

RE-NEGOTIATING ALEVI IDENTITY

VALUES, EMOTIONS
AND CONTENDING VISIONS
ON THE FUTURE

TALHA KÖSE



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SETA

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This book is a product of three major research endeavors. The main source of the rich body of personal life stories and broader collective narratives is my doctoral field research. During my doctoral research, I had a chance to do extensive field observations and field visits to various cities in Türkiye. The repertoire of personal narratives of Alevi citizens was collected in Istanbul, Ankara, and Malatya during my field research (2006-2008). The verbatim transcript of personal and collective stories I collected during my doctoral field research constituted more than 2,000 pages. Those narratives and my field notes were critical for understanding the various dynamics of Alevi identity and politics.

I had a chance to understand the rich oral tradition of the Alevi community, and I tried to reflect on how this corpus of personal and collective storylines constituted the mindset of Alevi citizens. I had sincere conversations and exchanges with scores of Alevi community leaders, dedes, young Alevis, Alevi academics, authors, and ordinary citizens. They shared their traumas, critical moments, and turning points in their lives. I am grateful to those who shared their stories and family experiences and sincerely reflected on personal and collective emotions and values. Without the rich cultural resources and psychosocial underpinnings, the reflections on the Alevi identity struggle would sound quite dry and tedious. I would like to thank my research counterparts for their patience and hospitality and for hosting me in their homes, offices, associations, foundations, cemevis, and neighborhood cafes.

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the new political reality of decades-long Kurdish issues in Türkiye. The narratives collected during this research were predominantly political. The process of evaluating the Kurdish Peace Process was, at the same time, the comparative assessment of the Alevi identity politics in the Turkish political landscape. The narratives we collected during this process were predominantly political, yet those stories also revealed reflections on the Turkish State, the majority Sunni population, and ethnic Kurds in Türkiye.

The third source of research data was collected during the research project titled “Alevi Identity Demands: Legal and Perceptual Dimensions of the Struggle for Recognition” (2014-2015). The research project constituted four daylong focus group workshops of Alevi dedes, opinion makers, civil society leaders, and intellectuals in Istanbul, Tokat, Malatya, and Erzincan. We had a tedious preparation period for the workshops. Participants of those workshops reflected on legal, political, religious, and cultural aspects of Alevi identity demands.

In addition to the three research projects on Alevi’s collective identity and identity struggle, I also examined the early Alevi popular literature and activist documents and resources. All those resources were very rich symbolically and in terms of activist messages.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

RE-NEGOTIATING ALEVI IDENTITY: VALUES, EMOTIONS AND CONTENDING VISION ON THE FUTURE

This book is about the formation and transformation of ethno-religious identities. In particular, it examines how the repertoires of collective narratives on shared sentiments of pain, grief, traumas, victimhood, pride, and glories are instrumentalized during the politicization of Alevi identity in post-1980 Türkiye. The practical ways in which those resources are used in the building of the boundaries and the moral grounds of collective identities in a modern context can be an intricate task. This process stirred controversies during the transformation and politicization of Alevi identity in Türkiye. Different aspects of the Alevi collective identity were activated according to the practical logic of the politicization process. This book elucidates the role of collective emotions and values in the re-articulation and politicization of Alevis' collective identity within the context of the post-1980 milieu of Türkiye.

The Alevis, one of the largest ethno-religious communities in Türkiye, are geographically spread throughout the country. Scholarly and popular works of literature on Alevilik have often referred to the period starting from the late 1980s as the "Alevi revival." This "revival/transformation" has manifested itself in forms of heightened group consciousness, greater ease to express identity in the public sphere, and increased public visibility. Alevis also established religious and cultural institutions/associations in the last two decades to maintain Alevi collective organizations in modern urban contexts and to make political and legal claims over Alevi identity in social and political arenas during the Alevi revival.

