Psychocultural Dynamics of Ethno-Sectarian Identities: Understanding the Emotional Dimensions of Alevi Identity Revival in Turkey

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Abstract

Popular discourses on significant historical episodes, collective dramas and especially the negative collective experiences that affect the collective emotions such as fear, humiliation and victimhood are important dimension of studies on ethno-sectarian identities. Shared narratives on massacres, wars, massive scale violence and humiliating collective experiences also play significant roles in the formation and the maintenance of large group identities. The dynamics of the “remembrance” or “reproduction” of the emotional elements of ethno-sectarian identities therefore is the research topic of this study. This study investigates the ways through which the personal and collective emotions such as grief/victimhood, fear and humiliation interact with each other and influence the Alevi identity negotiation process within the context of post 1980 Turkey.

Alevi personal and collective narratives on humiliating experiences are explored through life stories as well as widely shared group narratives. This study argues that the turning points in life stories of the individuals, who belong to the marginalized groups, play significant roles to connect/reconnect the personal experience of humiliation, fear, victimization and anger with the widely shared collective dramas. Marc Howard Ross’ notions of “psychocultural dramas” and “psychocultural interpretations” are used to analyze Alevi narratives on collective emotions. The theoretical assumptions and the findings of this research can have a significant contributions to addressing the underlying sources of the identity based discontents of Alevi community in Turkey and the other ethno-sectarian communities such as in Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan as well as Northern Ireland.
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1. Introduction

Popular discourses on significant historical episodes and especially the negative collective emotions such as fear, humiliation, victimhood/grief and collective dramas are important dimension of studies on ethno-sectarian identities. Shared narratives on massacres, wars, massive scale violence and humiliating collective experiences also play significant roles in the formation and the maintenance of large group identities. The dynamics of the “remembrance” or “reproduction” of the emotional elements of ethno-sectarian identities therefore is the research topic of this study. This study investigates the ways through which the personal and collective emotions such as victimhood, fear and humiliation influence the Alevi identity negotiation process within the context of post 1980 Turkey.

In my field research on Alevi community in Turkey, I have observed that discourses on victimhood, fear and humiliation shape Alevi identity formation and transformation both at the personal and collective levels. This study argues that understanding those emotions and the personal and historical narratives that reproduce those emotions are key to addressing identity-based discontents of Alevi citizens. Marc Howard Ross’ notion of “psychocultural dramas” and “psychocultural interpretations” are useful theoretical tools to analyze Alevi narratives on collective emotions. Psychocultural examinations can inform us about the ways the parties interpret recent and historical events, the core issues that are at stake, and the way they express their fears and their hidden collective feelings (Ross, 2001). The ways the parties frame a conflict, and what is at stake in it have dynamically been shaped along these dramas. Dramas offer valuable clues to make sense of conflict dynamics and insights about matters that must be
addressed for it to be managed constructively (Ross, 2001; Ross, 2007). Critical information related to the groups history and identity and especially the symbolic and linguistic tools, images and archetypal figures are actively resorted to process the contemporary information and worldview. Especially the references to the “archetypal villains” in Alevi collective narratives and psychocultural dramas illustrate how those images and archetypes both shape the way Alevis understand “group history” as well as project to their future.

The theoretical assumptions and the findings of this research can have a significant contributions to addressing the underlying sources of the identity based discontents of Alevi community in Turkey and the other ethno-sectarian communities such as in Iraq, Lebanon as well as Northern Ireland.

Analyzing the psychocultural narratives of the Alevi movement is a window to understanding meanings and social contexts of collective emotions. Cultural narratives help to express group identities of the parties that are in protracted struggle, “those narratives recount past encounters, present difficulties, and future aspirations” (Ross, 1997). Alevi personal and collective narratives on humiliating experiences are explored through life stories as well as widely shared narratives. Narratives on the victimhood stories are examined with specific focus on the archetypes of “villains” that embody fears and worries of Alevi citizens. By integrating personal stories with collective narratives and emphasizing the neglected emotional dimensions of Alevi identity, this study provides a fresh perspective on the studies on Alevi identity and community.

The Alevis, one of the largest communal groups in Turkey, are geographically spread throughout Turkey. The academic and popular literatures on Alevilik have often referred to the period starting from the late 1980s as the “Alevi revival” (Çamuroğlu, 1997; Bruinessen, 1996;
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Vorhoff, 2003; Çaha, 2004; Kehl-Bodrogi, 1996; Dressler, 2008). This “revival/transformation” has manifested itself in forms of heightened group consciousness, greater ease to express the identity in the public sphere, increased public visibility, and the making political and legal claims over Alevi identity in social and political arenas. The contemporary Alevi identity can be considered to be a modern social phenomenon, but for centuries the notion of Alevi groupness has been preserved and sustained as a distinctive social category, as opposed to all other competing social categories such as Sunni, Turkish, Kurdish, etc. There are overlapping cultural features such as language, customs and common religious rituals and practices with the other social groups in Turkey, but narratives of victimization, discrimination and marginalization that are specific to Alevi communities has helped the preservation and continuation of the separate Alevi subjectivity. Alevi communities historically had certain value systems and ritual practices that are separate from the mainstream Sunni worldview.

This study is composed of two main sections; in the theoretical discussion section role of collective emotions and psychocultural dramas on the study of ethnic and/or sectarian conflicts are elaborated. Under the theoretical umbrella of the psychocultural dramas, victimhood, fear and humiliation narratives and their contributions to the Alevi identity formation and transformation are discussed. In the analysis section the humiliation and victimization narratives that are compiled in research are analyzed. Analyzing the archetypal evil figures and their “contemporary reflections” is helpful to understand the intimate fears, worries and concerns of Alevi citizens. Without understanding those emotional elements it is difficult to address deep-rooted ethnic and sectarian conflicts.
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2. Psychocultural Analysis in Sectarian Conflicts

The notion of psychocultural drama is derived from Victor Turner’s (1975) notion of the social drama. As a conceptual tool psychocultural drama links cultural expressions and psychocultural narratives in order to analyze how the parties frame their own and others’ goals and actions in conflict and the important role that ritual plays in setting them. Mass rituals, parades and collective narratives methodologically play the central role in the formation of and the change in identities and their transformation into violent forms of inter-group engagement. Marc Howard Ross defines psychocultural dramas as “conflicts between groups of competing and apparently irresolvable claims that engage the central elements of each group’s historical experience and contemporary identity” (Ross, 2001).

