Lewis, 1968). Political community is a type of political relationship; an awareness of being part of a common political body with shared rights and duties. It also involves the idea of a common good that may

differ from the particular interests of individuals (Taylor, 2003, 2003/2004). The common good represents the justified content of a political community in which all members share in defining and debating its limits. Furthermore, this common good is not just an agreement on certain policies or procedures to be pursued, but it is more about the formation of general will. It involves a dialogical process in which each citizen takes an active part in formulating and debating what the general will is. Rousseau described this process as the body politic (Rousseau, 1988). The Rousseau perspective suggests that the body politic that exists in a political community is a key element in forming the general will and determining the nature of the common good. The body politic is primarily or purely formed to reveal what citizens' capacities and political interests in the formation of the general will are, since these are not fixed in any superior source. The body politic is maintained only when common ideals are shared, and a sense of rights, duties and obligations are equally possessed by all associates.

Although the coordinated political project of Mustafa Kemal was geared toward the formation of such a political community, the actual course of events looked more like "nation building" from above than political community building via participation (Trimberger, 1978). A well-studied phenomenon, nation building is a political project that all Western states embraced at one time or other (Kymlicka, 2002: 231). Similar to European cases, in the process of nation building the Turkish ruling elite used a wide range of means – founding a secular public school system, institutionalizing a single official national language, accepting of new alphabet and laws, imposing compulsory minimum education, establishing official institutions of language and history, creating national holidays and symbols, and instituting compulsory military service – to help spread and unite a sense of nationhood (Shaw and Shaw, 1977). In terms of statehood formation, this project may be summed up by the term elitist republicanism (Szyliowicz, 1975). By elitist republicanism, we refer to nation state formation that encourages rule making by an elite (or the government of the few) rather than through the participation of citizens as a sovereign "body politic" that may include diverse and potentially disagreeing parties. This particular form of republicanism involves a reliance on a certain set of secular social, political and cultural values, which are mostly appropriated by the elite through interpreting European modernization conceptions placed against those originating in the local context (Göle, 1996; Mardin, 1989; Kazancıgil, 1981). It usually defines privileged values in monolithic terms resulting in authoritarian governance, in contrast with those capable of being accommodative to a variety of discourses. We must

emphasize that the elitist republicanism that we attribute to the Turkish state was more dominant during the formative years of the state than in any other period in its 80 years of existence.

In the view of the founding elites, citizens must share in the supremacy of the general will of the nation. Yet such a general will that would act as an integrative force was, by and large, absent (Öncü, 2003a; Yeğen, 2001). Faced with this problem, the elite believed that citizens must first develop the required mental transformation together with the capacity needed for them to participate effectively in their own self-rule (Zürcher, 1991). In other words, there was the need for a new sense of public consciousness that could be promoted as being the “modern” basis of the good life.

In so far as citizens shared in this consciousness, the likelihood that they would fulfill their responsibilities arising from interdependence was thought to increase. This was a complex process of transition from a collectivity of communities (*Gemeinschaft*) to a society (*Gesellschaft*) (Tönnies, 1964), which involved a fundamental change in the relationship of individuals with political authority. The fundamental change needed dealt with constructing a modern political power system in the first place. Weber addressed this issue with reference to the concept of imperative control and defined it as “the probability that certain specific commands . . . from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber, 1948, 214). By introducing this concept, Weber underlined the importance of the role of legitimate authority in the formation and pursuit of collective ends. The individuals whose cooperation the elite was asking for in building the republic had respect for the commands of the political authority, but only because of its religious significance. In such a social context, individuals could only be pulled into a compromise on the desirability of collective ends through normative means such as customs. In *Gesellschaft*, (i.e. the type of social context that Turkey was heading toward), however, individuals would heed the demands of their isolated lives and possess heterogeneous identifications. In such a social context, there would emerge a need for formal authority (legal-rational power) as a substitute/supplement for normative institutions to provide the grounds for the contestation over and promotion of the desirability of proposed collective ends. Thus, individuals’ collective consciousness, or what Ibn Khaldun called their group minds or *asabiyah* (Ibn Khaldun, 1967), needed to be radically changed. The strength of political society could be ensured by the intensity of the solidarity citizens felt for one another. Nevertheless, it was the *asabiyah* of a legal-rational power kind that was absent and which was to be created by the elite during the nation building process.

Not only the absence of republican *asabiyyah* but also the lack of experience in political participation and civic virtue, i.e. the political identities, social qualities and traits necessary for self-government, prevented the straightforward materialization of a political community in Turkey, as defined previously. The absence of civic virtue as the essence of citizenship and the cement of the political community was significant because without this aspect it was almost impossible to institute order and harmony in society. As a set of secular social values, civic virtue would appear to be the opposite of the ruling principles that had subjected the people to the politico-religious order of the Ottoman sultan (Velidedeoğlu, 1974: 189–190). Through the exercise of such “virtue” the new Turkish citizen, not subordinated by a person or office, would be inclined to do what “society” would tell them they should do (Velidedeoğlu, 1974: 193–198). In other words, the republic could not be founded on the basis of a neutral approach to public morality. Virtue would be the source of morality and it would be the same for everyone, as it would be based on “secular” mutual respect. From this vantage point, Mustafa Kemal attributed to the leaders of the state a moral duty, i.e. the modernization of “society” along the lines of a secularization of political culture and a differentiation of the political structure parallel to West European democracies, even if this might only be done *forcefully* (Öncü, 2003b: 70–73). At this point, we must note that this very foundational principle of the Republic of Turkey lies in stark contrast with the notion of the ideal of a *republic*, given that the latter rests on submitting to a single, united and sovereign will.