The process of politicization of Alevi identity is a neglected aspect of the studies on Alevilik in Türkiye. The majority of the recent academic literature

on Alevi identity focuses on the folkloric, religious/ritualistic,¹ historical², and sociological³ aspects of Alevilik. There is vibrant academic literature, especially about the cultural and religious dimensions and traditional ritualistic practices of Alevi communities all over Türkiye. There are very few studies on Alevi identity politics and the existing studies deal predominantly with the legal and institutional aspects of modern Alevi identity politics.⁴ Most scholars delved into the transformation and politicization of Alevi identity, Alevi institutions, and the Alevi identity struggle within the modern urban context rather than traditional rural communities where the majority of Alevis lived for centuries in relatively secluded parts of Anatolia.

¹ Hüseyin Bal, *Alevi-Bektaşî Sosyolojisi* (Ant Yayınları, 1997); Robert Langer, "Transfer Processes within Sufi Rituals: An Example from Istanbul," *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 13 (December 31, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4584>; Robert Langer, "The Aesthetics of Contemporary Alevi Religious Practice: A Bodily-and-Material Cultures' Approach," in *Aesthetic and Performative Dimensions of Alevi Cultural Heritage* (Ergon-Verlag, 2020), 9–32, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956506413-9>; Benjamin Weineck, "Alevi Cultural Heritage in Turkey and Germany: Negotiating 'Useable Pasts' in Transnational Space," *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 20 (March 15, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.5206>; I. Markoff, "The Role of Expressive Culture in the Demystification of a Sect of Islam: The Case of the Alevis of Turkey," *The World of Music. XXVIII* 3 (1986); Arzu Öztürkmen, "Staging a Ritual Dance out of Its Context: The Role of an Individual Artist in Transforming the Alevi Semah," *Asian Folklore Studies* 64, no. 2 (2005): 247–60; Mehmet Ersal, "Alevi İnanç Sistemindeki Ritüelilik Özel Terimler: Musahiplik." *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 1 (2011): 1058–83; Rıza Yıldırım, *Geleneksel Alevilik: inanç, ibadet, Kurumlar, Toplumsal yapı, kolektif bellek*, 1. baskı., Araştırma-inceleme dizisi (İletişim Yayınları (Firm)) 439 (İstanbul: İletişim, 2018a).

² Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); A. Y. Ocak, *Türkiyede Tarihînin Saptırılması Sürecinde Türk Süflüğüne Bakışlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Alevi ve Bektaşî inançlarının İslâm öncesi temelleri*, 1. baskı., Araştırma-inceleme dizisi (İletişim Yayınları (Firm)) 96 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000); A. Y. Ocak, *Babailer İyânından Kızılbaşlığa: Anadolu'da İslâm Heterodoksizminin Doğuşu ve Gelişim Taribine Kısa Bir Bakış* (İstanbul: Ensar Nesriyat, 2001); Rıza Yıldırım, *Hacı Bektaş Veli'den Balım Sultan'a: Bektaşîliğin doğuşu*, 1. baskı., Araştırma-İnceleme dizisi 456 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019); Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, *Vefalık, Bektaşîlik, kızılbaşlık: Alevi kaynaklarını, tarihini ve tarihyazımını yeniden düşünmek*, 1. baskı., İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi yayınları 528 (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015); Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, *KIZILBASH-ALEVIS IN OTTOMAN ANATOLIA: Sufism, Politics and Community* (S.l.): EDINBURGH UNIV PRESS, 2020).

³ David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition*, 1st ed. (Routledge Curzon, 2003); S. Şahin, "The Rise of Alevilik as a Public Religion," *Current Sociology* 53, no. 3 (2005): 465–85.

