

IN SEARCH OF RECOGNITION: ALEVI IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE CASE OF THE (TÜRKİYE) UNITY PARTY

TANINMA TALEBİ: (TÜRKİYE) BİRLİK PARTİSİ VAKASINDA ALEVİ
KİMLİK SİYASETİ

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“Variety is the spice of life.”

William Cowper

Abstract

Identity politics can be defined as a phenomenon that focuses on the existence of marginalised individuals or groups in the political arena within social structures. Accordingly, this phenomenon puts an emphasis on making the identity, culture and values of certain individuals or groups visible and establishing social, political and economic equality between them and other dominant individuals or groups in society. While the Alevi community can be characterised as a minority religious group in Türkiye, it can be stressed that their efforts to exist in the political arena are reflected in the (Türkiye) Unity Party—(T)BP. The main objective of the present research is to examine how Alevis’ desire for recognition in the society has been constructed in the context of (T)BP. The data set of the research, which was designed as a single-site case study, was analysed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed six themes, including human rights and equality, secularism and freedom of belief, social justice and development, social reforms, education and cultural rights, and women’s rights, and the themes provided fertile ground for increasing the visibility of Alevi identity politics and defending their rights. Furthermore, it was concluded that Alevi identity is not only a religious issue but also has a broader perspective rooted in socio-economic and political justice demands. Consequently, it was demonstrated that the (T)BP has played an important role in the construction of Alevi identity politics and has contributed significantly to the consolidation of the democratic and secular system in Türkiye.

Key Words: Turkish Political Life, Alevism, Identity Politics, Recognition, (Türkiye) Unity Party.

Öz

Kimlik siyaseti, marjinalleştirilmiş birey ya da grupların toplumsal yapılar içerisinde siyasi arenadaki varlığına odaklanan bir olgu olarak tanımlanabilir. Bahse konu olgu, belirli birey ya da grupların kimlik, kültür ve değerlerinin görünür kılınmasına ve toplumdaki diğer

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baskın birey ya da gruplarla aralarında sosyal, siyasi ve ekonomik eşitlik kurulmasına vurgu yapmaktadır. Alevi toplumu Türkiye’de azınlık bir dini grup olarak nitelendirilebilirken, siyasi arenada var olma çabalarının (Türkiye) Birlik Partisi’nde-(T)BP- yansıdığı vurgulanabilir. Bu minvalde mevcut araştırmanın temel amacı, Alevi toplumunun tanınma taleplerinin (T) BP özelinde nasıl inşa edildiğini incelemektir. Tek vakalı örnek olay incelemesi yaklaşımı ile tasarlanan araştırmanın veri seti tematik analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, insan hakları ve eşitlik, laiklik ve inanç özgürlüğü, sosyal adalet ve kalkınma, sosyal reformlar, eğitim ve kültürel haklar ve kadın hakları olmak üzere altı tema ortaya çıkarmış ve bu temaların Alevi kimlik siyasetinin görünürlüğünün artırılması ve haklarının savunulması için verimli bir zemin oluşturduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, Alevi kimliğinin sadece dini bir mesele olmadığı, sosyo-ekonomik ve siyasi adalet taleplerini de içeren daha geniş bir perspektife sahip olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Böylelikle (T)BP’nin Alevi kimlik siyasetinin inşasında önemli bir rol oynadığı ve Türkiye’deki demokratik ve laik sistemin konsolidasyonuna önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunduğu ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Siyasal Hayatı, Alevilik, Kimlik Siyaseti, Tanınma Talebi, (Türkiye) Birlik Partisi.

Introduction

Identity politics, which is based on the shared experiences of particular social groups’ injustice, continues to attract of researchers in the social sciences and humanities (Akinyetun, 2024; Elmadagli and Machin, 2023; Yancey, 2023; Zaini, Sumirat, and Ridho, 2023; Bein, 2022; Pap, 2021; Karakaş and Mitra, 2021; Hanan, 2020). This concept, which shapes the identities and political positions of individuals in line with the social challenges and injustices they face (Zaini, Sumirat, and Ridho, 2023, 137), can be attributed to varied social phenomena, e.g., multiculturalism, women’s movements, civil rights (Bernstein, 2005, 47), gender, sexuality, and racial minorities (Yancey, 2023, 1246). Identity politics aims to raise awareness regarding the concerns and demands of stigmatised identities for the representation and recognition of these marginalised identities (Elmadagli and Machin, 2023, 417). Thus, the concept has had a wide range of uses, from separatist movements in Canada and Spain to ethnic conflicts in postcolonial Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (Bernstein, 2005, 47).