In the ideal republic, sovereign will cannot be founded on the will of a single ruler or that of an elite, but on the collective sovereignty of the body of citizens as a whole. The independence of each citizen can only be accomplished by the dependence of each on all. In giving oneself to all, one gives oneself to nobody, an act which eliminates subjection to particular wills through subjection to the general will. This act gives life to the whole body as an artificial public person (Rousseau, 1988: 93). This public person, according to Rousseau, is the sovereign body, which has both the power and the authority to take concrete decisions in determining the existence of a political community in its entirety. The essence of the sovereign body resides in sovereignty, creating and instituting power to set up fundamental laws, political and social orders, and novel political systems. One of the unique characteristics of sovereignty in representing the will of the people (i.e. general will) is not its dictatorial and discretionary power, but its ability to create a rule of the people (i.e. popular sovereignty) (Taylor, 2003: 20). On the one hand, sovereignty evokes a relationship of rule and

supremacy – i.e. a relation of freedom and equality – that is transposed into the domain of the democratic from the political model of community. On the other hand, sovereignty implies the recognition of particular wills as pluralities and the general will as a shared and single ruler. Rousseau also suggested that no citizen has a greater share of sovereignty than any other, and only the people are sovereign (Rousseau, 1988: 103). Therefore, it is perfectly consistent to say that the sovereignty implied by Rousseau might best be ascertained and promoted by a form of equality. This means that if sovereignty is shared by the whole – equally possessed by every citizen – then every citizen is equally both the ruler and the ruled (Rousseau, 1988: 116).

In contrast to this ideal republic, in the early Turkish Republic, the political community was not understood in terms of self-governance or the active participation of people engaged in the collective formation of unity and enjoyment of the common good. Instead, the republican elite saw self-governance as a threat to the nation building process (Savran, 1992: 54–55). They saw their vocation as the modernization of Turkey and aimed to exclude diverse elements of the country from the political revolution. Therefore, the capacity to exercise self-governance was denied and the emergence of political community was aborted by the rigidities of nation state formation (Löwy, 1981: 161). What emerged was essentially a ruling of people in which everybody is asked to be the same. “Sameness” required the introduction of restrictions on the expression of particular wills, while the sovereign will of the state was imposed as an expression of particular wills in uniformity (Oran, 1993). Therefore, in the early stages of Turkish modernization, the political community was repressed by stringently denying the expression of particular wills. As a result, citizens did not have much chance to develop any capacity to reflect on their inter-relationships.

In the background of this repressive state formation, a radical transformation of political and social institutions was taking place (Shaw and Shaw; 1977: 384; Rostow, 1982). The emerging realm of politics was limited by the enclosure of official discourse and collective decision-making with reference to the notions of secular rule such as national interest, the good of the nation, and “national” freedom and justice. In this sense communal and religious traditions and institutions that could produce competing “world images” were not allowed to penetrate into the public sphere. Behind this policy was the belief that modern Turkish society could not be created unless culturally based freedoms had been suspended for a while. Once the modern nation had achieved the mental revolution, the reformed (“imagined”) nation itself would be able to act as the body politic that would provide citizens with certain rights, and

hence, enable them to enjoy their individual and collective pursuits. In other words, the republic would be based on the formation of rights and responsibilities, and only after these had been achieved would the political contestation for various freedoms be allowed. Because of this very principle, just as the elite, the citizens would have to participate in public deliberations as individuals with a moral duty. In other words, the very idea of the republic had to be perceived and approached as the main political project by *all*. Until the creation and consolidation of the general will that would be the guarantor of rights, freedoms could be brushed aside. Mustafa Kemal made this point very clear with a speech delivered before a very unenthusiastic audience on September 20, 1924:

Friends, the body that now bears responsibility for governing the country is the party of the republic, which I think comprises the whole nation . . . The fundamental principle of this party is to work for . . . the nation and I think this is the clear-cut road. That is a sign for the achievement of the nation's . . . renovation in the mental and social revolution . . . Today we stand at the head of a clear cut-road. The distance covered is too small to influence our plans. All positions must first acquire the necessary clarity and precision. Until that has happened, the thought of more than one party is common partisanship, and ladies and gentlemen, from a point of view of the order and safety of country and nation the conditions to open the way for the establishment of more than one party have not been met yet (Zürcher, 1991: 43).

