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The Alevi and Questions of Identity, Including Violence and Insider/Outsider Perspectives

Alevilik is the second largest religious movement in Turkey after Sunnite Islam. The Alevi worship Ali and the twelve Imams of his family. Ali is more or less deified and therefore Alevis are considered as being *ghulat* ('exaggerated', 'extremist') and heterodox. The elevated Ali personifies an aspiration to justice and righteousness. He fought on the side of the weak and oppressed against those with power in society. Theologically, Ali is assumed to be blessed by the divine light and is therefore able to see into the mysterious spirituality of Islam (Ataseven 1997: 256). Many Alevis today however totally dissociate themselves from Shi'ism. Still, the degrading label *kızılbaş* ('red-head') is associated with Ali and thus is something alleged to be anti-Osman, since Isma'il fought against the Osman Empire. The colour red represents the blood of Mohammed: he was wounded in battle and Ali saw the prophet's blood flowing. As Ali grew older, he wanted to remind people of Mohammed's struggle and therefore started wearing red headgear. Red thus became the colour of the Shi'ites and over time a symbol of Shi'ite martyrdom. Later red also gained political significance for the Alevis (Ataseven 1997: 259). The religious and the political are closely intertwined, but despite this, neither the Left nor Shi'ism does simply stand on one side and the Right/Sunni on the other – there are no such simple dichotomies in reality.

As for martyrdom, blood has indeed flowed, and early attacks on Alevis have great symbolic significance today. The massacre in Kahramanmaraş which took place between the 22nd and 25th December in 1978, is regarded as one of the worst bloodbaths to occur in Turkey in the 1970s.

On Thursday 21st December, two teachers with leftist opinions were shot on their way home from the vocational high school where they taught. Their funeral was to be conducted the following day, the 22nd, but armed encounters outside the mosque where the mourners were to pray held up the ceremony. Three people were killed and many wounded. The attackers demolished houses and gardens, offices and shops in the town. Over

the days that followed (Saturday, Sunday and Monday), the violence escalated and more than one hundred people were killed, whilst hundreds were wounded. Many women and children were murdered in their homes; thousands managed to flee and sought shelter with politicians of high station. Parts of the town of Kahramanmaraş were plundered, burnt and left in ruins. Armed groups ignored the curfew and cut off certain areas for civilians, but the police and the army were also kept at bay. It has been asked why the armed groups did not stop the mobsters rampaging with firearms, iron bars and meat cleavers, but it seems to be the case that there was nobody to organise the resistance and nobody made the decisions needed to stop the massacre. The individual soldiers were confused since they had not received orders to take any serious action, that is, use their arms to forcefully stop the atrocities. Later, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit claimed that the army had in any case used the incident to further its own programme, since the violence ceased only when the Government made a decision to proclaim a state of emergency (Sinclair-Webb 2003: 222–6).¹

On 26 December, the situation in the town was more or less under control, and the event was debated in the press. As has been said above, the Government had decided to proclaim a state of emergency for two months, starting immediately, in thirteen provinces, including Istanbul and Ankara. This can be seen as the beginning of (or a phase in) the process that ended with the military coup of 12 September 1980 (Dagdeviren 2005).

In the areas mainly inhabited by Sunnite Muslims, the murder victims were Alevis. Already on the 19th, a bomb had exploded, placed in a cinema by right-wing idealists in order to cast suspicion on the Alevis. This was revealed in the questioning during a trial. However, the press depicted the event in different ways, depending on their political bias. *Hürriyet* and *Tercüman* did not ascribe the right-wingers with any responsibility for the massacre, neither did these newspapers write anything about Sunnite Muslims and religious motives; however, they did emphasize that many conservatives had been wounded. *Tercüman*, for example, accused militant communists of having provoked the incident. Social liberal newspapers, *Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet*, showed a much greater interest in various moti-

1 'On 23 December, an *imam* (prayer leader) standing on an official vehicle of the Technical Department of Kahramanmaraş Municipality, agitated people with the following words: "My Muslim brothers, do not dread, just hit and destroy ... Muslim Turkey's, Kahramanmaraş's, heroic children, take our revenge on the communists!" (Gürel 2004: 9).

vations and models of explanation. These papers tried to describe which groups led the offensive and which were attacked (Sinclair-Webb 2003: 223–4).

