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Turkish Nationalisms and the Ambivalence Status of Alevi Citizens

Despite the fact that ethno-secular and ethno-religious nationalisms have represented two rival and competing national imaginaries through which modern Turkish citizenship is conceptualized, there is a surprising continuity between them with respect to the status of Alevi citizens. Both conceptualize national community as organic entities. Therefore, the condition of being a citizen is to “own” or be incorporated into Turkish language and culture. Because of the ethno-cultural characteristics both forms of nationalism have, being a citizen is not enough to be a Turk since “Turkishness” is not of historical political construction, but a “natural” category, transcending political unity. Within this context, both forms interpellate the Alevis as “pure-Turks” who have been the carriers of authentic Turkish culture. However, for ethno-secularists, ethno-linguistic plurality of Alevi community (especially Kurdish-speaking Alevis) leads to an ambivalence regarding the Alevis as trustworthy citizens. Also, ethno-secular elites regard the syncretic and heterodox religious characteristics of Alevi identity as ignorance and superstition. For ethno-religious nationalism, the Alevi belief represents backwardness in the Islamization process of the Turks. Moreover, ethno-religious nationalism stigmatized the Alevis as the fifth column of communism just because they have supported left-wing parties/organizations. Thus, the Alevis, whose identity has been excluded from the public sphere, are left in an ambiguous and undecided citizenship status, oscillating between love and hate, incorporation and exclusion at once.