Thus, in the absence of an integrative force, the ruling elite would only need to preserve coherence within the "single" political party of the republic, the Republican People's Party (Koçak, 1992; Sunar, 1974). In doing so, they would be able to act as moral educators, namely, to impose a set of "virtues" on all people within the borders of the state with an aim to construct a political identity inclined to put the good of national society before any communal interest, and recognize the responsibilities of national citizenship. As this was not likely to materialize voluntarily, the state needed to promote these dispositions in citizens in a variety of ways, including reforms from above (Trimberger, 1978). Of all the reforms, the one that caused the most damage to the new state's claim to be a secular republic was the abolition in 1928 of the constitutional clause detailing that Islam was the state religion. Although on the surface appearing to distance the state from matters of religion, in fact the state's identification with religion was strengthened through the institution of a Directorate of Religious Affairs and a Directorate of Pious Foundations, both of which were supposed to represent the "true" version of Sunni Islam¹ and both of which were firmly under state control (Tarhanlı, 1993: 147–175). By this act, the state explicitly adopted the Sunni Islamic identity as a new mythology

and incorporated this into its institutional structures. As a result, the state formalized and promoted a Sunni religious set of beliefs and values that were to be enforced on all citizens. This not only structured the *cultural* and *social* rules of inclusion into and exclusion from the political community, but also provided a basis for solidarity among citizens by enclosing the socio-religious universe (Turam, 2004: 358). In this sense, Turkish citizenship has been a form of anomalous amalgamation since its conception. On the one hand, the state insisted on the pre-emptive exclusion of religion and various communal cultural identities from politics, while on other hand it promoted a particular religious identity primarily as a means of promoting cultural and social solidarity among its citizens. As result, members of non-Sunni communities, such as the Alevi, suffered from the biased standpoint of the state. Because their spiritual beliefs and cultural practices had been denied and excluded from the socio-cultural identity of citizenship, they were forced to change not only their political orientation but also most importantly their very culture – especially if they wanted to integrate into the new political landscape without difficulty. In other words, the exclusion of Alevis from the Directorate of Religious Affairs demonstrated how non-Sunnis were required to suppress their true cultural identity and pretend to be Sunnis if they wanted to participate in political deliberations as citizens of the “imagined” Turkish nation. Within this context, Sunni Islam played a political role by stipulating the socio-cultural identity of Turkish citizenship according to which the interpretation of Islam was no longer left up to individuals or groups. Islamic identity thus became a state institution supplying a specific form of cultural existence fused into political citizenship in a uniform way. In this sense, the pragmatic political choice of the founding elite during the nation building process resulted in the production of a unique model of “secular” citizenship that was culturally exclusionary.

Retrospectively speaking, the peculiar secularist transformation imposed from above – however exclusionary and incomplete this might have been – was adopted swiftly by some minority groups (Toprak, 1987: 225). Among the latter, Alevis were the most receptive. Following the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Alevis began to express loyalty to the new republic. This allegiance was not only derived from a rational choice, but also from a salvation narrative that framed Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the new Turkish state, as their protector (Dressler, 1999, 2002). Alevis have always considered the republican transformation as a major improvement over their subordination to Islamic political domination in the Ottoman state (Schüller, 1999; Küçük, 2002). Thus,

they have maintained their support for the imperfect secular citizenship model, while continuing to raise concerns based on their own interpretations of secular citizenship. Alevi interpretations of Islam and secularism have been deeply influenced by their own historical and cultural practices, which have been shaped by the memories of massacres and cultural repression. With this background in mind, we can now turn to Alevi cultural identity and its position vis-à-vis Turkish citizenship.

Alevi in the Politics of Turkish Citizenship

Caught between past, present and future ideas and practices, and constant dialogism (though without the rich experience of active citizenship), through their resistance to the exclusionary structure of the Turkish state Alevi have recently adopted the discourse of citizenship and have attempted to organize themselves into movements (Şahin, 2001; Bahadır, 2003; Gül, 1999). From a historical perspective, this section deals with the genesis and development of Alevi citizenship movements. From a contemporary point of view, it envisages the role of Alevi as actors in the political transformation of contemporary Turkey. This dual perspective is based on the assumption that the specific patterns of meaning used by contemporary Alevi movements cannot be understood without considering the historical background of Alevism.

It is difficult to describe what Alevism is because there is no single element in terms of political, cultural and social leanings or in a sense of overall consciousness to which Alevi are supposed to subscribe (Aktaş, 1998, 1994; Kaleli, 2000; Melikoff, 1998, 1999; Özdalga and Olson, 1998). While certain sets of traditions, rules and symbols shape the collective space of Alevi communities, the social relations, feelings, thoughts and behaviour practiced are multiple and complex. Different emphases on what Alevi share or what Alevism corresponds to have all too often produced competing descriptions of Alevism. These competing definitions often consider Alevism as a heterodox sect within Islam, as Turkish Anatolian Islam, as a philosophy, as Sufi or Shiite in nature or as a syncretic mixture of elements of Islam, Christianity and Shamanism. Besides these characteristics, Alevism has also commonly been applied to different cultural communities with particular common meanings – values concerning rituals as well as language practices embedded in their historical memory. In the republican period, Alevi experienced a significant transformation, which can be described in terms of secularization, re-culturation and politicization (Schüller, 1999). The process of the transformation and re-culturation of Alevi reality has accompanied the recent

revival of citizenship movements questioning the fundamental premises of the republican model of Turkish citizenship.