⁴ T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, and C. Raudvere, *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2005); P. J. White, "The Debate on the Identity of Alevi Kurds," in *Turkey's Alevi Enigma: A Comprehensive Overview* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 17–33; élise Massicard, *Türkiyeden Avrupa'ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007); L. Kaleli, *Alevi Kimliği ve Alevi Örgütlenmeleri* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2000); A. Yaman, "Günümüzde Alevilik-Bektaşîlik Alanındaki Aktörlere İlişkin Genel Bir Analiz Denemesi," *1. Uluslararası Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, 27-28-29 Nisan 2000, Ankara, (Ankara: Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı Yayınları, 2000), 2000, 191–225; Mehmet Ali BALKANLIOĞLU and Fatih IRMAK, "BİR SOSYAL SERMAYE TÜRÜ OLARAK TÜRKİYE'DEKİ ALEVİ SOSYAL ÖRGÜTLERİ VE FAALİYETLERİNİN İNCELENMESİ.," *Turkish Culture & Hacı Bektaş Veli Research Quarterly*, no. 70 (2014).

This study is unique in the sense that it examines the transformation and politicization of Alevi identity on the bases of personal accounts, life stories, and subjective interpretations of the Alevi opinion-makers and ordinary Alevi citizens. Some of the meta-narratives are accepted and iterated in those accounts whereas some others are challenged and reframed in those personal accounts. This book offers a novel theoretical approach by focusing on the narrative aspect of Alevi identity negotiation and politicization. Empirically diverse data and resources, ranging from personal stories, biographies, semi-structured interviews, popular literature, and web-based resources are utilized.

Alevi identity is a multi-dimensional identity with ethnic, religious, and political/ideological aspects. Alevi identity has ethno-religious origins, but it has taken a multiplicity of forms during the ongoing process of identity transformation and politicization. There are unsettled debates and continuing competition between different ways of articulating Alevi identity among the important actors of the Alevi community.⁵ This internal controversy is also an essential component of the Alevi identity negotiation. The book also discusses the internal debates within the Alevi community during the process of identity re-definition.

This manuscript contributes to the major debate on minorities and related identities. There is burgeoning literature on sectarianism and ethno-religious conflicts in the Middle East region in recent years.⁶ Iraq,⁷ Syria,⁸ Lebanon,⁹ Ye-

⁵ Talha Köse, "Between Nationalism, Modernism and Secularism: The Ambivalent Place of 'Alevi Identities,'" *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 4 (2013): 590–607, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.798309>.

⁶ Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Frederic M Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York [N.Y.]: Columbia University Press, 2014); Lawrence G. Potter, *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Frederic Wehrey, ed., *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (Columbia University Press, 2011); Fanar Haddad, "Sunni-Shia Relations After the Iraq War," Peacebrief (Washington D.C.: USIP, November 18, 2013), <http://www.usip.org/publications/sunni-shia-relations-after-the-iraq-war>; Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Relations and Sunni Identity in Post-Civil War Iraq," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (Hurst & Company London, 2013), 67–115; Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Identity and National Identity in the Middle East," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 123–137; Fanar Haddad, *UNDERSTANDING SECTARIANISM: Sunni-Shi'a Relations in the Modern Arab World* (S.I.): OXFORD UNIV PRESS US, 2020).

⁸ Christopher Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2015): 357–376; Paulo G. Pinto, "Mystical Metaphors: Ritual, Symbols and Self in Syrian Sufism," *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 90–109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2017.1326957>; Heiko Wimmen, "The Sectarianization of the Syrian War," in *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*, Frederic M. Wehrey (Ed.) (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61–86.

⁹ Paul W. T. Kingston, *Reproducing Sectarianism: Advocacy Networks and the Politics of Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon* (SUNY Press, 2013); Joseph Bahout, "Lebanese 'Political Sectarianism' in Context and Some Regional Lessons" (Houston, Texas: Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy, 07 2018); Bassel F. Salloukh et al., *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, vol. 56217 (London: Pluto Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p3d5>.

men,¹⁰ Bahrain,¹¹ and Egypt¹² became the hot spots of sectarian and ethno-religious tensions and violent confrontations in the last couple of years. Ethno-religious groups like Syrian Alawites,¹³ Yemeni Houthis,¹⁴ the Copts of Egypt,¹⁵ and various schools and denominations of Shiism in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait¹⁶ became the focal actors of those studies. Ethno-religious and sectarian cleavages are activated, politicized, and manipulated both by the domestic actors in those countries and the other international actors that try to spread their influence in those countries. There is an increasing effort to understand the sources, dynamics, and resolution mechanisms of those conflicts. There is also increasing literature on the status and political struggle of Kurds in the entire Middle East region.¹⁷

¹⁰ Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "Sectarianization, Islamist Republicanism, and International Misrecognition in Yemen," in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Edited by Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (London: Hurst, 2017), 185–99; Khaled Fattah, "Yemen: Sectarianism and the Politics of Regime Survival," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, Lawrence G. Potter (Ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2014), 207–228.