The two teachers belonged to TÖB-DER (leftist organization for teachers), and they were therefore seen as a threat. When the teachers were to be buried, right-wing groups demonstrated and shouted: ‘Funeral prayers for communists and Alevis are not to be conducted!’ About 10,000 people attacked the funeral procession close to the Ulu mosque. In the ensuing commotion two right-wingers who wanted to hinder the prayers were killed. The rightist newspaper *Tercüman* did not write anything in their reports about what the demonstrators had shouted. Liberal-left *Milliyet* reported that other slogans used outside the mosque were ‘Muslim Turkey!’ and ‘Let the army and the nation join hands!’ (Sinclair-Webb 2003: 224–5).²

In the indictment drawn up during the military trial, any mention of ‘Alevis’ is omitted from the description of the events. The proceedings reveal that the incident originally was not a clash between two groups. According to all the witnesses who managed to escape and seek shelter, their homes and possessions were attacked and plundered and their houses set on fire. The Alevis were threatened and many of the defenceless ones were murdered; most of those who managed to escape saw neighbours being assaulted or killed. The areas of the town that were attacked (Karamaşa, Yörükselim and Yenimahalle) were inhabited by Alevis. Rumours circulated that Kurdish Alevis in Kahramanmaraş were allied with lawless remnants of the Osman era (N. N. 2005).

Sunni Muslims and Alevis are mutually dependent on each other. There is an essential power balance in the figure that the groups form. But since the Sunnites monopolise all the important posts in the small towns of southern Anatolia, the power balance is very unequal. Factors of group charisma and group disgrace are at work in a very obvious way. A stigmatisation process dominates society and several Alevis have tried / are trying to expressly take on the norms of the established group, while others who have chosen to live as Alevis in their particular way, quite unconsciously absorb the view that the established group holds of them, so that the we-

2 ‘According to the trial indictment (*Iddianame*), on 22 December, one of the leaders of the group that attacked the Namik Kemal district, Mirza Dogan, exhorted those around him by shouting, “Shoot the leftist!” ... That night, about 300 *ilkkücüs* [= idealists] held a demonstration, shouting slogans such as “Nationalist Turkey!”, “Damn the communists!”’ (Gürel 2004: 9).

image is affected and occasionally creates an attitude of resignation, despite resistance. Thus, the tension between the groups is constantly being heightened. In circumstances when the Alevis have been able to financially compete with the Sunnites, the power balance has been less unequal; at these times, rebellions have arisen, opposition has been clearly expressed and attempts at emancipation have taken place. The historical chain of events and the position of the Sunnites in the Osman Empire are essential; their oppression of the Alevis has influenced and shaped this outsider group. The way in which both groups have been dependent on each other has made them strive towards certain goals and formulate claims or demands on a certain lifestyle. Since the Sunnites have been in the majority, the unequal power balance has resulted in a distorted view of reality. The image of 'the Others' is twisted and imaginary; and in the same way, the self-image is also warped. '[A]fter an intervening period of heightened tension and conflict, the more nearly equal is the balance of power, the more favourable are the conditions for more realistic mutual perceptions and the more likely a high degree of mutual identification' (Mennell 1992: 138). However, it is the Alevis who have to crawl to the mosque; if they adopt the Five Pillars of Islam, they are allowed to join the game – at least be on show as tourist objects.

By illuminating collective fantasies that are expressed in rumour, the theory of the established and the outsiders complements Norbert Elias's theory on the civilisation process. Collective fantasy is a complex phenomenon; power relations are characterised by collective praise and slander, and these fantasies develop in a diachronic manner. The issues observed and explained must be seen as parts of processes, and therefore tradition plays an important role. The fact that differences between the features of 'old' and 'new' are still perceived as relevant for structural differences between groups is largely due to the fact that the dominant notion of 'social structure' makes people see structures as 'still pictures', as 'structures in a stable state', while the movement of structures in time, in the form of development or other kinds of social change, are treated as 'historical', which in the language of sociology often means that they are looked upon as separate from the structure, and not as an inseparable part of it (Elias and Scotson 1999: 11).