Contemporary Alevism appears to be very heterogeneous, which renders the definition of Alevism problematic (Melikoff, 1998; Ocak, 2002). Alevism is neither an object that can be physically grasped nor a phenomenon that can be understood without the mediation of language. Any attempt to determine the meaning of Alevism must come to terms with the value relativity of language. The answer to the question "What is Alevism?" depends on the discourse and, more substantively, on the signifier/signified relationship. The meaning of Alevism is neither value-neutral nor is it divorced from the political, cultural and historical context. Thus, the task before us is not to impose a fixed objective meaning on the reader, but to ensure that the way Alevism is used in this article is as dialogical as it is in the Turkish social and political context.

Having said this, we can begin with what we believe the situation is. Alevis are the largest minority in Turkey, forming anywhere from 10–30% of Turkey's current population. Alevis, because of the deviation of their faith and practices from Sunni Islamic principles, were severely persecuted during Sunni Ottoman rule (Ocak, 2002). In response, Alevis practiced *takiye* (dissimulation), and hence they did not outwardly identify themselves as Alevis (Ortaylı, 1999). So it is safe to assume that the utterance "Alevi" by Alevis in the public sphere has been virtually absent for centuries. Most of the time, they made references to their particular interpretations and principles of Islamic faith in order to differentiate themselves from the Sunni majority (Melikoff, 1998). Some of these references might have been to *Ehlibeyt* (love of the Prophet's family), to the love of *Ali* (cousin and husband of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter), to the *Oniki İmam* (Twelve Imams), to *Teslis* (the trinity, Allah-Muhammed-Ali), and to prominent figures of their faith such as Ahmet Yesevi, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal². In the absence of an openly claimed Alevi identity by Alevis, those who did not belong to Alevi communities referred to Alevism in a positive way as *mezhep* (creed), *meşrep* (disposition), *din* (religion), *tarikât* (tariqa), *yol* (path) and *yaşam biçimi* (life style); and pejoratively as *zeval* (decadant), *müşrik* (polytheist) and *sapkın* (perverted).

Other than those qualifying terms, there have also been a number of names used as substitutes for the term Alevi: *Kizilbaş* after the Turkmen followers of the Safavid Sufi order of the 15th and 16th centuries from which they emerged, and also *Bektaşî* after the Anatolian Bektaşî Sufi order founded in the 13th century to which many belong (Melikoff, 1999). Other names include *Tahtacı*,

Nalçı, Abdal and *Sıraç*, signifying specific lifestyles and worship practices representative of the heterogeneous character of the Alevi population in Turkey (Yörükan, 2002: 41–52). Most of these groups adhere to different saints as their founding leaders such as *Baba, Kalender, Haydar, Cavlak* and *Torlak*. Each of these groups has particular beliefs, rituals and ceremonies that have been differentiated in accordance with the values designated to Ali and/or differing beliefs about the lineage of Ali (Aktaş, 1998: 106–113). Another dividing line among the Alevi groups is the ethno-linguistic difference. The two main groups are the Turkish-speaking Alevs and the Kurdish speaking ones (Gezik, 2000). Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevs lived in remote mountainous regions, reflecting their history of persecution under the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Only from the 1950s did they begin to leave these regions in large numbers to settle in the larger towns of central and eastern Anatolia or migrate to the developed cities in the west, and later to Western Europe, especially Germany. While there are many Alevi sub-groups along the lines mentioned above, all of these tend to close ranks when it comes to the Sunnis, employing an “us” versus “them” discourse and emphasizing their position as a marginalized religious minority (Bal, 1997; Bahadır and Başgöz, 2002).

From the point of view of the sociology of religion, Alevism is referred to as a kind of syncretism formed as a result of the people of Anatolia’s long interaction with different beliefs and cultures in different regions and time periods (Yörükan, 2002: 445–459; Öktem, 1999). Mainly because of this, Anatolian Alevism is heterodox, and poses a remarkable contrast not only with Sunni Islam but also to the “orthodox” Shiism of Iran and *Alawism* in Syria (*Nusayri* communities). The syncretism of the faith is most visible in its belief in the trinity of Allah, Muhammad and Ali – reminiscent of the Christian trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This heterodox faith is a “*volk*” religion based on oral tradition, as opposed to a written religion in which the beliefs and myths continued in Islamic forms. Following the Sufi doctrine of the “Perfect Man,” Alevs believe that salvation exists in emulating perfect models such as Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and other saints. But the absolute center of Alevi faith is the *edeb* morality. The ideal Alevi is “master of his/her hand, his/her tongue, his/her loins,” a moral order that forbids theft, lying and adultery. Everybody must seek to obtain “purity of heart” and self-knowledge, and piety is measured by lifestyle and not by ritual. Love and forgiveness are seen as important elements in interpersonal relationships. This feature of their faith is reflected in the communal nature of their rituals that aim to foster a sense of *birlik* (unity) and *muhabbet* (love). In contrast to Sunni rituals, women are included on an equal footing

with men in all communal and religious gatherings. The ideals of equality, justice and respect for all give Alevi women a higher status in society than Sunni women possess. Alevi women do not need to be veiled and are not as segregated as Sunni women are, and neither must they fear polygamy or one-sided divorce, as Alevis practice monogamy and divorce is comparatively rare.