The manifest focus of a psychocultural drama can be about the allocation of material resources, or differences about cultural components of identity such as language, religion, social practices, or music and popular culture (Ross, 2001). “At a deeper or latent level however, psychocultural dramas are about polarizing events about non-negotiable cultural claims, perceived threats, and/or rights connected to narratives and metaphors central to a group’s identity” (Ross, 2001, p.). Psychocultural dramas provide the culturally and emotionally driven accounts and narratives of these critical events. These narratives are sometimes transmitted through oral genres such as poems, folk songs and legends. Oral transmissions are common forms of narrative practices for Alevi psychocultural dramas. For Ross, these narratives must be central to the analysis of ethnic conflict and steps are taken to mitigate it, the narratives surrounding a conflict operate as exacerbators and inhibitors of further conflict, and play a causal role in making certain courses of action more plausible and appealing than others. (Ross, 2007, p. 28)
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Remembrance of the Karbala Massacre is an important component of the Alevi ritual cem. Commemoration of Hacı Bektaş Veli, founder of the Bektaşî order; Pîr Sultan Abdal, and the recent Alevi drama of the “Sivas Massacre” of 1993, as well as remembering other painful experiences such as the Maraş Events of 1978, are mechanisms for the maintenance of Alevi identity. These occasions are at the same time important sites and spaces of activism for many Alevi associations. These feelings have both been presented in collective narratives and story forms and also through more conceptual and abstract models such as memorials, museums, rites and other commemorations (Ross, 2007). Victimization, fear or threat perceptions, and humiliation caused by marginalization and slander, are the important emotional drives for the Alevi identity movement as a whole.

2.1. Sub Genres of Psychocultural Dramas: Narratives on Victimization

“Victimization is about an unjust traumatic loss that is being denied by the ‘descendents’ of perpetrators. To perceive oneself as a victim requires naming the pain one has suffered, blaming the offender, and claiming some type of restitution (Huyse, 2003, p. 60)”. Victimization represents the element of continuity in Alevi identity. The perpetual feeling of victimization has historically been maintained and the language and the discourses of victimization have been adapted to the conditions of changing social and political environments. The debates on the moral responsibility of victimization are often lively debates that also help the negotiation of the moral boundaries of the identity groups.

Whether at the inter-personal, inter-group or international levels, these features summarize the characteristics of victim psychology. Dealing with historical grievances, especially the psychology of victimization is crucial in order to transform the relationships into a positive form. The state of denial or misrecognition of historical controversies also feeds the fear
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of a potential repetition of violent past experiences and perpetuates the psychology of victimhood. Victimhood, therefore, reproduces itself in different forms according to changing circumstances, unless a process of societal reconciliation is achieved. There are ways in which a person or a group of people who are the victim of political, ethnic or religious violence can receive additional hurt after the direct cause of victimization has disappeared – this is called “re-victimization” by Luc Huyse (Huyse, 2003). The sources of re-victimization are not just emotional, in many cases there are legal, political or social practices that remind the group or the individual of the past victimization by:

i. Denial of the status of victim;
ii. Unfulfilled expectations in dealing with official agencies;
iii. Unwanted effects of victim-centered initiatives; and
iv. Social stigmatization and exclusion. (Huyse, 2003, p. 61)

For many Alevis all four of the conditions of re-victimization that are mentioned by Huyse are still continuing. Sunni citizens and the Turkish officials have never acknowledged their pains. Their expectations in terms of official recognition have not been satisfied; and the discrimination and marginalization against them are still going on in many areas.

Besides the implicit or explicit daily practices of discrimination and marginalization and the unfulfilled expectations that cause re-victimization, the victimization process involves the remembrance of past victimization. Explorations of psychocultural dramas also examine the ways in which those attitudes and perceptions have been formulated and reproduced. Memories of past victimhood, sufferings and traumas have been formulated and presented in different narrative forms. The feeling of victimization and the emotions that are associated with victimization such as guilt, shame and humiliation, bring a form of social cohesion in the Alevi case. Victimhood, common threat perceptions and shared collective emotions became the quintessential unifying factors for the scattered Alevis that are living in the urban context. In
most cases the common ground for shared emotions among urban Alevis are: fear of assimilation; fear of Islamic radicalism; the feeling of victimhood; the problem of marginalization; and to a certain extend humiliation. Whereas in the rural context, the connections and ties are based on face-to-face interactions, common religious ritual practices, marriages and shared social space.

2.2. Humiliation as the “Nuclear Bomb of Emotions”

“Human dignity” and “humiliation” have recently been emphasized as an important dimension of violent anti-social behavior within the research on emotional sources of identity based conflicts (Lindner, 2002; Goldman, & Coleman, 2005). In particular, the motivational background of self destructive violence, which has become more of an issue after the spread of “suicide terrorism” and “protracted asymmetric struggles”, has been understood in relation to honor and dignity (Lindner, 2001; Lindner et al 2006). Humiliation has been defined as “enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damage or strips away pride, honor, or dignity” (Lindner, 2006, p. 172). One of the conceptual advantages of humiliation and dignity in comparison to the trauma-oriented research is that, humiliation is not defined as totally an intra-psychic notion. Unlike the trauma oriented explanations that propose abstract therapeutic healing mechanisms and processes, humiliation research suggests that conflict resolution mechanisms fix broken social relationships. Cultural codes, collective axiology and social comparisons shape both the nature of humiliation and the responses to it.

3. Methods

Psychocultural interpretations are available in many different forms including, public documents, declarations, popular and academic books, songs, sermons, movies, nowadays in web pages, blogs, personal life stories as well as field research. In this study a combination of
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Life story narratives and public narratives, including books by Alevi authors, and discourses have been gathered as the empirical data. This study agrees with the theoretical approaches that argue that the stories or narratives embody the rich and sometimes intricate phenomena of life, and personal and collective experiences better than other forms (Lieblich et al., 1998). The life stories of individuals with regard to their being Alevi, transformations of their identity, critical moments and personal accounts related to key events in their lives are considered as important social resources. Elements and the intimate details of the collective stories are expressed with the individual’s voices. The changes and variations of pragmatic political concerns as well as public and personal narratives are crucial resources. Group stories and narratives help individuals and groups to explain and reproduce a conflict to themselves and to outsiders (Ross, 1997; 2001).

Stories, especially collective stories such as origin myths and histories are important narratives for community formation and maintenance (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvii). Narratives are defined as the connective structures that organize communities and shared meanings along different lines. In contrast to the primordial and material interest based collectivity formation, narratives generate a cultural sense of belonging. Collective narratives play roles in the temporal organization of collective experiences. Historical narratives and the debates related to historical information are key dimensions of the renegotiation of Alevi identity. Collective stories, national or group myths and collective ideals that are already available and widely shared by group members play roles in the orientation of personal stories.

Alevi “identities” are therefore re-negotiated and transformed with the available cultural and narrative resources. Historical, cultural, social and political narratives each play a role in the process of the making of meaning for Alevi identity. What is more important, however, is the practical use of the available resources within the Alevi identity struggle. My focus is on the
function of these resources in the process of identity negotiation, rather than their deep underlying meanings. Stories and narrative accounts also embody the emotional and normative attributions of the Alevi community. Narratives have been discussed within a broader social and cultural context with reference to public documents and some other secondary sources as well.

The Multiple Case Narrative approach has been used to gather narrative data. The Multiple Case Narrative is defined as “a research methodology used by researchers to collect data from a large number of people as part of the same study” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 20). Rather than having an in-depth study of a life story of a single individual or a particular event or story, this study examines the life stories of many informants. The main characteristic of the Multiple Case Narrative approach is that the “researcher spends a relatively small amount of time meeting and talking with each of the informants and collecting information from them” (Shkedi, 2005).