¹¹ Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*; Staci Strobl, *Sectarian Order in Bahrain: The Social and Colonial Origins of Criminal Justice* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

¹² Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity and Representation* (Routledge, 2012); Laure Guirguis, *Copts and the Security State: Violence, Coercion, and Sectarianism in Contemporary Egypt*, vol. 82, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹³ Leon Goldsmith, "Syria's Alawites and the Politics of Sectarian Insecurity: A Khaldunian Perspective," *Ortadoğu Enüleri* 3, no. 1 (2011): 33–60; Leon Goldsmith, *Cycle of Fear: Syria's Alawites in War and Peace* (Hurst & Company, 2015); Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: The Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Cairo: The American University In Cairo Press, 2013), http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook.batch.GEN_batch:EDZ000086281220160623; Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Madeleine Wells, "Sectarianism, Authoritarianism, and Opposition in Kuwait," in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Edited by N. Hashemi, and D. Postel. (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 235–258.; Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London: Hurst & Co Publishers, 2008); Laurence Louër, "The State and the Sectarian Identities in The Persian Gulf Monarchies: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in Comparative Perspective," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, Lawrence G. Potter (Ed.) (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117–43.

¹⁷ Emel Elif Tuğdar and Serhun Al, *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (Springer, 2018); Durukan Kuzu, *Multiculturalism in Turkey: The Kurds and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Ephraim Nimni and Elçin Aktoprak, *Democratic Representation in Plurinational States: The Kurds in Turkey* (Springer, 2018); Cengiz Güneş, *The Kurds in a New Middle East: The Changing Geopolitics of a Regional Conflict* (Springer, 2019).

With its theoretical and methodological approaches, this manuscript may also make a critical contribution to the literature on ethno-religious groups and the conflicts in the Middle East. Despite the legacy of social and political discrimination and exclusion of Alevi in Türkiye, the Alevi revival was a non-violent one. There are valuable lessons to be drawn from the non-violent revival of the Alevi case in Türkiye. The Alevi community's rich cultural and narrative resources allowed the formulation of practical positions. It is difficult to draw the boundaries between myths, histories, and more recent practical political debates in the discursive processes of identity negotiations. All those discursive resources are utilized practically in personal life stories as well as the in more widely shared oral and written resources. Both personal and popularly shared discursive resources and narrative repertoires are examined in this study.

ALEVIS IN THE CHANGING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Early efforts to re-articulate Alevi identity and Alevi culture in a modern context started in the 1960s, but this process gained momentum during the late 1980s. The Alevi community needed to redefine and re-articulate themselves vis-à-vis the Turkish State, the majority Sunni community, political parties, civil society institutions, and international actors. The process of re-articulation and politicization led to primary debates and controversies within the Alevi community. How should the Alevi community define its moral boundaries? Or define their collective ethos? How could its members institutionalize themselves according to the necessities of modern urban contexts? These were essential questions and puzzles for the survival of the Alevi community.

Alevi communities in Anatolia managed to maintain their autonomy along with their informal institutions, networks, and rituals. The oral tradition in their practice of faith and unorthodox religious tradition; informal mechanisms of social and economic support and solidarity; and informal networks of social control helped the Alevi communities across Anatolia maintain themselves for centuries. These resources were necessary yet insufficient, at best, for the continuation of Alevi identity in the modern urban context. There were institutional and legal barriers to the establishment of traditional Alevi beliefs and ritual spaces known as *cemevis* in urban centers. According to personal testimonies, some Alevis denied the belief aspect of their identity, whereas some others reframed their definition of "Aleviness" to fit their social and political positions. What most Alevis complained

about was the lack of pluralistic social, religious, and political environments that would embrace the Alevi identity within their new context.