The massacre in the town of Kahramanmaraş in 1978 was the culmination of a long process. The abounding rumours had built up over a long period of time, and the moral panic that broke out in December can partly be interpreted by using Elias's theory of the established versus the outsiders.

The Sunnite, and right-wing extremist, attack on the Alevis cannot merely be explained by gossip, but rumour and outbreaks of violence are nevertheless connected. Rumours often trigger riots; at least they aggravate the situation and pave the way for violence in combination with other factors. 'Rumour crystallizes the perceptions that members of each group have of the group towards which they feel hostile' (Goode 1992: 130).

Rumours are concrete representations which are preserved by the members of a group; gossip dramatizes imaginative perceptions and gives them material substance. Gossip can be seen as real-life enactments or embodiments of spiteful notions of other people. Rumours confirm that prevailing ideas are 'true' by seeming to demonstrate that they are rooted in reality. Paranoid fantasies and infamous stories play the main part in the rumours spread before, during and after attacks manifesting group conflicts. When moral panic breaks out, rumours are often an indicator of hostility. 'In short, rumours reflecting intergroup hostility provide *moral-ity tales*, each complete with a plot, characters, a message, and sometimes even a call for action' (Goode 1992: 130).

Seen from a political perspective, it is not the rootless and alienated who participate in collective violence, but rather those individuals who are most attached to important religious, social and cultural institutions. Even if moral panic appears as something irrational, collective violence can be rational and intentional, a means that members of a certain group use to attain their goals. The attackers usually have a perception of what they want when carrying out destructive actions – such acts of violence are not unpredictable, emotional and arbitrary assaults (Goode 1992: 128).

Elias has analysed genocide and group violence and notes that rational motives are often the explanation behind these, but belief and religious confession are more important than reason (Fletcher 1997: 163).

What, then, are the rumours that the massacre in Kahramanmaraş were based on?

In addition to the Alevis', from a Sunnite Muslim perspective, religious deviance, as well as their leftist stamp, which irritates the conservative Sunnites, their immorality is emphasized as being the greatest threat against society. What does this immorality consist of? Simply of the fact that men and women conduct religious worship together. 'In the setting of a moral system that puts great emphasis on the chastity of women, the Alevi ritual could become an easy target for all kinds of speculations: the main ritual, the *ayin-i cem* (ceremony of gathering), was clandestinely held at night; men and women gathered in one room, there was singing and 'dancing' (Alevis would qualify the *semah* not as a dance, bound to worldly affairs,

but as a form of devout meditation) and drink of an often alcoholic nature were essential elements of the ritual' (Vorhoff 2003: 105).

This is in stark contrast to the Sunnite lifestyle, where men and women are strictly separated in religious rituals. *Şeriat* is very powerful in Turkey today, and the Alevis are among those who therefore will suffer the most. '*Şeriat*³ will attack the Alevis with more aggression even than they will the communists. Their own history emphasises this as a sacred duty' (Shankland 2003: 165).

According to David Shankland, an anthropological expert on Turkey, who has conducted extensive fieldwork among Alevis, they are now subject to attacks which are unlike any in history. Over many years of hangings, massacres and threats of exile, the state has succeeded in creating fear and passivity, but still it has not managed to erase the Alevis. The rulers have now changed tactics and are trying to win the Alevis over to their side, persuading them to become Sunnites, assimilating them and thus dispersing the members of the group. The Alevis are repeatedly faced with questions like 'Why do you feel like an outsider?' and invitations such as 'Do not stand outside the country's umbrella, you are also children of this state!', or made to hear declarations such as 'Thanks to God we are all Muslims – there is one Koran, one nation and one flag!' Mosques have been built in all Alevi villages, the children are forced to attend Sunnite Muslim classes and learn the correct way of praying in the mosque. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis still functions as a kind of basic ideology on radio and TV stations, which naturally influences the content of their broadcasts. Programmatic Islamist *Refah Partisi* (The Welfare Party, later called *Fazilet Partisi*, the 'paragon of virtue') borrowed statements by Pir Sultan Abdal as slogans for the party, while MHP (*Milliyet Hareket Partisi*, ultra-nationalists) took wise words by Hacı Bektaş Veli and arranged them in a way unfavourable for the Alevis. For example, they quoted the motto of the Sufi master: 'Let us be united, let us be strong, let us be active' and mocked this maxim by contrasting it with the words of the old Dervish leader Ahmet Yesevi as he disciplined his student Hacı Bektaş Veli by asking: 'Why do you not follow the words of the wise?' (Shankland 2003: 165).⁴