In this research, in-depth interviews with 70 informants constitute the primary data. The interviews were quite comprehensive in terms of their contents. Formal interviews with a purposefully selected group of Alevi citizens including, journalists, intellectuals, authors, academicians, association leaders, businessmen, women, youth, dedes, religious figures, politicians, and other ordinary citizens constitute the primary source of research data in this study. In addition to the primary sources, I used a wide variety of secondary sources. The secondary sources of data are multiple, such as the observation of the context and references to texts such as Alevi journals, books, web sites, e-mail groups; all-important sources which I refer to in this research. The secondary sources of the data are also relevant for the contextualization of arguments and findings. The interviews have been conducted in three big cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Malatya, between February 2006 and April 2007.
4.1. Victimhood Narratives, Denial of Identity and Alevi Involvement in Left-Wing Struggle

There are hundreds of episodes of folk rebellions, social and economic contentions in Anatolian history. The majority of these rebellions and contentions have been initiated by the Turcoman tribes, and after the 16th century they were called the Kızılbaş of Anatolia. The sources of many of these contentions have been social and economic marginalization and discontent, whereas now they are being claimed by Alevi activists to be the antecedent of the contemporary struggle for the recognition of Alevi identity. Feelings of permanent marginalization, victimization and humiliation, together with the discourses of revolutionary resistance have motivated the massive involvement of Alevi youth in extreme left organizations. The vast majority of the members and supporters of the revolutionary leftist organizations such as DEV-SOL, TIKKO, and TKP were Alevi. Almost all of these organizations have been involved in certain violent practices. TIKKO has a more specific membership and militant profile, and in a particular are from the Tunceli (Dersim) region (Kurdish Alevi). These acts of organized violence during the 1970s, 80s and early 90s had not been perpetrated for the Alevi cause, but it was always much easier for these organizations to recruit militants and members among Alevi citizens.

It was not uncommon to encounter the allegorizations that considered Marx, Lenin and Mao to be the Pir Sultan Abdal or Shah Ismails of the century. Even the secularized Alevis or atheists referred to the atrocities of Yazid, the oppressive legacy of the Umayyad dynasty and the martyrdom of Hussein in their discourses on social resistance. Religion and sect are not important concerns for these Marxist oriented or secularist groups, what really mattered for these people were the “perennial struggle against the oppressive central authorities and dogmatic, highly politicized and biased interpreters of religion. The resentments that had prevented the
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integration of the Alevi community with the rest of Turkish society thus had also been tailored to proxy causes. Alevi citizens have always been under the scrutiny of the Turkish state and their loyalties to the Turkish State have been considered questionable. The cycle of marginalization, humiliation, oppression, rebellion, mistrust and further marginalization and contention has been maintained for centuries in different forms. The name of this new struggle starting from the early 1990s is the “struggle for the recognition of the Alevi identity” (Massicard, 2007; Sökefeld, 2008). In the current democratic context of Turkey there are multiplicities of non-violent, democratic channels for conducting the struggle. The psychocultural drives of fear, victimhood psychology, humiliation and traumatic memories are important motives behind the “Alevist movement.”

There are no legal rational mechanisms to deal with the intense emotional dimensions of threatened identities. Even the conciliatory gestures of right wing, nationalist and Islamist politicians are interpreted as assimilatory tricks. The governing AKP’s recent Alevi policy (Köse, 2010) which will be discussed in the conclusion chapter, is also interpreted as such. Historical memories symbols, and ways of remembering certain episodes help to comprehend some of the irreconcilable feelings. Most of the books that were written by Alevi activists/intellectuals have statements related to threat narratives and statements reminding the reader of traumatic historical experiences. The quotation below, which is from the foreword of a recent book on Alevi identity and history, is one of the examples of such a statement.

As Alevilik, a creed, which had been in danger of systematic assimilation for centuries was about to rediscover its identity. External forces tried to refute and make futile this liberation and representation opportunity. Unfortunately today we are faced with a similar tension and resistance which we had experienced previously during Ottoman and Seljukid times……This book manifests a clear stance against the assimilationist pressures. It also tries to understand a creed, which is delegitimized and prohibited in its native land. (Erdoğan Aydın, “Kimlik Mücadelesinde Alevilik.” İstanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2007)
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Having a defensive and sometimes even unfriendly demeanor toward the “others” or “outsiders” has been considered a legitimate attitude by many Alevis. In fact, the overall mentality of “we are surrounded by enemies who are either trying to exterminate us or to assimilate us” is a common fear. We are surrounded by external (Yezits, Muaviyes and imperialists) and internal enemies (Hızır Paşas and secret service’s or deep state’s agents) that have all sorts of means to wipe out Alevis. Entrepreneurs of Alevi identity politics try to legitimize their ideological stance with these discourses. This overall emotional mood that is blended with fear, anguish and resentments represents many features of the threatened identities.

4.2. Return of the Repressed: Humiliation and the Turning Points in the Life Stories

The majority of my informants have experienced psychological wounds because of the humiliations they experienced in school, work places, military service, in their peer environments, and neighborhood contexts. It is relatively uncommon to encounter slander and humiliating comments in public domain, but they are common in inter-personal contexts. These slanders and humiliating comments and public remarks often constitute the important turning points in Alevi citizens’ understanding of their individual and collective identities. According to Cobb (2006), Leary (2004), Putnam (2004) critical moments generate changes in persons, relationships, social processes and political institutions. Those personal experiences, public spectacles and, sometimes unintended, public discourses may have lasting impacts on the nature of inter-personal, inter-communal relations as well as intra communal relations, thus lead to the transformation of the conflictual relationships. As Cobb (2006) describes turning points are “moments in a conflict when a group's dynamic changes—times when something extraordinary emerges that occupies a nuanced space between a heightened moment of conflict, and the next moment where that conflict has been diffused or exacerbated” (p. 148). Putnam (2004) also
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mentions that the critical moments often enlarge and complicate the conflicts. Intense emotions, tension and anxiety are often inherent to the turning points.

One of the public examples, which created an enormous outrage, was the “Güner Ümit Affair”. Güner Ümit’s innuendo about the sexual perversion of Kızılbaş allowed many Alevis to publicly condemn the slandering against Alevis. It was a reaction to the centuries-long humiliations because of slandering, false accusations and stereotypes. “Extinguishing candles” (orgy), “they are not clean,” and “they have tails,” are also stereotypes that have been maintained among the Sunnis for centuries. Expressions of these discourses often constitute forms of turning points in both public and personal narratives of Alevis. What is critical in public slanders and innuendos is that those interventions reveal the cultural and symbolic slanders that historically humiliate Alevi citizens. Responses to those humiliating claims and threats re-enacts the cultural sense of belonging and difference from the mainstream majority identity. Thus those critical turning points are crucial for interpretation of self, community, notion of collective history as well as life stories.