The Alevi identity struggle and political movement aimed for the recognition and acknowledgment of the Alevi collective identity by other social groups in Türkiye.¹⁸ More importantly, Alevis struggled to have an institutional framework and legal protection for Alevi cultural and religious practices. Two main puzzles for the Alevi community were how to maintain their identity and autonomy and how to develop a dignified relationship with the cultural “other” in the modern urban landscape. These two puzzles were the prime drivers of the politics of the Alevi identity.

This book scrutinizes the dynamics of Alevi identity negotiation through the competing narratives, within the context of post-1980 Türkiye. It asks the following questions: How are the moral, cultural, and political boundaries of Alevi identity being re-negotiated vis-à-vis other social groups within the changing social and political context of Türkiye? How are the rich cultural repertoires of Alevi tradition represented in the genres of laments, folk songs, oral stories, myths, idioms, and ritual practices utilized for shaping Alevi collective ethos and moral boundaries? How were selective references to Alevi cultural repertoires instrumentalized by the entrepreneurs of the Alevi identity politics? How do the narratives on the collective emotions such as victimhood fear, humiliation, marginalization, and discrimination shape the Alevi collective consciousness, and how do they practically influence the identity negotiation process?

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical approaches in the study of identity-based conflicts try to explain sources of identity conflicts with various assumptions. Some of the most popular explanatory schemas are: non-negotiable basic human needs such as identity, security, recognition, autonomy, self-esteem, and a sense of justice¹⁹; perceived

¹⁸ Elise Massicard, *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe: Identity and Managing Territorial Diversity* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁹ J. W. Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism & War: The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1979); J. W. Burton, *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (Univ Press of America, 1987); J. W. Burton, *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (St. Martin's Press, 1990); J. W. Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Provention* (Macmillan, 1990); E. E. Azar and J. W. Burton, *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (Wheatsheaf Books, 1986); E. E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1990); E. E. Azar, “The Analysis and Management of Protracted Conflict,” in *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships/ Edited by Vamik D. Volkan, Demetrios A. Julius, Joseph V. Montville*, vol. 2 (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1991), 93–120.

incompatibility of goals and values²⁰; rational self-interest²¹; incompatible future goals and aspirations²²; in-group membership and comparison with out-groups²³; the ambiguity of boundaries, social change and unfulfillment of political and economic expectations²⁴; and shared beliefs, perceptions/misperceptions of fear.²⁵

While taking into consideration conflicting interests, unsatisfied human needs, incompatible goals, perceptions, and misperceptions in identity struggle, this study more specifically analyzes the emotional and normative aspects of identity-based conflicts. The management and manipulation of collective emotions by the entrepreneurs of identity politics, some of which reproduce hostile feelings, is a significant pillar of any identity-based conflict. It should also be a crucial part of any sustainable peacemaking and reconciliation effort as well. This study offers both conceptual guidelines to understand and practical instruments to respond to the conflicts of culturally divided societies in a broader framework.

The complicated process of re-negotiating the boundaries of Alevi identity has been taking place with the assistance of narrative instruments, including mass media and publications, online debates in social media, as well as through social, political, and legal institutions, and practical activities. The study particularly highlights the narrational and discursive processes of identity re-negotiation and

²⁰ D. G. Pruitt and S. H. Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (McGraw-Hill New York, 2004); Otomar J. Bartos and Paul Wehr, *Using Conflict Theory*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²¹ Anatol Rapoport, *Fights, Games, and Debates* (University of Michigan Press, 1974); Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

²² R. J. Fisher, "Interactive Conflict Resolution," in *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques. (Revised Edition), I. William Zartman (Ed.)*. (Washington D.C.: United States Inst of Peace Press, 2007), 227–73; Herbert C. Kelman, "Negotiation as Interactive Problem Solving," *International Negotiation* 1, no. 1 (1996): 99–123.