Identity politics, which emerged with the problematisation of identity, is at the centre of politics in the postmodern period. This understanding of politics suggests addressing politics based on identity rather than adopting identity as a result of politics (Göktolga, 2013, 122). In other words, identity politics refers to the transformation of social and cultural identities into political instruments under the influence of globalisation. Identity-based conflicts, which were controlled for a while with the emergence of the modern state, increased again with the globalisation process and became visible all over the world. In this process, identity categories mobilised group members by emphasising their uniqueness and politicised differences. According to Charles Taylor (1994, 38), one of the recognition theorists, the development of the concept of identity in the modern period is closely related to the politics of recognition shaped by criticisms, such as discrimination and second-class citizenship. At the end of the day, this relationship paved the way for the politics of difference by enabling the acceptance of distinctive characteristics as the basis for different treatment. In essence, Taylor’s analysis of the concept of identity, by associating the problem of recognition with identity struggles, has facilitated the explanation of the phenomenon of identity politics through demands for recognition and the conceptualisation of collective identities as struggles for recognition. In this respect, the concept of identity politics corresponds to an approach that emphasises the importance of group identity and

highlights political demands for this identity. This approach encompasses different groups pursuing a political strategy based on their group identities and defines society not as a whole but on the basis of the distinctive characteristics of particular groups. Identity politics focuses on the politicisation of a common identity or sense of *we*, which is the main basis of group cohesion. In this way, identity is defined as “the same” in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, or other unifying elements. It politicises people by channelling their feelings and thoughts in a certain direction (Zaini, Sumirat and Ridho, 2023, 139).

Identity politics can be associated with the organisation of associations with common characteristics or qualities in line with certain political objectives, or it can be used to define groups with different structures and qualities within a particular community (Tok, 2006, 26). Each group that comes into existence in social unity seeks to underscore its own unique identity and to express its political demands through this identity. In this connection, identity politics is not limited to placing the identity of a group on a political basis, but also determines the position of the relevant group in the eyes of the society through a definition that prioritises the distinctive qualities of the group (Kalin, 2006). This approach to identity politics makes the group identity more visible by distinguishing it from other identities existing in the society and thus enables the group to realise political and social representation because of its unique characteristics. In this respect, the main purpose of the present study is to reveal the themes through which the (Turkish) Unity Party—(T)BP—which was founded with sectarian references to Alevism in Türkiye, tries to clarify the demand for recognition of Alevi identity. The flow of the current study, which adopts a single-site case study approach, is as follows: conceptional and theoretical lens towards identity politics, review of literature, methodology, findings, discussion, and concluding points.

1. Identity Politics in Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

While in the United States identity politics is mostly defined as the activism of minority groups to fight discrimination and to participate in political processes, in Europe the new identity politics has a more exclusionary character. It is based on the promise to protect the silent majority from the harmful effects of globalisation, European integration and immigration. Identity politics today stresses an understanding of identity based on characteristics, e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, and is markedly different from class-based politics, grounded in economic issues (Noury and Roland, 2020, 423). Therefore, since the second half of the 20th century, the interest of politics in identity politics has increased (Yancey, 2023, 1248). Particularly towards the end of the 20th century, identity-based movements, which gained a visible momentum and focused on defending the rights of minority groups, have become more prominent. This development of the concept of identity politics has formed the basis of many movements seeking social justice and equality today. Identity politics is basically based on the new social movements that began to emerge in the 1960s. The concept of identity politics of the 1960s was divided into “new social movements such as feminism, environmentalism, and the black movement that strive for their own interests” (Göktolga, 2013, 123). Identity politics, anchored in the principle of problematising identity, is closely linked to the expansion and complexity of modern society. More precisely, the erosion of traditional social structures, the sense of alienation in personality, the collapse of social structures, the atomisation of social relations and the development of mass media (Dunn, 1998, 24-25) have led to the problematisation of identity, as well as the fragmentation and diversity in social

movements. Because the mainstream narrative failed to address minority interests, identity as a narrative of resistance for marginalised groups began to exist and function as a tool to voice the demands of the oppressed (Zaini, Sumirat and Ridho, 2023, 139). As a result, identity politics has become a concept used by minority groups to stand against the discrimination they face, to be more visible in society and to demand participation in the decision-making process. This concept endeavours to provide a space where these groups can express themselves and defend their rights on the social plane. Therefore, identity politics can be defined as a tool or mechanism that enables marginalised groups to play an active role in political and social processes to maximise their interests and make their voices heard (Bein, 2022, 225).