This guy carried the Sunni prejudices to the public sphere

[B. Ü.]: One day you have Güner Ümit. I want you to specifically write this down in your thesis. I want you to in some way express the truth about this man, the truth which is not being brought out in the open, or I am saying it was done by Allah, a good thing this happened. Throughout [a period] of five years, five years in a row, the Alevi creed was said to be like this, Sunni Islam was said to be like that. But why? It happened after the Güner Ümit event. This is one of the important event that I want to stress. I said thanks to the Lord. Somebody came out and expressed this [in] the media. Among the people are [these rumors that] Alevis extinguish candles, rape their daughters, do this, piss on a prayer carpet, no they throw the Quran in the toilet, they piss all over you. Such things all of a sudden exploded in front of us. I wanted this [to happen] from Allah, in other words. Like I said, may we thank Güner Ümit. If this man wouldn’t have been, if he wouldn’t have made such a blunder, then this whole Alevi – Sunni matter would not have been carried into the public sphere.
“Güner Ümit Affair” is emphasized as a significant turning point in the lives of many Alevis. Although there were many humiliating remarks and widely shared stories related to the “moral weaknesses” and “ethical inferiorities” of Alevi community, none of those stories have been mentioned in the public domain. Those stories and slanders have humiliated many Alevis at some points of their lives. With the Güner Ümit Affair, for the first time they had a chance to publicly express their outrage and indignation. Ümit’ innuendo and its symbolic background was a deeply entrenched in Sunni population’s characterization of Alevi citizens.

We had observed that in the case of an existential threat, people can get mobilized easily.

[V. K.]: This was an event, which took place as a result of a social consensus, not because it was done to Star TV, or because it was ill- or well-intentioned. But this suddenly erupting and not at all organized protest when this program was cut from Star TV’s broadcasts was important. Like that protest [which arose as a result] of the disentanglement of the building works above that hearth in Şahkulu. These are all things, which weren’t organized but spontaneously erupted as protests of Alevi youngsters. This is very important in my view. It showed this. When they wanted to, Alevi youths could take the initiative in a peaceful manner and make themselves heard in society, without feeling the need to become organized.

Alevis were ready to resist those humiliating remarks, because the event had a broader meaning for the dignity of Alevi community. What is more important was the non-violent and ad hoc nature of the protests. What connected many Alevis in that collective response was the memories of the personal experiences of humiliation as well as the disturbing popular slanders. While some Alevis continued to hide their identities, many others revealed their Alevi identity and resisted to the deeply rooted and culturally entrenched mechanisms of lowering.

I started to wear zülfikar\textsuperscript{ix} after the event

[B. Ö.]: When I was in senior high school the Güner Ümit even took place. In secondary school, me and my friends would walk around wearing a golden representation of Zülfikâr [Hazrat Ali’s double-edged sword] around [our] necks. Everybody would say stuff, our Alevi girl has come by, in fact even my Alevi teachers would say you are stressing it quite openly, I would reply nobody can interfere with however much I want to
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stress it, maybe it was my own peevishness that came out in the open that I started wearing the sword around my neck after that event. After the Güner Ümit event took place, some of my friends would come to me and say my family told me that I must have Alevi friends for our candles were extinguished. In a serious way this event was talked over, at least in our school, people came to me with questions all the time, as if religion was my centre [of life] and I had easy access to that center, or maybe it was because of the Zülfikâr that people thought this girl is an Alevi we can ask her.

Besides of the struggle for the legalization of cemevis as religious places, criticism against the compulsory religion courses is an important argument of the Alevi mobilization. Negative experiences in the compulsory religion courses for many Alevis constitute the first encounter with the system that is created by the “oppressive other.” Humiliation either leads to the denial of identity or the development of a reactionary identity. In both cases interpersonal and intergroup relations develop negatively.

Religious courses and the humiliation during youth

[H. Ş.]: I remember my secondary school days, when we would have religious class we would enter with fear. But we never could properly memorize those prayers. We’d have to get up in class and perform the ritual prayer [salah, namaz], we could never do it. And we would be ostracized, even among our own classmates. That’s why, after 1980, we would start saying we’re Alevi, after those events in Gazi in Istanbul.

We were humiliated by the teacher because of the religious classes

[C. S.]: At the time the biggest problems were caused by religious classes in school. Religious classes were voluntary. They were voluntary in this way: those who did not want to take part in the class were supposed to present a written application. After having handed in the application, they’d be exempt. For example, in senior high school, in our class were fifty pupils, ten of whom had submitted an application not to enter religious class. Their religious teacher would teach them once a week. He would always be obdurate. We said we submitted a petition, we are exempt from those classes, we were not supposed to be in that class at all. T.K.: Which year was this? C.S.: between 1965 and ’70. The religious teacher would put us in the class on purpose, he would take the roster. In spite of the fact that we were exempt from the class, he would still call us. After having called the roster, he would say stand up, he would never tell us to leave. We would get up and go out one by one. He wouldn’t allow us to leave as a group, now when you leave one by one, this gives rise to certain reaction. Everybody would knock against the door and get out. After that, out of the fifty pupils in the class 40 are your enemy. Of course getting out of the room while knocking against the door was a
reaction against the teacher, but your classmates would perceive it as directed against them as well. In fact, they would see it as [an attack] on their faith. Afterwards, by way of revenge, this would take the form of a fight in another class. It would evolve into fights in the city streets, in the city lanes. It would become a source of discomfort.

I was accused of being an atheist

[E. G.]: Before 1980, there was no such thing as a compulsory religious class, it was voluntary. At the time I was attending senior high school, I didn’t want to take part in religious classes, I handed in my written application. And when I first entered the class, the religious teacher was holding the piece of paper in his hand, I stood up, he told me “are you an [atheist] or are you an unbeliever? Why don’t you want to take religious classes?” I became flustered over my whole body, a thousand things went through my head, but I couldn’t say a thing. Get out he said. Now towards my friends, my honor was deeply hurt in my circle, I was embarrassed, the way people look at you changes. In every aspect of life, while going to school, while walking around with somebody, for instance a simple instance, some time ago, the nephew of the general director entered the attorney’s exams, a written examination, Turkey’s best, he was among 200-300 best, but following the exam, they asked him, where are you from and what does your father do, alright leave now. Can you pass or fail a test like that?

I even considered changing my name

[H. T.]: I thought of changing my name. Because my name is Hıdır, it is obvious that I am an Alevi, I thought a lot about changing my name. But now I am proud of my name. It changed in senior high school, it continued right up to senior high school. You go through a bad time as a kid, if you get picked upon because of your name.