²³ H. Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); H. Tajfel, "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations," *Annual Review of Psychology* 33, no. 1 (1982): 1–39; H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, "The Social Psychology of Intergroup Behavior," *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 1986, 7–24.

²⁴ T. R. Gurr, M. G. Marshall, and D. Khosla, "Peace and Conflict 2001: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy," *University of Maryland, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, College Park*, 2001; T. R. Gurr, "Minorities, Nationalists, and Islamists. Managing Communal Conflict in the Twenty-First Century," in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, 2007, 131–60; Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, and United States Institute of Peace, *Minorities at Risk* (United States Institute of Peace Press Washington, DC, 1993).

²⁵ D. Bar-Tal, *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social Psychological Analysis* (Sage Publications, 2000); D. Bar-Tal, "Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 11 (2007): 1430; D. Bar-Tal and Y. Teichman, *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society* (Cambridge Univ Press, 2005).

politicization. The significance of the personal and public narratives related to moral, cultural, historical, and political concerns, as well as collective feelings and expectations, take shape within them.

Marginalization and the denial of the rights of Alevis and some of the social restraints on Alevis have been carried out through certain narratives, stereotypes, stigmas, and discriminatory practices. Those resources constitute the conceptual foundation of the political and legal restrictions that Alevis face. The Alevi elite has countered these meta-narratives of marginalization and exclusion by means of available discursive resources and different narrational genres. Alevi opinion-makers, from traditional dedes to association and foundation leaders, resorted to modern frames of reference to re-articulate their collective ethos, which would be more compatible with the challenges of the time. One of the essential highlights of this study is the critical examination of how Alevi identity and the Alevi community were framed and positioned by the institutions of Türkiye's official state apparatus during the different phases of the republican era. How the Alevi community responded and challenged those positionings is elaborated with reference to personal accounts as well as broadly shared collective narratives of the Alevi community.

NARRATIVES & NEGOTIATION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES

Stories, especially collective stories such as origin myths and histories, are important resources for community formation and maintenance.²⁶ Narratives are defined as the connective structures that organize communities along different lines. In contrast to the primordial and material interest-based collectivity formation, narratives generate a cultural sense of belonging. The way we construct and orient our present choices and actions is shaped in light of our imagined futures and the version of our pasts that fits with those choices. The most crucial feature of narratives is that they “give shape to the temporal dimension of human experience.”²⁷ Collective narratives play an essential role in the temporal organization of collective experiences. Historical narratives and debates related to historical information are critical dimensions of the re-negotiation of Alevi identity. Collective stories, national or group myths, and collective ideals that are already available

²⁶ L. Hinchman and S. Hinchman, *Memory, Community, Identity: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997). p. xvii

²⁷ J. Brockmeier, “Remembering and Forgetting: Narrative as Cultural Memory,” *Culture & Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2002): 27.

and widely shared by group members often play essential roles in the orientation of personal stories.

The construction of the storylines and narratives on “self” and “other,” past and future, are at the same time creating meaning for these categories and re-negotiating those according to actual needs. There is often severe competition over the versions of collective stories and the individual stories appropriate to those collective stories in the struggles of Alevi identity negotiation. Institutions of social and political activism, scholars, and diasporic Alevis have produced very different narratives related to the Alevi issue and Alevi identity that also have resonance in Alevi public discourses.

Identity negotiation and politicization have both practical and motivational aspects which are hard to be disaggregated. The investigation of Alevi identity negotiation focuses on three main discursive spheres. The sphere of axiological praxis focuses on the discussions of moral and cultural values in personal and collective narratives. The realm of psychocultural praxis focuses on the negotiation of personal and collective emotions. The sphere of identity politics investigates the discursive practices of social and political activism and interest aggregation. For the broader narratives preferred by various Alevi institutions, Alevi identity negotiation is a dynamic process, and discursive praxis in these three domains shapes this dynamic process.