Identity is not a positive or negative element, so it can be a source of individual and social richness, diversity and sincerity, but it can also pave the way for violence and terrorism (Sen, 2006, 23). However, placing identities at the centre of political projects—conducting politics through identities—may cause social groups to withdraw into themselves, institutionalise marginalisation and spread violence and fanaticism. The foregrounding of religious, ethnic, national, or gender-based identities in political struggles makes these identities sharper and more divisive. This deepens social polarisation and increases the potential for conflict. Consequently, the overemphasis of identity politics can damage social peace and pave the way for the spread of violence (Giddens, 2002, 245). An important issue that needs to be emphasised is related to how identity is politicised. For an identity to acquire a political aspect, first of all, the differences among its representatives or carriers of that identity must be recognised. However, this awareness is not a sufficient condition for the development of identity politics. In this vein, it is necessary to adopt a sense of the relevant identity and individuals who adopt that identity may be subjected to inequalities due to their identity. Subsequently, for individuals who realise that they are oppressed because of their identities, a fertile ground for the construction of identity politics is formed (Knouse, 2009, 765). Identity politics is built upon individuals' perceptions of identity and the cultural, political and economic dynamics that give these identities political and emotional power. Modern societies are more complex and diverse than traditional societies. Therefore, identities become more salient for individuals and begin to play an important role in politics. While social structures and roles are more fixed in traditional societies, identities are constantly reshaped and become central to politics in modern societies. Hence, the fact that identity politics is more prevalent in modern societies can be more easily explained by the combination and intersection of these dynamics. Francis Fukuyama is one of the most significant scholars to analyse the rise of identity politics and its implications. In Fukuyama's (2018) theoretical grounding, social segments that have been discriminated in the historical past tend to cluster around their identities and remain organised within a common goal or objective. The identity politics that emerges in this way offers people a moral understanding that they have an authentic inner identity which is not recognised. As a result, they perceive the outside world as false and oppressive. This understanding emphasises people's demand for dignity and provides a language through which they can express their anger and frustration when this demand is not met (Fukuyama, 2018). According to Fukuyama (2018), the concept of identity politics, which claims to defend the marginalised rights of oppressed minority groups, such as women, blacks and homosexuals who pioneered the social movements of the 1960s, needs to be considered in a context that also includes nationalist, religious, populist, or authoritarian movements today.

2. Literature Review on Identity Politics

Identity politics has recently been at the centre of social and political debates and has become a comprehensive research field that examines how the identity-based demands of individuals and groups are represented in the political arena and how these representations shape social structures. Addressing identity politics and identity conflicts from the perspective of systems and democratic theory, Bein (2022) develops a perspective on how the tension between democratic universality and relational limitation can be managed. In this perspective, Bein (2022, 241) argues that creating a common democratic identity can eliminate the existing anomie. González (2023) underlines that for identity politics to be understood as a democratic oscillation between power and reason, a radical democratic and standpoint theory-based understanding of identity politics should be developed. In his study, González (2023, 12) concluded that especially societies in the process of democratisation should have a special identity politics. On the other hand, Akinyetun (2024, 15), who investigates the relations between different identity groups, reveals that identity politics leads to group conflicts due to alienation relations between groups and prevents national integration.

In the context of political elections, Zaini, Sumirat and Ridho (2023) aim to understand the emergence and sources of identity politics. Illustrating that the most common type of identity politics is shaped by religious sentiments or specific religious groups on a local scale, these researchers characterise identity politics as a threat to democracy (Zaini, Sumirat and Ridho, 2023, 158). In another study examining the role of identity politics on elections, it was suggested that identity politics can be an effective strategy on election results (Hanan, 2020). In a similar study, Karakaş and Mitra (2021, 170) determined the determinance of cultural identity on election results in issues where voters adopt a “behavioural” attitude. With the basic assumption that the distinction between right and left parties is becoming increasingly blurred and identity-based transformations are taking place in politics, Okudan Dernek (2014, 72) analyses the changes in political parties through varied reasons, such as the deepening economy-policy distinction of neoliberalism, the increasing emphasis on civil rights, the transformation in the concept of citizenship, and the class-based political understanding that has lost its effect. Besides, Pap’s (2021) study reveals how legal policies can be misguided in the labyrinth of identity politics, minority protection and criminal populism.