Slander and accusations in workplaces and school

Alevis are not Clean

[B.Ü]: Of course. A military unit is a nice thing, on the one hand. You get to know a lot of different people, and bond with them. They say you become a man in the army. Of course. You become a man, you become a [grown up] person [human being]. One day in the army, I was talking to the hoca (chaplain). Of course, he tells [stories], I tell [stories]. The hoca speaks of the Prophet, speaks of Hazrat Ali, he talks about it, I talk about it. I had not said that I am an Alevi. One day such a conversation started up again, he said this: Where I come from, you there are Alevis, these are dirty people. Well hoca, why do you say such a thing about these people? It is not like you know. These people are very dirty. They are gypsies. But my hoca, I am an Alevi. He immediately left where he was sitting, I can still see it in front of me.
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There are many other narratives and personal accounts related to moral degradation, humiliation and marginalization of Alevi citizens during their encounters with the “other” especially the ignorant and malignant “other” in many social domains. Those experiences in schools, military service, work places, marriages and neighborhood contexts transform the identity and consciousness of many Alevis. Personal experiences of humiliation and marginalization, which are often significant turning points in the life stories of Alevi citizens, are connected to the dramatic historical collective experiences of the “group histories”, and “group narratives” thus making the Alevi self the subject of the narratives of “perpetual victimhood”. Continuation of those slanders, lack of meaningful apologies and denial of their marginalized and victimized position further victimizes and humiliates the Alevi citizens. Especially in the last two decades Alevis started to resist to the humiliating public discourses and practices through more systematic and institutionalized channels, which helped to alleviate the impacts of social stigmatization and exclusion in some domains. However the interventions at the interpersonal and inter-group levels are much complicated and difficult, since they are deeply embedded within the popular Sunni narratives and collective psyche.

4.3. Complicating the Drama's Archetypes of Evil and their Followers: The Villains in Alevi Public Narratives

Fear is one of the most important primal emotions that alert us to potential dangers or to potential benefits (Lindner, 2006). Fear can have both positive and negative impacts on the course of the interpersonal and inter-communal contentions. “Fear can hamper constructive conflict resolution or enhance it when it sharpens our senses and alerts our thoughts” (Lindner, p. 274). Alevi discourses about their public memory and narratives of their history are rich in terms of fear related accounts. Those accounts and narratives are often used to legitimize or de-
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legitimize certain courses of action and certain public figures that are related to their contention. Alevi social and political activism is presented as a continuation of a centuries-old contention and the names of the heroes are an inspiration to new generations. It is very common to hear from almost all the Alevis about the historical background of their “identity struggle.” The contemporary Alevi struggle for recognition is presented as a continuation of a centuries-old struggle for survival and dignity. With the same logic, villains of history such as Yezid, Hızır Paşa and Yavuz Sultan Selim (Selim I) are still active in the social imaginations of Alevis. For many Alevis, the problems they have been facing now are centuries old, and the features of the historical villains are embodied in the characters of contemporary personalities. What is critical for the fear narratives is that, those narratives both help Alevi citizens to “understand” their threats and problems within a broader cultural context and are used to motivate Alevi community to get organized in order to protect Alevi culture and identity. There is a permanent fear, which can hardly be reassured, this permanent lack of security at the same time helps to fortify the boundaries of Alevi community against the “external enemies”.

There is a wide range of academic and non-academic publications on the Alevi heroes such as Hz. Ali, 12 Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Shah Ismail, Pir Sultan Abdal, Atatürk and many others. Those figures definitely play significant role in the formation of Alevi identity and Alevi moral and belief system. Villains of the popular Alevi narratives are equally important to grasp the negative emotions especially the fears of Alevi community. How those figures intervene into contemporary debates and discussions is equally important understanding and addressing the psychocultural dramas of Alevi citizens.

In the Alevi historical imagination there are certain figures that are presented as the archetypal evil personalities, who attempted to destroy or humiliate the predecessors of the Alevi
Psychocultural Dynamics of Ethno-Sectarian Identities

community. These personalities are the main actors of the traumatic events and the psychocultural dramas for Alevis. Their legacies are still a serious concern and source of fear and anger. Opponents or other enemies of the Alevi community even today are described and de-legitimized in relation to these archetypal images of evil personalities. It is common for Alevis to refer to Sunnis they don’t like or they don’t trust as Yezit or to call some of the right wing politicians as Muaviye. Hızır Paşa is also a common idiom that is used to de-legitimize Alevis that seem to cooperate with Sunnis and forestall Alevis from reaching their collective goals.

What is important for the “villains” in Alevi narratives is that, they embody the intimate and sometimes very abstract fears of the Alevi community that have been haunting the community for centuries. The “villains” in those stories such as Yezid, Muaviye, Abussuud etc exemplify the fears, abominations and other negative feelings of Alevi citizens. Contemporary challenges and tensions are interpreted as well as framed according to the “moral qualities” of these figures. No matter when the narratives initiate the sources and the beginnings of the Alevi history, they present it in the form of a struggle. Yezit, Muaviye, Ebussuud and Hızır Paşa are the four major archetypal images of evil. There are other important images of villains, which will be examined below but these four names appear as reference personalities with their negative characteristics.

i) Yezit (Yazid ibn Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan/ 645-683): He is considered to be the primary culprit of the Karbala Disaster and the enemy of Ahl-al bayt. He is associated with pure destruction, killing and attempts to annihilate ancestors of “Alevis” by violence. Even the secular or “atheist” Alevis use the idiom of Yezit against their Sunni rivals or enemies. For a long time Alevis called their enemies “Yezits.” Calling someone Yezit is the worst form of insult for Alevis and it is frequently used against conservative Sunnis.
ii) *Muaviye* (Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan/ 602-680): Muaviye is the father of Yezit and son of Mecca notable, Abu Sufyan. Muaviye was considered to be the arch enemy of Ali (Ali ibn ebu Talip), his father was considered to be the enemy of the Prophet and his son is the murderer of Hussein. Political conspiracies, coalition formation, and dirty political and religious tricks to promote self interest are associated with Muaviye. There are many reasons mentioned why Alevis don’t like Muaviye, but two events are graphically described by many people to de-legitimize Muaviye. In the Battle of Siffin, Muaviye’s troops used the pages of the Quran to stop Ali’s troops, and in the arbitration affair (hakem event) he is believed to be the cheater. Muaviye is associated with coordinating complicated political tricks, using religious sensitivities to cheat and promote the specific interests of his own tribe.

iii) *Ebussud* (1490- 1574) (Grand Mufti/ Sheiykhulislam of Suleiman 1): He was the supreme judge during the Suleiman I and Selim II. He brought local laws in conformity with Islamic law (sharia). He is known as being against esoteric sects and decreeing legal justification for their oppression and killing. He was accused of producing technologies de-legitimizing Kızılbaş, inventing certain legal procedures, instruments, and spreading slander in order to oppress and assimilate Kızılbaş and other esoteric sects.

iv) *Hızır Paşa* (No exact info about his birth but he was in charge in the 1560s): Hızır Paşa is considered to be the archetypal image of a traitor within Alevi community. There is not clear information about his historical personality and his biography but there are clear negative convictions concerning what he is believed to have done against Pir Sultan Abdal. He is accused of cooperating with the enemies of Alevis and oppressing his own people.