Subjective definitions of the facts and figures related to Alevilik and the practical use of these frames in the identity debate are more central in this study than the “objective” facts, figures, and cultural characteristics. Narratives have often been drawn from the historical, cultural and political repertoires of the Alevi community, which include highly contested and controversial elements. While referring to academic debates over the facts and figures, this study mainly focuses on the practical use of public and private discourses on Alevi identity.

In many cases, ethnic groups have been divided along contradictory victimization discourses, and hostilities have been activated by the use of sectarian parades, rituals, and assaults.²⁸ These contradictory narratives, in combination with some

²⁸ Marc Howard Ross, “Social Structure, Psychocultural Dispositions, and Violent Conflict: Extensions from a Cross-Cultural Study,” in *In James Silverberg, J Patrick Gray (Eds.), Aggression and Peacefulness in Humans and Other Primates*, 1992, 271–294; M. H. Ross, “Psychocultural Interpretation Theory and Peacemaking in Ethnic Conflicts,” *Political Psychology* 16, no. 3 (1995): 523–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3792225>; M. H. Ross, “Psychocultural Interpretations and Dramas: Identity Dynamics in Ethnic Conflict,” *Political Psychology*, 2001, 157–78; M. H. Ross, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

historical narratives and confrontations, turn into essential mechanisms of boundary-making in identity-based conflicts and struggles. The politicization of psychocultural boundaries reproduces conflicting historical narratives and limits the possibilities of common storylines and narratives. Shia-Sunni, Alevi-Sunni, and Catholic-Protestant splits, as well as many other sectarian conflicts, have existed for centuries with a shared narrative of victimhood and suffering. Those narratives are also moral frames that define the contours of Alevi identity politics. Alevi activists and identity entrepreneurs make constant references to those repertoires in determining the moral superiority of the Alevi belief system and lifestyle. That is why this book project puts particular emphasis on cultural narratives.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To understand the transformation and fragmentation of Alevi identity, the Alevi public and private narratives are examined. Oral narratives, stories, and ritual practices that were told and practiced by dedes were crucial aspects of the production and the maintenance of Alevi identity. Those stories that had been told in a rural context in face-to-face interactions are now being replaced by written sources. The epic stories and victimhood narratives that were transmitted orally in traditional settings are also being replaced by written sources such as books, journal articles, and feuilletons in major newspapers. Intermediary figures, or the storytellers in the new context, are not dedes, but researchers, writers, academics, and journalists. The nature of new narratives and shared stories that constitute the modern Alevi identity is substantially different from the traditional narratives. There are new heroes, new villains, new moral values, and priorities in new Alevi narratives. At the same time, existing narratives have been tailored and modified to fit the preferences and necessities of the new social context. Understanding those elements is crucial for understanding the dynamics of Alevi identity negotiation.

As a theoretical and analytical framework, positioning theory enables dynamic and interactive analysis of this debate. Positioning theory is defined as the study of local moral orders as shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting.²⁹ Harré and van Langenhove define position as a “complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which

²⁹ Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove, *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); R. Harre and F. M. Moghaddam, *The Self and Others* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); F. M. Moghaddam, R. Harré, and N. Lee, “Positioning and Conflict: An Introduction,” *Global Conflict Resolution Through Positioning Analysis*, 2008, 3–20.

This book investigates the transformation and the politicization of Alevi identity within the social and political context of post-1980 Türkiye. This study specifically focuses on the role of collective emotions and values in forming and transforming Alevi identity. Collective traumas and the glories of the Alevi community are explored with reference to personal life stories and widely shared collective narratives. This study answers the following questions:

- How are the moral, cultural, and political boundaries of Alevi identity being re-negotiated vis-à-vis other social groups within the changing social and political context?
- How do the narratives on collective emotions such as victimhood, fear, humiliation, marginalization, and discrimination practically influence the Alevi identity negotiation process?
- How can we address the deep-rooted negative collective emotions and important barriers to inter-communal reconciliation processes?
- What lessons can other identity groups in Türkiye and elsewhere learn from Alevi identity politics?