3 *Şeriat*, roughly 'the Sunnah path', referring to those following the Sunnite way, opposed to *Tarikat*, the Alevi way. *Şeriat* is the Sunni way of life, but *şeriat* can also be Islamic law (Shankland 2003: 239).

4 'According to the *Vilayetname*, Bektash was a disciple (*mürid*) of Ahmet Yesevi ... the first Turkish Sufi and the first to establish a Turkish mystical *tarikât*. Since Yesevi lived a century before Bektash, it is obvious that he was not an actual disciple

The Islamisation of Turkish politics gives the Alevis only one alternative, that of organising themselves into a more hard and fast group; and one way is by forming a deeper connection with the Bektaşî Sufi Order.

There might not be a solution to the outsider problem in the eyes of the Sunnite Muslims, but when Alevis and Sunnites realise that they strive for common democracy and human rights, perhaps the Alevi connection with the Bektaşî is so solid and powerful that it no longer exists far beyond the Sunnite field, but as a part thereof. The opinion of those hoping for co-operation is that Alevis and Bektaşî members must strive together. Professor Faruk Bilici speaks of an Alevi-Bektashi Theology, but for many Alevis, there is a big difference. 'The Alevi, whose culture is predominantly oral, cannot find satisfaction in written sources which stem mainly from the Bektashi tradition' (Bilici 1998: 58).

The debate in the Turkish Parliament has, to a certain extent, been a reaction to the demands for collaboration between Alevis and Bektaşî members, clearly presented in a publication called 'Alevi problems in our daily lives and suggested solutions to these problems', written in 1994 by Ali Balkız (who writes in the Alevi paper *Nefes*).

According to the hopes among Alevis today, there will be a development where the antagonists move closer to each other, so that a pluralist democracy is a fact. However, the treatment of the Alevis points in another direction. Extra-institutional groups, with connections to established political parties, but with varying violent agendas, appear in unexpected ways in the 'de-Kemalised' Turkey. Theoretically, a wider political development in the form of increased democracy, where more people would have access to both resources and opportunities, was seen as the solution to the problems of violence (Apter 1987: 40). Yet certain groups are singled out as marginal, and the increasing violence is largely a function of the current social process (cf. Apter 1987: 37). Instead of wondering who deserves most sympathy, it is important to consider how the conditions of violence create their own discourse. Violence must not be seen as irrational, but as symptomatic of something – a diagnostic phenomenon (Apter 1987: 40, cf. p. 48).

If violence is characterised as a performative language which functions according to a strategy concerning order and disorder, it appears that the

of Yesevi but, like Yesevi, a Sufi saint from Khurasan.' (Clarke 1999: 56.) Spencer Trimingham points out that Ahmet Yesevi (here Ahmad al-Yasavi) died in 1166 and Hacı Bektaş (here Hājjī Bektāsh) in 1335 (Trimingham 1998: 58–9).

general notion of the logical disjunction of violence, that violence only represents disorder (when order and disorder are juxtaposed as mutually excluding alternatives), does not hold true on all levels, since violence can give rise to re-ordering in some situations (du Toit 1990: 119).