Alevis are well aware of the contrasts between their faith and Sunni Islam. They have built up a form of identity politics geared toward integration along new lines by resisting the current citizenship model of the Turkish Republic. Therefore, they consider the appearance of Islamic movements on the political scene as a threat to their own existence. In fact, throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, Alevis have perceived themselves as a counterforce to Sunni fundamentalism, ensuring the continued secularism of Turkey (Ocak, 2002). This self-awareness prompts the Nietzschean concept of *ressentiment*. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche explains *ressentiment* as the basic relationship between adherents of a master morality and a slave morality (Nietzsche, 1956). Nietzsche suggests that the slave morality is instituted when resentment becomes a creative force (Nietzsche; 1956:171). Slave morality is basically negative and reactive, originating in a refutation of the other that is different from it. It looks outward and reveals "denial" to the antagonistic external forces that oppose and oppress it. It is perhaps this notion that is most salient in Alevi identity. This means that Alevis, as a group, have come to reinterpret their moral codes and values in relation to their perceived counterpart, Sunni Islam, institutionally supported by the state. Sunni Islam consists (among other things) of communal interrelationships that connect individuals in a common religious universe. This system of interrelationship has been effective not only in defining the boundaries of membership in the Sunni community but also, endorsed by the state, in identifying the socio-cultural basis of Turkish citizenship. The totalization of the moral values and codes of Sunni Islam by the state has led to a crude binary opposition between Sunni and Alevi forms of lifestyle; thereby these two communities are enrolled in a slave morality condition over the true meaning of Turkish citizenship. While Sunnis regarded Alevis as being somehow deviant, Alevis saw Sunnis as harmful to the universalist assertions of secular citizenship. As result, a polarization within the political community along the Sunni Islam versus Alevism axis has emerged. In this polarization, right-wing political movements supported Sunni Islam, while movements on the left of the spectrum and secularists cooperated with the Alevis. As a general rule, polarization binds friends and enemies into conflictual assemblages of the political. Before 1980,

when the state's perceived enemies were the Soviet Union, Communists, and left-leaning Alevis, the ultra-right National Action Party (MHP) carried out several concerted massacres of Alevis and leftists. Alevi-Sunni communal conflict was organized by the MHP in Kahramanmaraş in 1978, and then in Çorum in 1980. Similar incidents took place in Sivas and the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul in the 1990s.

Alevis have been the main allies of secularist groups, organizations and political parties (Üzüm, 1999) as they have a direct interest in resisting the rise of Sunni Islamic fundamentalist influence. In line with the nationalist ideology of the Turkish Republic, Alevis, especially the Turkish-speaking community, have characterized themselves as maintainers of true Turkish culture, religion and folklore in the face of the influence of Sunni Islam. This view has been strengthened by the Kemalist stress on Anatolian culture as the authentic source of Turkish national identity. For a long time, Alevis have stressed only the liberal and humanistic values of Alevism as a world-view in the public sphere, downplaying any religious connotations (Kaleli, 2000). However, they have of late begun demanding that the state recognize Alevism as an official Islamic community equal to, but different from, Sunnism. How did this sudden change in their political position, moving toward demands for recognition on the basis of Alevi identity, come about?

From the 1980s on, the constitutional framework of the state consciously departed from the ideals of secularism (Margulies and Yıldızoğlu, 1988). In the early 1980s following the military coup, the military regime, in order to stamp out the socialist movement, deliberately encouraged Sunni Islam by promoting the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (a doctrine combining Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam) (Tarhanlı, 1993: 182–186). It made religious education a requirement at elementary and secondary schools, which had been optional under the 1961 constitution (Copeaux, 1997: 80–81). This was associated with the growth of public religious high schools (*İmam Hatip Liseleri*) teaching Sunni Islam. These moves gave a political capacity to Islamic movements, which have not hesitated to target Alevis as scapegoats for the ills of society. In this context, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which controls all mosques in Turkey and many Turkish mosques abroad, was strengthened, numerous new mosques were built and prayer leaders (imam) appointed – not only in Sunni towns and villages, but also in the midst of Alevi communities. To counter such actions, some Alevis demanded representation within the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Cem Vakfi, 2000). However, the Directorate of Religious Affairs went beyond being the representative of Sunni Islamic tradition alone. By assigning imams (preachers) to Alevi communities, the

Directorate of Religious Affairs actively sought to deny Alevi differences by condemning such activities as deviations from Islam. In response to the rigidity of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, some Alevi communities rejected the opportunity to be represented in the Directorate, even if such a right were granted to them. All these measures could be interpreted as the state's endorsement of assimilative efforts to bring the Alevis into the Sunni faith.