The entire narratives related to these archetypal images of evil and the heroic or tragic events around these personalities can be considered as mythico-histocial events (Rothbart &
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Bartlett, 2008). The temporal, moral and emotional order around these events and personalities are configured uniquely according to the concerns, priorities, challenges and emotional states of Alevis. Having mentioned the archetypes of evil personalities and moral and emotional backgrounds of these figures and associated events, I will explicate more on the “lesser evils” or “villains” for Alevis.

There may be a study that is solely related to this subject because there is an enormous body of narratives and stories in relation to villains and accounts related to their faults. Discussing and analyzing the villain’s helps to reveal moral values, collective emotions such as fear, amity, animosity, significant events and Alevis’ understanding of their unresolved traumatic experiences and future expectations. It is also helpful to reveal how the historical and contemporary villains are related to each other for practical purposes.

Below, I have summarized the list of villains and the deeds and misdemeanors that are associated with their names in tables 1, 2, 3 and 4. For the purposes of simplification and clarity I categorized the frequently mentioned villains in four lists. The episodes and some of the events associated with these figures will be referred to in the narratives below. The first list is composed of figures from the early Islamic history, mainly among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali. One of the major differences between Alevis and Sunnis in Turkey is the different ways in which they approach Sahaba (companions of the Prophet Mohammed). Alevis are much more critical of the Sahaba; they are even outspoken about their hatred of some of the most well known Shaba.

**Table 1: List of Villains 1: Figures from Early Islamic History (Sahabah)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villains (Turkish pronunciations are bold)</th>
<th>Reasons mentioned for the moral blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yezit</strong> (Yazid ibn Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan/ 645-683)</td>
<td>Culprit of the Karbala Massacre, Massacred Hussein Greatest “evil” personality of all times, Enemy of Islam, Enemy of Ahl-al Bayt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muaviye</strong> (Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan/ 602-680)</td>
<td>Was the arch enemy of Ali, Coordinated the conspiracies against Ali He was considered to be a Machiavellian figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haccaci Zalim</strong> (661-714)</td>
<td>He was the mayor of Hijaz and Yemen, Ruthless enemy of Ahl-al Bayt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ömer</strong> (Omar ibn-al Khattab) 602-680</td>
<td>Extorted the caliphate right of Ali, Threatened the members of the Ahl-al Bayt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ebu Bekir</strong> (Abu Bakr as Siddiq/ 573-634)</td>
<td>Extorted the caliphate right of Ali, Denied Fatima’s right to the Fadak Date Grove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Osman</strong> (Uthman ibn Affan/ 579-656)</td>
<td>Gave privileges to Umayyad Family Was a weak leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ebu Sufyan</strong> (Abu Sufyan/ 560-650) Leading figures of Quraish Tribe in Macc</td>
<td>Father of Muawiya, Leading figure in Umayyad Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ayşe</strong> (Aisha bint Abu Bakr/ died in 678) (Prophet Mohammad’s Wife, Abu Bakr’s daughter)</td>
<td>Fought against Ali in the battle of Jamal Tried to mobilize sahabah against Ali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second set of villains is from Ottoman History. The Alevi understanding of popular Ottoman historiography is completely different from the Sunni understanding of Ottoman historiography. For Alevis, the Ottoman State was established on the Alevi Bektaşi principles of tolerance and humility. The establishment of the ulama legacy and Kızılbaş rebellions were considered a disaster for Alevis. Alevis believe that as the Ottoman Empire grew and became more cosmopolitan, it excluded and persecuted Kızılbaş Turcomans.

**[A. Y.]: Centre-Periphery** (political and social) in Seljuk times the Babâî uprisings, the Jelalî revolts in Ottoman times disclose that Alevis represent the periphery. Dervishes and Bektashi babas are the ones who founded the Ottoman state, [after having been] founded by the colonizer Turkish dervishes it spread to Anatolia and the Balkans. When the Ottomans started assuming a more cosmopolitan kind of empire, these dervishes get pushed to a second tier and there is a development towards a more centralized state formation, [and] in this context the Bektashi babas become neglected. This separation becomes most visible in the course of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry struggles.
For them, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Modern Turkish Republic was a blessing. The Ottoman legacy left very dark memories in the Alevi public imagination. Many of the Alevi heroes were the figures that struggled for justice with the Ottoman central authorities and were then executed by the villains. The list below is an abridged list that only includes the figures that have the highest positions in the list villains.

[F.A.]: As such, Sunni Islam, the Alevi creed were formalized after the 16th century. Up to that point there had been no such thing as Sunni or Alevi. All Sunni Muslims were Alevis. When Mevlana [Rumi], Hacı Bektaş Veli came to Anatolia there was no such [distinction between] Sunni Muslims and Alevis. Islam had been spread to everybody by means of the fact of the Ahl al-Bayt. The Seljuk state was a state pertaining to the Ahl al-Bayt. The Ottoman state was like that too until it got to [the reign of] Sultan Selim I [Yavuz]. This separation occurred after [the reign of] Sultan Selim I [Yavuz]. The Byzantines, Sultan Selim had his mother, his father, his brothers killed when he got to the throne, after that he inserted religious affairs into the palace [administration], up to that point these had been administered from Mekka and Madinah, but through conquest he got hold of them. Up to that point, they had had no contact with those administering religion. Saying the palace [of pleasure and enjoyment], they became Party to bigotry, and caused society to become enemies of one another.

Table 2: List of Villians 2 Figures from Ottoman History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villains (Turkish pronunciations are bold)</th>
<th>Reasons mentioned for the moral blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selim I (Grim-Yavuz) (1465-1520)</td>
<td>Massacred 40000 Kızılbaş in Anatolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defeated Shah Ismail and Kızılbaş ideals,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning of the oppressive rule against Kızılbaş,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defamations against Kızılbaş started at this time,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Established the sharia order and distorted the tolerant ethos of Anatolia, Tried to destroy or assimilate Alevis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebussuud (1490- 1574)</td>
<td>Decreed fatwas against Kızılbaş,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sheyhulislam of Suleiman the Magnificent)</td>
<td>Source of the accusations, slanders and religious stereotypes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Made the Ottoman Empire a sharia state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Issued fatwas to de-legitimize and massacre Kızılbaş</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hızır Paşa (No exact info about his birth but he was in charge in 1560s)</td>
<td>Executed Pir Sultan Abdal, who was a legendary rebellious folk hero, and other Kızılbaş people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Betrayed his own people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He was political opportunist in order to advance in Ottoman bureaucracy oppressed people of Anatolia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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| **Kuyucu Murat Paşa**  
| (around 1535-1611)  
| Was grand vizir of the Ottoman Empire between 1605-11) | Executed tens of thousands of Turcomans/ Kızılbaş during Jelali Uprisings  
| Buried people in pits  
| Was a ruthless killer |

| **Mahmut II**  
| (1785-1839)  
| (30th Ottoman Sultan) | Abolished Bektashi order and gave the administration of Bektashi lodges to Nakshbandi order  
| He even ordered the destruction of Bektashi tombstones |

| **Abdüllahmet II**  
| (Abdul Hamid II/ 1842-1918)  
| 34th Sultan | He had the Islamist agenda of trying to convert Alevis into Sunni  
| He was an authoritarian figure who tried to oppress progressive forces in the Ottoman Empire |

| **Mehmet VI**  
| (Vahdettin/1861-1926)  
| 36th Sultan | Tried to stop Atatürk in the Turkish Independence Struggle  
| Cooperated with imperialist Britain |

The third list includes the Turkish politicians from recent past and contemporary figures. The list is composed of right wing and Islamist politicians including the current Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In general, right-wing and Islamist politicians are considered motivated to turn Turkey away from Atatürk’s ideals of a modern, secular, nation state. These images are often associated and compared with the images from early Islamic history. It is not uncommon to find people calling Necmettin Erbakan, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Kenan Evren as Yezits or Süleyman Demirel and Turgut Özal as Muawiya. The level of de-legitimization is boosted by associating the contemporary villains with the “more established historical villains.”