Violent actions are often a question of revival and planning; each new attack or clash overlaps similar past episodes of violence and reawakens a complex heritage. Those attacked create their own mythology and martyrs, they turn to a wider circle and the chain of events is transmitted in narratives that grab hold of us, that is, people who are not directly concerned with the events (Apter 1987: 40, cf. p. 48). At the same time, the revived heritage generates plans for future actions that are thus based on the myths of the outsider group. In this way, violence can develop a kind of symbolic capital, an independent source of power to change the meaning of the discourse. However, the practical ingredients of the symbolic capital must be close at hand and recognisable. When ordinary phenomena and events are suddenly loaded with a special meaning and depicted as an overall pattern signifying something – a recovered ‘truth’, a particular representation, a narrative, a myth, a certain kind of logic, special theories – a process that enriches the group has been started. This is a question of substantiating and supporting a distinctive character so that symbols, signs, markers and traces can be mobilised to ascribe a mythically coloured logic (associated with terror, riots and protests) with symbolic weight (Apter 1987: 43).

The dynamics of violence express a narrative of battle. The description based on the innate ability of violence to trigger change can be seen as a semiotic field defining morality, the symbolic effects of which spread so that the re-experienced history and the planned reactions that this gives rise to prompts demands for universal acknowledgement. Thus a moral architecture is created which produces engagement and spurs to action (Apter 1987: 41, 237, 249–51).

The experience of violence and harassment can be transformed into symbolic capital. This happens through a shift of perspective that allows those who have experienced violence not only to be seen as victims, but also as potential actors in the context of the larger struggle. Alevis in present-day Turkey can, partly with the support from Alevis in the diaspora, create a powerful community. In the summer of 1998, eighteen Alevi organizations united in the publication of a declaration: seven of these are based in Europe and eleven in Turkey. The declaration signed by the organizations included sixteen points that they regard as constituting the base for what ‘Alevism’ is. These points suggest what the essential characteristics of the

Alevi identity is (Schüler 2000: 208). The Alevi organizations demand that *Alevilik* is recognized as a confessional group striving to maintain its financial, social, political, cultural and religious identity. Further, they insist that *Alevilik* is no longer to be denied, that Alevi civil servants may not be dismissed because of their allegiance, that state employees are promoted following the same pattern as Sunnite Muslims, that violent attacks against Alevis must stop, that the murderers in Maraş, Sivas, Çorum and Gazi are to be tried in court; that DİB (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) is abolished, that schools and social institutions are built and founded instead of mosques in Alevi villages, that libel and disparaging statements about Alevis are erased from school books, that the press, the radio and TV stop accepting material criticising the Alevis, that the reactionary Islamisation of society is stopped, that Sunnite Muslims and certain ethnic groups tied to that belief are no longer to dominate Turkish society and that modern, democratic civil rights are to be granted all inhabitants of the country (Schüler 2000: 208–9).

Since children in Turkish schools learn that Alevis are sinful, carry out incest and group sex, totally lack morality, and so on, Sunnite Muslims are indoctrinated with this view from a very early age. The majority view is that Alevis can be tolerated as long as they keep away from the public sector, but they have no legal status and do not officially exist. The *Alevilik* are denied legal recognition either as a religion (*din*), or as a religious or confessional community (*mezhep*) or order (*tarikât*). The state authorities are adamant and do not want to concede to the Alevis. What is more, the Alevis are not in agreement among themselves about which of the above categories they want to belong to (Schüler 2000: 209).

If the Alevis are recognized by the Turkish state, the relation between state and religion is altered in the country. This could be problematic, but school books can be revised and religious Alevi material can easily be included in the subject of religion. The Social Democrat Party (CHP) could make an effort to gain Alevi votes and implement the general political demand of the Alevis concerning the education system. CHP re-emerged in 1992 and included the precarious situation of the Alevis in its programme; they stated, for example, that various religious beliefs should be allowed. Everything was, however, expressed in an indirect way, and words like 'Alevi' or 'mezhep' were not used. Neither did the Social Democrats touch upon the question of whether Alevis should get state grants for cultural activities, for example, if Alevi cultural organizations should get funds from DİB or the State Cultural Department (Schüler 2000: 213).

Alevis live both in big cities and central Anatolian villages, and the So-

cial Democrat Party has held a strong position in typically Alevi areas. Unfortunately, these areas suffer from regional underdevelopment. Instead of flirting with the new middle-class, the Social Democrat Party could show that it understands that disadvantaged and neglected social groups turn to the Social Democrats hoping that the party will use its voice for them and against discrimination. The oppressed Alevis need a party with distinct, credible ideas and principles that can offer them a better future. The Social Democrats suffered a disastrous setback in the elections on 18 April 1999. According to analyses of the results this was caused by the Alevis having lost their faith in the party.