One effect of the Islamization of the political sphere in the 1980s was a renewed interest among some Alevis themselves in Alevism as a distinct identity (Kaleli, 2000). This was in sharp contrast to the 1970s, when many young Alevis became associated with socialist or social democratic political movements (Schüller, 1999). For these individuals, Alevism has always had a class dimension because of the historical oppression of Alevi communities. Most believed that Alevism evolved out of centuries of class struggle against domination and oppression, and that in some way it was striving for "folk socialism." With the suppression of the radical left movement in Turkey, Alevism as a form of folk socialism began to dissipate and a new generation of Alevi activists who saw Alevism as a cultural and a political "identity" appeared on the public scene (Üzüm, 1999).

The rise of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism and the formation of a government by a pro-Islamist party in the 1990s added further impetus to the Alevi revival (Yavuz, 1996, 1999). During those years, the state's approach to Sunnism began to deviate from the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" strategy. Against the fundamentalist stance of the pro-Islamic government, a more rigid secular discourse began to be disseminated by various state institutions, which claimed that Sunnis and non-Sunnis are all part of Turkish society. Behind this attitudinal change was the state's attempt to mobilize a secularist oppositional bloc as a counterbalance to Islamic fundamentalism, which was getting out of hand (Shankland, 1999). Thus, not surprisingly, the state allowed the legal establishment of Alevi cultural associations, which quickly sprang up all over the country (Üzüm, 1999). Under the sponsorship of these associations, Alevi rituals (*cem*) began to be publicly performed, and houses of worship (*cemevit*) were publicly opened. There was a sudden increase in the number of publications by Alevi authors aiming to explain the history, principles and rituals of Alevism. These developments marked an important change in the nature of Alevism: the transition from a secret, initiatory, locally anchored and orally transmitted religion, which it had been for centuries, to a public religion with formalized, or at least written, doctrines and rituals (Sahin, 2001). Out of this cultural revival, an Alevi position on the Turkish state's relationship to citizenship

began to emerge. This position focused on the Sunni bias of the Turkish state's Directorate of Religious Affairs, which was publicly denounced for privileging Sunni citizens by organizing and administering only Sunni religious services. Some Alevi groups called for equal representation within the bureaucratic structure of the Directorate, while others called for the abolition of the institution (Melikoff, 1998: 334–338).

It seems clear enough that the institutional exclusion of Alevis from the political community, namely the particular affiliation of the state with Sunni interpretations of Islam, provided a political context for Alevi citizenship movements. Alevi movements have come to the fore and challenged the state's role in moulding the moral and cultural life of citizens. Alevis have sought to establish the equality of culturally different citizens both in terms of a legal status that guarantees non-discrimination and in terms of participating in collective self-government without concealing their difference. In brief, Alevi citizenship movements have acted as a response to the culturally exclusionary Turkish citizenship model from within a particular cultural identity without asking to relinquish the universalist-inclusionary ideals of secularism.

Conclusion: Alevis and Re-imagining Citizenship in Turkey

Alevi movements provide a new source of energy for the revision of concepts of citizenship in Turkey. Alevis have suffered from prejudice, while their culture has been arrested and excluded from the nation building process. They were not able to integrate into the form of national identity based on the “secular” principles that the republican state has provided as a means of promoting solidarity among citizens. The aim of the Turkish republic has been to create equal – and “same” – citizens by giving them a political identity rooted in the values of secularism and modernity. The principal means of achieving this was through a system of secular public schooling and through the control of religion via the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Establishing a unitary public schooling and religious system has been justified as necessary to achieve socio-cultural cohesion. Different interpretations and practices of Islam were strongly discouraged, and Alevi practices were never given official recognition. Secularism has been viewed as a positive value in itself; and everybody is expected to leave his or her particular religious identities outside the political community.

Over the decades, secularism has gradually been appropriated as a unifying force legitimizing the principle of the constitutional state. It has also contributed to the construction of a modern

everyday life in Turkey that is not too dissimilar to “Western” examples. Nevertheless, the meaning of citizen and citizenship has not come to occupy a focal point of debate in the public sphere until recently. As European historical examples remind us, however, the emergence of a secular political community cannot be separated from the politics of citizenship. In this sense, the more secularism has been accepted as the norm of the political foundation of Turkish society, the more unavoidable engagement with the implications of secularism for citizenship structures and practices has become. Thus, public debate has begun on the meaning of citizenship, and the political arena has begun to be occupied by a set of questions on and about citizenship: “What defines one as a citizen?” “Who is a citizen?” and “What is it to be a citizen?” (Öncü and Koçan, 2002).

A perceived understanding of citizenship not only varies according to the social, political and cultural conditions of the contender, but also with ideas about what constitutes an adequate concept of citizenship, as well as an effective approach to democracy. When some of the leading viewpoints about the citizen and citizenship are considered, six discernible positions become apparent. The first position involves an argument that sees citizenship as a paradigm of self-government used for deriving a constitutional model of a political system (Aristotle, 1981). The second places the citizen in a rationally built normative context asking him/her to abide by constitutional “imperatives” (Kant, 1997). The third position conceives the citizen as a member of a political association who has the disposition to actively participate in the political process in the pursuit of the common good (Rousseau, 1988). The fourth problematizes the citizen by seeing him/her as someone caught in the divide between individual identity and public identity, difference and unity, integration and resistance, and the particular and universal (Mouffe, 2000). The fifth considers the citizen embedded in both difference and unity, and the particular and universal (Habermas, 1989; Habermas, 1996; Habermas, 2001; Hegel, 1999). Finally, the sixth position represents citizenship as a system of rights assuring the condition of neutrality (Rawls, 1993). This diversity of positions leads to a range of theoretical puzzles about the components of citizenship that have long been addressed in the history of political philosophy. Among others, the ideas of Aristotle seem to provide us with an archetypical framework with reference to which we can embark upon investigating some of these puzzles based on our inquiry into Alevis.