*Nothing Happened by Chance: Fear of Declining Secularism*

They first turned the call to prayer (ezan) into Arabic. You listened. They said “You can even bring the Caliphate back if you really want.” You assumed that this was democratic request. They opened the Quran courses and İmam Hatip schools all over. Religion courses became mandatory constitutionally. You accepted that. The veiling (tesettür) became widespread and the number of mosques exceeded the number of schools. You considered it as freedom of religion. They then interrupted your lifestyle and killed the people who do not fast. You were surprised. They killed the scientists and writers. They smashed the journalists and MPs, burned your poets and dancers. You kept questioning the identities of the perpetrators.
At the end they will KNOCK your door; you will have no one to help yourself other than you!
(No author specified, Pir Sultan Abdal: Kültür Sanat Dergisi, Issue 62 (Special issue on 13th year of Sivas Events of 1993), June 2006.

The poem/declaration that is published without a name in the Alevi periodical summarizes some of the frustrations and fears of the Alevi citizens with regard to the changes in republican ideals.

The villains mentioned in the list 3 and 4 are the people responsible for the deviation from republican ideals. The quotation above eloquently summarizes the fears of many Alevi citizens with regard to the decline of secularism in Turkey. Many contemporary right wing politicians are designated as the culprits of this decline. Those politicians and public figures are often presented as the disciples of Muaviye and Ebussud. Even the former American president George W. Bush and American policy makers are accused as supporting “moderate Islam” and AKP administration in Turkey. Extend of fears transcends the limits of geography and time.

Table 3: List of Villains 3: Politicians (Contemporary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villains (Turkish pronunciations are bold)</th>
<th>Reasons mentioned by my informants for the moral blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenan Evren (1918- ) 7th president of Turkey</td>
<td>Organized 1980 coup and established an authoritarian regime, Oppression of Alevi and creation of semi-authoritarian order, Ordered mandatory religion courses, Waged the idea of Turkish-Islamic synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necmettin Erbakan (1926- ) Islamist Former PM</td>
<td>Leader of fundamentalist religious ideals for a long time, Against secularism, Against Atatürk and Alevis, Wants to create sharia based state, (Yezid of our age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1954- ) Turkish PM, Former mayor of Istanbul</td>
<td>Ordered to demolish Karaca Ahmet Cemevi when mayor of Istanbul Have the secret agenda to establish religious state, Discriminated Alevi in government jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Süleyman Demirel (1924- ) Served 7 times as PM of Turkey, 9th president of Turkey</td>
<td>Opened Imam Hatip schools, Violated secular principles of the republic, Used religion for political purposes, Always denied Alevis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temel Karamollaoğlu (1941- ) (Former Mayor of Sivas)</td>
<td>Was the mayor of Sivas during Sivas Events, Encouraged fundamentalists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Şevket Kazan (1933- )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Former Minister of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice during Erbakan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabinet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defended suspects of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sivas Events,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mum Söndü” accusation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(candle went off)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly humiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alevi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to create sharia based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adnan Menderes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1899- 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to bring the sharia back,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to abolish Atatürk’s secular reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bülent Arınç (Head of parliament 2002-2007/ 1948- )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist Islamist,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants a regime change,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarizing figure that encourages extreme religious tendencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turgut Özal (8th President of Turkey/ 1927-1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism in Turkey had been strengthened during his period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He supported the religious oriented groups and Sunni sects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W Bush (1946- )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US President (2001-2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had imperialist agenda,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waged wars all over world and killed thousands of innocent people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth list is a more generic list that includes some public figures, institutions, political parties, people with a particular mentality, and even states. Intense emotions such as fear and hatred are felt, and accusations are made against the actors and generic titles in this list. For example, the concepts of “yobaz” (bigot), “gerici” (retrograde) and “şeriatçı” have similar connotations; for Alevi they try to bring religious bigotry and a medieval style theocratic regime. The understanding of “U.S.” (United States) in the Alevi political and emotional lexicon is much different than the understanding of U.S. in the minds of other groups in Turkey. Many of the major political conspiracies are somehow related to the U.S. according to Alevi. Rather than giving political agency to Islamist groups and religiously oriented communal groups in Turkey, many Alevi consider the emergence of these groups to be part of an American agenda in Turkey.

Unlike the previous century, it is impossible to live an isolated life in the contemporary world. Whenever there is a problem in one part of the world, people and countries from the other parts can get involved. For example Fetullah, who is sponsored by US, Diyanet and EU are trying to Sunnify the Central Asian Turks who had forgotten about their Aleviness. EU cannot fulfill the expectations of Alevi in terms of pressing for the liberal agenda in Turkey. (Murtaza Demir, Kuşatılmış Bir İnançın Tarihi Alevilik. İstanbul: Nokta Kitap 2008).
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It is difficult to bring all these villains together for the purpose of “Sunnifying Alevis,” but it is not uncommon to hear such statements from well-known Alevi leaders. Some left-nationalist (ulusalci) Alevis even describe the EU as if similar to the Entente Powers of WWI that tried to impose the Sevres Treaty on Turkey. There are also many Alevis who consider Turkey’s EU integration process to be the right path for the liberalization of Turkey.

[A.Yl.]: The EU [accession] process is very important for us. We value the EU above all else. And the problems are going to get resolved with the EU. Even if we don’t join the EU, the EU [accession] process, if the ones in power are not being hypocritical, if the EU [accession] process is taken seriously then in a legal sense it can secure a lot of things, it can secure equality. If what they call the laws of conformity [to EU standards], if these laws of conformity can be realized. If the EU’s laws find their counterpart in real life, if they become accepted, if the EU standards become accepted in a way, if they spread out among society, among the state [’s institutions], they are a prerequisite for Alevi. These are all things that will end injustice, lawlessness, discrimination.

There are always rumors about the “deep state”/“secret state” in Turkey, which is seen as one of the beneficiaries of the maintenance of Alevi-Sunni tension in Turkey. Analyzing these narratives reveals the deep collective emotions of many Alevis.

