

Aytaç, Ahmet Murat, Ankara University, Turkey

Difficult Freedom: Politics of Emancipation and the Alevis in Turkey

In the light of current identity politics that tends to reshape Turkish democracy, the Alevi question emerges as one of the crucial instances. The political significance of Alevi question stems, at least, from three interrelated issues: the question of the nature of secularism in Turkey, the question of ethno-religious minority rights and the question of national identity. Even though, these issues remained almost untouched for many decades, both the process of democratization, and the rise of Alevi political movements from the 1990s onwards paved way new discussions regarding how the demands of the Alevi citizens should be incorporated into the new reform drafts. More interestingly, further democratization led to a fragmentation within Alevi public opinion. The position of Alevi citizens tends to be polarized with respect to these developments. The first position approaching the issue from the viewpoint of radical secularism demands a total neutralization of the state through a withdrawal from the organization of religious affairs. The second adopts a rather gradualist strategy envisages amelioration of relations between the Alevis and the state, and to this end, demands the inclusion of the Alevi belief system into the institutional framework and the curriculum of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. This paper will examine the emancipatory potential of diverging and conflicting positions between the state and the Alevis, as well as within the Alevi politics itself.