Aristotle (Aristotle, 1981: 171 (1275 b13)) had a very straightforward idea in his mind in regard to the question as to “Who is a citizen?”:

As soon as a man becomes entitled to participate in office, deliberative or judicial, we deem him to be a citizen of that state; and a number of such persons large enough to secure a self-sufficient life we may, by and large, call a state.

Thus, for Aristotle, citizens are politically enabled persons within a political community. Here, the political community is understood in terms of its relationship to self-government. The conception of self-government is based on the idea that a citizen is a unit that rules and is ruled in turn, which means that he/she determines the law by which one becomes bound. In this sense, the active influential citizen described by Aristotle is not exempt from the idea of obligation. This also means that being a member and sharing in the deliberative power of a political community requires the citizen not only to be a capable decision-maker, but also to be a person who is willing to abide by decisions made by others. As Aristotle stressed (Aristotle, 1981: 182 (1277 b7)):

... It is not possible to be a good ruler without first having been ruled. Not that good ruling and good obedience are the same virtue – only that the good citizen must have the knowledge and ability both to rule and be ruled. That is what we mean by the virtue of a citizen – understanding the governing of free men from both points of view.

This not only presupposes citizens as persons vested with rights, privileges and duties, but also requires them to be both the source and limitation of power. In this sense, participation in the deliberations of a political community becomes the most critical component of citizenship. This can only be achieved by having a community of persons who share civic virtue as a public identity, combining the personal world with the collective space of social forms and instilling a sense of public responsibility and thereby cementing the political community.

At this point, one of the significant contributions of Hegel to the debate on citizenship becomes relevant – especially in the Turkish context. Hegel conceives the political community as a combined space of civil society and the state where citizens enjoy freedom only in so far as they participate in the ethical and political life of their particular community through their actions to sustain its existence and further its well-being. Both the state and civil society help build different forms of relations among citizens. In civil society, citizens do not deliberately aim to achieve the common good in decisions or preferences; they pursue their own good or the furtherance of their own individual or group-specific well-being. However, without directly pursuing the common good, they indirectly meet the needs of the public or advance the welfare of other citizens and establish new kinds of social integration. Therefore, in

Hegel's view, political community in the proper sense of the word is not only a sovereign political unit, but also a cultural and civil community (Hegel, 1991: 313–315). This broader conceptualization of a political community allows us to move beyond a model of citizenship based on a system of duties and rights and the notion of common good (Pelczynski, 1984). It introduces a novel component to citizenship by drawing attention to the practical role of the civil public forum, in which matters concerning society as a whole are deliberated in connection with certain particular wills, and then the decisions arrived at by people are passed on to the government as representative of their sovereign capacity. In other words, in the civil public arena, the needs of the people are considered and evaluated, and the unification of individual interests and societal interests is achieved in a deliberate and ordered manner *via der Staat* (Pelczynski, 1984).

In this context, the political community cannot distance itself from the actuality of substantial (i.e. non-abstract) freedom by reference to a set of abstract rights, however they have been contracted or constructed. The political community cannot be isolated from particular individuals and particular groups that are integrated via the construction of the political identity of *der Staat*. Abstract rights cannot be taken as the sole basis upon which citizens are expected to act. The right to resist must be granted to citizens because the political community cannot overcome the condition of dividedness that is reproduced in civil society, in which each person has only an individual part. In Hegel's view, substantial freedom allows citizens to act from a particular will and not from a general will. Thus, individuality and its individual good, first and foremost, can be used for the pursuit of particular forms of well-being and for the explicit recognition of a substantial/concrete right. Nevertheless, individuals also pass over their own unity into the universal/general, and recognize it as their own substantive consciousness/identity; they take it as their end and aim, and are active in its pursuit (Pelczynski, 1984). The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion without individual interests and through the cooperation of particular wills. Likewise, citizens do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will be part of the universal in the light of the universal. In this sense, they render their political community and its identity an organic yet dynamic being. This entails that, regardless of any differences in social, economic and cultural status, all citizens have an *equal* right and opportunity to participate in the political process or be represented in making political decisions that affect them (Pelczynski, 1984).