**Table 4: List of Villains 4: Public Figures, Institutions and Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villains (Turkish pronunciations are bold)</th>
<th>Reasons mentioned for the moral blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yobazlar</strong> / <strong>Şeriatçılar</strong></td>
<td>Wants to return Turkey to the Medieval darkness, Enemy of progressive Alevi ideals (other of Alevi image) They are enemies of Atatürk and fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic They assassinated the secularist progressive intellectuals and threaten progressive people in Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deep State/ Secret State</strong> (Derin devlet)</td>
<td>Tries to create internal conflict between Alevis and Sunnis, Obstacle to democratization efforts in Turkey Responsible for the instigation of Gazi Riots of 1995 and for violence in 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MHP</strong> of pre 2000’s (Nationalist National Action Party)</td>
<td>Fought against Alevis in 1970s, Perpetrators of the violent massacres against Alevis such as Maraş, Çorum, Sivas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abdullah Öcalan</strong> (Imprisoned PKK chief 1948-)</td>
<td>Wanted to divide Turkey, Murderer of kids Separatist Terrorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>US</strong></td>
<td>Green Belt Project in 1970-80s supported religious movements in Turkey Greater Middle East Project was imperial project to control Islamic World</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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|                          | Support for moderate Islam and AKP,  
|                          | Supported the right-wing violence against Alevis in 1960s and 70s  
|                          | Imperial claims over Turkey and the Middle East  
|                          | Wants to create a Kurdish state in the South East Turkey |
| **Gülen Movement**      | Try to create Moderate Islamic regime,  
| (Islamic scholar and leader | Try to assimilate Alevis, wants to take control of Turkish state,  
| of social/ religious      | American protegé  
| movement)                | Wants to divide Turkey,  
|                          | Supports Kurdish separatists, fundamentalist religious movements and  
|                          | Atheist Alevis,  
|                          | Never gave up the dream of Sevres Treaty,  
|                          | Imperial claims over Turkey, wants to divide and rule |

For many Alevis, fear is not just an abstract matter; it is one of the primary motivations behind the contemporary Alevi movement. Narratives on victimhood and humiliation helps to maintain the continuation of Alevi identity, whereas fear and threat perception helps to maintain boundaries of Alevi identity and motivates Alevis for collective action and for getting organized and institutionalized. What is illustrative in the archetypal villains is that those images, archetypes and figures not only allow Alevis to interpret and construct their group history in emotional texture but also practically aims to prevent future recurrence with culturally embedded way of condemnation. As Lindner mentioned (2006), fear alert us to potential dangers or to potential benefits. Dealing with the fears, therefore should be one of the primary priorities of the actors that would try to address identity problems of Alevis.

5. Discussions and Conclusion

In this study psychocultural dramas of the Alevi community in Turkey have been elaborated with specific reference to fear, humiliation and victimhood narratives. This study has relevance beyond the context of Alevi identity since in other cases of ethno-sectarian conflicts similar dynamics are at play. Based on the field research on the Alevis of Turkey, this study demonstrated how widely shared narratives such as fear, humiliation and victimization narratives matter in understanding the dynamics of ethno-sectarian identities. As Ross mentioned
Psychocultural Dynamics of Ethno-Sectarian Identities

“psychocultural dramas” offer emotionally meaningful accounts of the world they also explain motives and actions in identity-based conflicts (2007). Some of the basic pillars and continuities of group identity and even the formulation of personal life stories are shaped along the dynamic interaction of narratives on personal and collective emotions. Existing repertoires on psychocultural dramas does not only inform us about the features of a particular ethno-sectarian group but more importantly helps to reproduce similar elements in more recent contexts.

The psychocultural narratives of the Alevi community, which have been transmitted through ritual performances and oral narratives, have served to represent the dimension of continuity in Alevi identity. However, the content and the practical implications of those psychocultural narratives have been transformed over time according to changing challenges the Alevi community have been experiencing. Therefore the production and maintenance of those narratives is a dynamic process. Analysis of collective emotions such as fear, humiliation and victimhood, does not provide any predictive capacity for identity based conflicts, however it helps to shed light on the cognitive and motivational dimensions of those conflicts as in the case of Alevi identity.

The abstract fears, traumas and mythic historical narratives have been substantiated and embodied in the images of contemporary personalities and institutions. Personal experiences of humiliation and threat perceptions have been connected to the collective dramas strengthening the motivational consequences of those experiences. Although they do not encounter slanders frequently, the occasions in which they do face these prejudices and humiliating experiences have become important turning points in their perceptions of their “Aleviness.” Those experiences and interventions are connected to the widely shared collective narratives and made
part of mainstream narratives. The ongoing practices of denial and cultural slanders are a source of permanent humiliation in the daily lives of many Alevi.

Addressing the problem of psychocultural dramas is a challenging task since those dramas are deeply embedded in culture. There are however available constructive narratives in the shared cultural repertoires, which are often selectively avoided due to predominance of unaddressed negative emotions. Nurturing positive emotions hope and confidence and showing the signs of respect and understanding is key to improving relations between Alevi and Sunni communities in Turkey. For the practical side of the psychocultural approaches, successful conflict resolution and peace building have to incorporate reconciliation and healing processes in addition to problem solving activities (Montville, 1993; 2006).
References


Pir Sultan Abdal: Kültür Sanat Dergisi, Issue 62 (Special issue on 13th year of Sivas Events of 1993), June 2006.


It is impossible to figure out an exact population of Alevi citizens in Turkey because of the lack of census data based on ethnic and sectarian factors. According to highly contested KONDA (polling company) estimates, which provide one of the most comprehensive research data sets on contemporary Turkish society, the number of people who define themselves as Alevis are around 4.5 million (6.2 % of the Turkish population). Many Alevis, including writers and intellectuals, have objected to this percentage. According to many Alevis, the “real population of Alevis” in Turkey is at least 20 million.

I prefer to use the term Alevilik as a broader term that refers to Alevi community as well as the broader cultural community, rather than the term “Alevism”, which sound more like a political ideology.


The origins of the Alevi identity in Anatolia is closely connected to the Kızılbaş Turcoman tribes that supported the Safavid State against the Ottoman Empire. The origin of the concept Kızılbaş was related to the red hats that the Safavid armies wear however term turned into pejorative one that is often associated with moral inferiority and decadence.

Personal contact with the police chief who was involved in the cases related to extreme left organizations in Turkey. Some of my informants were also actively involved in those organizations; they personally confirmed police chiefs’ statements.

There were many examples of this discourse in field interviews.

Güner Ümit was the host of the popular quiz-show “Turnike” on TV channel Interstar. On January 10, 1995 he made a joke implying incestuous relationships among Kızılbaş on a live show. Immediately after the unfortunate joke many Alevis all over Istanbul gathered around the building of the TV station to protest Ümit. Thousands of people protested in front of the building and the TV station received thousands of protest calls. Ümit resigned from the program.

Special shaped figure of sword, representing sword of Ali ibn Abu Talib, cousin/ brother in law of prophet Mohammed, and the legendary spiritual guide of Alevi community.