Furthermore, what can the European Union offer the Alevis?

In June 2000, Karen Fogg, representing the EU Commission, organised a meeting between EU civil servants and leaders of some Alevi organizations. This meeting caused the Turkish Foreign Minister to scold Fogg and rage with anger. Turkey chose to interpret the organised meeting as interfering with internal issues and the EU Commission was blamed for acting behind closed doors (Çelik 2002: 199–200).

The Alevis hope that membership in the EU will grant one of Turkey's largest minority groups human rights and the freedom to practice their own religion. However, power is also an issue at stake here. When the 'binary configuration' of power, that is, the legal model for the oppressors and the oppressed, is dismantled, strategies for subverting hierarchies are enabled.

The liberated form of social intercourse between the sexes in the Alevi community is culturally structured, imbued with dynamic power, and therefore political problems similar to the problems created by the oppressive culture arise implicitly. Liberation and public acknowledgement could free them from these problems. There is an ill-concealed legal model of power that assumes a binary opposition between Sunnite Muslims and Alevis. If such a binary opposition is dismantled, the oppositional pairs change; not by one party being brought to the fore, but because perspectives are multiplied in such a way that binary oppositions eventually become meaningless in a context teeming with all kinds of differences (cf. Butler 1987: 137–8).

There are strategies available which pertain to changing the old power game (consisting of oppressors and the oppressed). With the aid of the EU, the Alevis do not only want to transcend power relations, but also multiply various forms of power so that the oppressive and regulating legal power model can no longer constitute sole supremacy. When the oppressors are themselves oppressed and the oppressed develop alternative

forms of power, post-modern power relations are at hand. This interplay leads to new and more complex power liaisons, and the power in the binary opposition seems to disseminate through the power present in the ambiguity.

In the actual constitution of the subject, the materialization power operates – ‘in the principle which simultaneously forms and regulates the “subject” of subjectivation’ (Butler 1993: 34).

Power, rather than law, includes both the legal (prohibitive and regulating) and the productive (creative by mistake) functions in differential relations (Butler 1990: 29). Since power can be neither removed nor denied, perhaps the Alevis could focus on a replacement of power, instead of making any endeavour to become elevated to a completely normative status (cf. Butler 1990: 124).

If the self cannot be seen as the subject in a life-story, ‘there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (Butler 1990: 25). But it is impossible to completely discard the subject and still claim to be a fully responsible participant in the discursive community (Benhabib 1992: 239).

Various Alevi stereotypes are both generated and nurtured by conservative Sunnite ideology; furthermore, these stereotypes provide the rhetoric apparatus with information that maintains the ideology in question. Thus, the power in such discourses is not the old supreme political power that is uniformly placed over a subordinate population. Power is manifested in local ‘truths’, descriptions and prohibitions. Power appears in both impersonal structures and concrete violent actions – it is tangible in the exclusive as well as in the inclusive.

Concluding Remarks

History, the memory of violence and representation are, in the case of the Alevis, parts of a process in which a group identity is created through negations. This process actually ties the Alevis to the majority Sunnite culture, rather than separates them from it. They need their enemy for their self-definition (cf. Weaver 1953: 222).

As always when identity is created through negation, the Alevis produce a new domain when they incorporate the environment enclosing and threatening the group. This is done by including influencing factors as negative introjections. They thus integrate Sunnite norms, attitudes and values, but in an indirect way (cf. Stallybrass and White 1986: 89).

When looking at the Turkish state in a wider perspective, the attacks against Alevis to a certain extent seem to be a question of stabilising and strengthening the nation's ambivalent marginal regions (cf. Bhaba 1990: 4). When Sunnites attack Alevis, they assault the space of 'the Other' in order for identities to appear as clear-cut and to be able to free more space for self-representation. The struggle about the market in the cities is a source for new rhetoric fantasies. This is largely a question of space; the Alevis take up space with their cultural events.