Thus, exercising the equality of rights themselves appears to be a requisite criterion of citizenship. With respect to the effective equal rights of participation, each citizen can be in a position of exercising the power to do what they want without being constrained by other agents and political authorities, but only to the extent that such actions do not interfere with the same freedom of execution that others possess. This form of equality that has been denied to Alevis can be called the self-determinative capacity that has to be supported by *substantial freedoms*. The latter refers not only to how active participation is recognized as a citizenship right or affirmation of one's existence, but also how it is extended and equally distributed across socially, economically and culturally different citizens to create an effective ability for self-determination. Here, the idea of the equality of abilities must explicitly be taken into consideration to extend the active participation of citizens in political processes with equal means to achieve what they value. Amartya Sen emphasizes this point in order to distinguish the equality of capabilities from the equality of rights, resources, goods and welfare (Sen, 1992). In Sen's view, equality of capability primarily refers to the capacity of reflection on one's potential freedom to achieve a particular functioning (i.e. doings and beings). The notion of equality of capability for active participation concentrates directly on freedom as an achievement rather than on the means to achieve freedom (Sen, 1992: 56–73). In turn, this leads on to a more general conceptualization of equality, and underlines the importance of the normative orientations of actors in political life, which can differ because of cultural differences.

Against this background, the recent revival of Alevism in the form of citizenship movements seems to be a mobilization toward a more inclusionary variant of the existing citizenship model in Turkey, which no longer has the ability to foreclose the civil public forum to a particular cultural identity. Politically active Alevis are promoting four discernible trends for a more inclusionary universal model of citizenship. The first three trends evoke Aristotelian notions of citizenship, illustrating Alevis's explicit recognition of the Republic of Turkey as a constitutional political community. Namely, a revised model of citizenship, like the current version, should be based on the self-government paradigm. This is, if you will, a *sine qua non* component of citizenship. The second, which shares certain common assumptions with the first stance, posits the citizen as a legal member of a state, who accepts the obligations that ensue from this membership. The third conceives of the citizen as a member of a political community who has the disposition to actively participate in the political process as part of the

pursuit of the common good. The fourth, which approaches citizenship from a Hegelian problematic, sees the citizen as someone embedded in difference and unity, integration and resistance, and the particular and universal. Therefore, a revised citizenship model in terms of a system of rights seeks to assure the condition of neutrality of the state vis-a-vis culturally diverse citizens. In other words, Alevis demand a great leap forward toward the ideal type secularism.

From the point of view of the last component, Alevis, in a fashion very similar to Taylor (2003, 2003/2004), see citizenship as a common or overarching identity shared by all members in a political community. Such a view of identity involves ideas of reciprocity, creating a sense of obligation towards the political community of which one is a member. This identity is different from particular affiliations based on ethnic or national divisions, cultural or religious belongingness, regional divisions, economic or professional membership, gender differences etc. This means that private and public identities face each other in the realm of citizenship. In the most common case of plural identities comprising a political community such as in Turkey, citizenship becomes more and more dialogical. As a result, citizenship becomes the basis on which the interaction between citizens who simultaneously hold membership in particular cultural associations and in the overarching political community takes place. This form of dialogue necessitates a redefinition of citizenship in Turkey. Citizenship now not only helps express the primary form of political sharedness, and thus situates itself in particular identities, but also secondarily connects them with the unity of the political community. Particular identities dialogically connected with political identity can draw on citizenship understood as the basis of dialogue to express their freedom (Tully, 1999: 169–176). In other words, within and through plural interactive spaces particular identities can turn to citizenship without having to be immersed in some monolithic unity, such as the nation premised upon a privileged cultural identity³ (Tully 1995: 52–53, Tully, 2000: 215).

All this means that a revised citizenship model along the lines described in very general terms above would enable Alevis to be the citizens of a state whose political identity does not derive from an absolute and fixed cultural essence. As a minority, they have a serious stake in this because otherwise this would lead to the foreclosure of what Taylor (2003/2004, 23) calls “identity sharing space” in their “people’s” republic. In other words, they would be pre-emptively excluded from the construction of the political identity of the “people” on whose basis they and their fellow citizens are asked to participate in the pursuit of the common good. In this

case, they will keep finding themselves in the anomalous situation of either confirming or denying the collectivity to which they do not feel they belong. If they confirm their membership of the collectivity they will continue their history of dissimulation. Yet if they deny, the majority of the collectivity will call them deviants. And thus, their oppressed cultural history would repeat itself in the most tragicomic of manifestations.

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Notes

¹ The state-monitored Sunnism does not cover the whole Sunni Islam in Turkey. It excludes, first and foremost, *Tarikats*, (Islamic brotherhoods) and clandestine Islamic movements with considerable number of Turkish Sunni Muslims as members.

² After the death of Prophet Muhammad, a conflict over the selection of his successor caused a schism among Muslims. Those believed that Muslims must choose successors by election established the Sunni tradition, while those who argued for the successor must come from the family of Muhammad (Ehl-i Beyt, Ali and 12 İmam) generated the Shia tradition. The followers of these traditions have had long history of conflict since the assassination of Ali and the massacre of Hüseyin, the son of Ali, and his 72 followers in Karbela. Alevi, i.e. followers of Ali, inspired by the exemplary personalities of Ali and Hüseyin, have continued to keep up the tradition of rising up against the injustice carried out by powerful even if this may lead to the loss of one's life (Aktaş, 1998: 88–91).

³ The political community itself, within and through politics, should decide how those interactive spaces can be constructed and what institutional and organizational forms they may take on. Therefore, it is meaningless to search for a theoretical model of the so-called "best practice."

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