'The memory of massacre creates history, identity and the focus for future mobilisations. The political significance of massacres is that they continue as a defining moment beyond the event and become part of historical collective memory reference point in the past ... The political significance of a "massacre" is, as a collective act, its ability to define conflicts as communal, precluding other cross-cutting constructions.' (Bozarslan 2003: 36.)

There is a generating reciprocity between violence and representation which is clearly discernible in symbolic acts carried out by various ethnic or religious groups. Unfortunately, violence is the basic linguistic form for social symbols (Feldman 1991: 260).

Textual violence will exist as long as language creates differences through violent acts. Texts do not pop up from a void, but appear in a sometimes painful manner from a context that forms the struggle for existence – they also replace other texts. Each text takes on a position in relation to other texts and thus receives both its significance and ethical strength. Those involved feel their presence through the constantly dominating resistance (Conquergood 1994: 213).

Norbert Elias combines the actor and structure perspectives in his concept of 'figuration'. This refers to a network of mutually dependent people who are tied to each other in various ways and on several levels. In these networks, gossip and rumour have great power. Rumour keeps the oppressed in place, and the Turkish media contributes to the stigmatisation of Alevis. On the other hand, the media is also a channel for the Alevis to reach out and present themselves. They can show that rumour and gossip convey a stereotypical image of them with the object of making them powerless.

Rumour is the breeding ground for moral panic. 'In most cases, a deviant category or stereotype exists, but is latent and only routinely activated. During the moral panic, the category is either created or, more often, relocated, dusted off, and attacked with renewed vigour. New charges may be made, old ones dredged up and reformulated.' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 74–5.)

Moral panic reveals variations in condemnations and dissociations. The Sunnites have stigmatised the Alevis in different ways during various time periods, and apart from alleged religious deviance, rumours of financial problems and political accusations, sexual and moral issues also recur constantly in the gossip about the Alevis. When those accused of deviance act according to the roles ascribed to them, which existed already before moral panic broke out, they might very well underline certain traits that the agitated mass perceives as immoral or sinful. They might even make something up further to emphasize the deviance of the group. 'The part that individuals who are designated as deviants play in moral panics is crucial – indeed, central – but their precise role is creatively assigned, dynamically acted out, and to some degree reformulated with each episode' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 75).

Hatred of the Alevis has existed since the sixteenth century, but the reasons for which Sunnite Muslims harass Alevis are constantly being renovated as various stories are spread through rumours, and the gossip is lethally sharp. Generally, intellectual Alevis claim that *Alevilik* represents a modern way of living, compared with the Sunnite Muslim lifestyle. Often the view of women is brought up; Alevi women are regarded as being treated much more equally than Sunnite women (Çaha 2004: 335). Perhaps it is the position of women in the Alevi community which is most disturbing and threatening in the eyes of the Sunnite? During the prayer rituals, *tarikât*, all look into each other's faces, women as well as men. By praying face to face, the Alevis look into each other's hearts and thus come closer to God. This collective form of worship is called *muhabbet*, and the Alevis regard the Sunnite Muslim prayers in the mosque, where only men sit in rows without being able to see each other, as a sign of falsehood (Shankland 2003: 120).

Nevertheless, we must carefully scrutinize myths; we are constantly dealing with stories of a reality that shifts according to the perspective from which it is viewed. Exploitation of 'history' and 'tradition' is something that the revived Alevism has in common with many ethnic and nationalistic movements. This is largely a question of pointing out 'the Other' – the dichotomy of 'us here' and 'them there' is an obvious motif in almost all texts produced by Alevis during the 1990s.

In many writings their own group is glorified, for example: we belong to *Ehlibeyt'*, that is, the household of Mohammed, where Fatima, Ali, and their sons Hasan and Hüseyin are included. Hüseyin's passion symbolises the historical struggle between good and evil. The pathos and significance associated with Hüseyin's martyrdom – with themes such as oppression,

tyranny, social justice and atonement – are revealed in liturgical handbooks that recount the fatal struggle (Esposito 2001: 152). This pertains to Shi'ism generally and the Alevis often refer to Hüseyin's martyrdom in Kerbela in 680.

Binary oppositions exist everywhere in the descriptions of the history of the Alevis. They envision their own history from Prophet Mohammed to today's Turkish society – they remember it. The Sunnites are on one side and the Alevis on the other; in the writing of history persons who have contributed to the Alevi community are highlighted, they are eminent persons who have formed their religion. Throughout history Alevis and Sunnites are described in a stereotypical manner as two morally different societies. Of course, it is understandable that this dualism is important for those who wish to create a collective sense of community, an Alevi identity. It is always easier to identify with heroes and innocent victims than with abstract principles. The powerful forces acting in Alevi history are mostly concrete persons. Historical representation is a specific means of recounting history; it is a process pertaining to group formation that provides a historical basis for the reshaping which is constantly taking place. History is presented as an endless repetition of a pattern where the good, righteous and innocent are set against the evil, irreverent and cruel. The Alevis are writing their history according to a classic narrative form of historiography. The manicheistic features in the Alevi religion emerge clearly, since the society is divided into two categories of people: one side consists of humble nomads, modest farmers, poor workers, weak and unprivileged who are all innocent, just, good and prepared to suffer for their ideals. They live in a democratic society based on equality, justice, freedom and solidarity. The other side is represented by the Sunnites who are thoroughly unjust. Such thinking got Elias to bring the concept of charisma even closer to the theory on social behaviour, groups and relations in order to eliminate all essentialist and normative associations (Goudsblom and Mennell 1998: 105).

Ali, Hüseyin and Hacı Bektaş Veli are not only men of principle who fought for the Alevi ideals, they also embody the moral norms connected with the principles. Since the world has not changed for the better, these men and today's Alevis are being discriminated against, oppressed, exploited and murdered by their evil opponents.

In the Alevi historical stories the good who are oppressed are of Central Asian origin while the oppressors are Arabs or decadent Turks, such as the Osmons. Thus, there is an open ethnic or nationalistic rhetoric in the contemporary Alevi discourse.

According to the Alevis, Sunnite Muslim leaders make up rumours about them: 'These despots invented the slander of the character of the Alevi religious service to break the solidarity of the common people and to discipline them' (Vorhoff 2003: 105).

At the same time as the Alevis use the passion drama and Hüseyin's martyrdom to enclose themselves in a cycle of eternal repetitions, they look forward and create a new identity through their modified image of Alevism. Through an invented tradition, which is rather a mirror image of the present historical enactments of tradition, the Alevis express current circumstances. Karl Marx would probably have said something about the traditions of dead generations weighing on the minds of the living like a nightmare (Marx 2003: 150).

In societies characterised by mythical thinking, the social structure can be seen as a holy, timeless order which is justified by the myths. They explain the great importance of the community and the way in which it has been shaped. Furthermore, rituals are very important, since they strengthen the solidarity between those who belong to a certain group, and thus the solidarity of the society at large is undermined. This gives rituals a clearly more important political role than if rituals only existed to cement society. Since a ritual can bring together various political groupings, rituals also hold a key role in the political struggle between power-seeking factions and sub-groups; rituals are also an important tool when a nation is created and a useful instrument for chauvinists (Kertzer 1988: 69).

Cultural identity is never enough as the sole guide in life. We all have multiple identities of many kinds, and even if we accept one basic cultural identity, we might not totally adapt to it and correspond to the image thereof. Theories of culture turn our attention away from all that we have in common instead of encouraging us to communicate across national, ethnic and religious borders, and take the risk of going beyond these marked dividing lines (Kuper 1999: 247).

When people create their history and carry out something unprecedented, they feel insecure and therefore try to invoke representations that ensure their context and reveal the connection to times past. If the continuity is threatened they quickly invent a past that re-establishes the calm: And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes (Marx 2003: 150).

In this shuttle between the past and the present there is, nevertheless,

a kind of development taking place; it is not merely an endless, limitless repetition of the same old pattern. The collective memory of 'Alevism' grants accesses to many updated versions of the Alevi self. May the image of the oppressed Alevi be blurred in the European Union!

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