While there are recent studies on identity politics in the literature (e.g., Çelik and Börklüoğlu, 2024; Çiçek, Aydın and Baran, 2017; Elhan, 2023), it is possible to state that a variety of studies on Alevi identity and (T)BP have also been conducted at various levels. Ertan (2006), who examines how Alevism was politicised in the 1990s with its structural characteristics, concludes that the current politicisation is shaped through Alevi associations and the Peace Party. Güler (2007, 163), arguing that there have been transformations in the traditional structure of Alevism with the Republic, modernisation and urbanisation processes, notes that Alevism, which was faced with the question of which identity to politicise in the modern period, was formulated with structural elements, e.g., “Kemalism, secularism, modernity, leftism and socialism.” Yümlü (2008) also investigated the TBP, which was founded by Alevis who were subjected to political and religious discrimination in order to act organised at the urban level. In the related study, Yümlü (2008, 257) finalised that TBP, which exists as a unique historical experience of Alevi politics, operates with ideological diversity and mixed political understanding. In another study on the relationship between Alevism and politics with a special focus on (T)BP, it is highlighted that (T)BP was a turning

point in the Alevis' struggle for identity (Ata, 2007, 26). In this vein, Ata (2007, 29) argues that (T)BP emerged as a reactionary movement of Alevis, who lived a closed life and were marginalised, and connectedly signifies that this political organisation provided Alevis political power and experience and made them "more demanding" in their relations with the state after 1980.

Each of the abovementioned studies in the literature contributes to both identity politics and Alevi identity. However, there is an observable lack of studies investigating how Alevi identity politics is constructed, how it is made visible and how it is presented to the society, which constitutes an important deficiency in the mainstream literature on identity politics. The present study fundamentally aimed to reveal the themes through which the demand for recognition of Alevi identity is tried to be made visible in the specific case of the political formation founded in 1961 with the sectarian references of Alevism in Türkiye under the names of Unity Party (Birlik Partisi - BP) and Türkiye Unity Party (Türkiye Birlik Partisi - TBP). In line with the aim of the study, the following research questions were determined:

1. How do the political discourses and party programmes of the (Türkiye) Unity Party express the demand for recognition of Alevi identity?
2. Which social, political and cultural themes does the (Türkiye) Unity Party emphasise for the recognition of Alevi identity?

3. Methodological Lens

The current research was designed by adopting the single-site case study approach, which is one of the qualitative research designs. Within this research design, researchers focus on a single event, person, group, situation, or process and examine the notions of their research on the basis of a unique case (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The main purpose of embracing a case study in scientific research can be expressed as gaining in-depth insights into the theoretical phenomena based on the specific case that is the subject of the research. The case of this research was determined as the (Türkiye) Unity Party and how Alevi identity was constructed within the boundary of the (Türkiye) Unity Party was investigated. Accordingly, the data were obtained from the party documents of the (Türkiye) Unity Party. Table 1 demonstrates a summary of the dataset.

Table 1. *Overview of the Dataset.*

Name of the Document	Scope	Publication Year	Total Number of the Pages/ Speeches
Statute and Programme of the Unity Party	® The Statute outlines the fundamental laws that govern the party's internal operation, its organs, membership qualifications, and the division of authorities and tasks. ® The Programme covers the party's goals, objectives, and ideological attitude in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.	1969	71 Pages
Election Declaration of the Unity Party	® The manifesto summarises the policies and objectives which the party pledged to pursue during and upon the election.	1969	19 Pages
Statute and Programme of the Türkiye Unity Party	® The Statute outlines the fundamental laws that govern the party's internal operation, its organs, membership qualifications, and the division of authorities and tasks. ® The Programme covers the party's goals, objectives, and ideological attitude in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.	1972	72 Pages
General Election Radio Speeches	® Radio speeches about the general elections provided voters with information about the election process, candidates, party policies and key election-related information.	1977	63 Pages/12 Speeches
Statute and Programme of the Türkiye Unity Party	® The Statute outlines the fundamental laws that govern the party's internal operation, its organs, membership qualifications, and the division of authorities and tasks. ® The Programme covers the party's goals, objectives, and ideological attitude in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.	1980	131 Pages

The collected data were analysed using the thematic analysis method, which is frequently used in qualitative studies and whose theoretical and practical aspects have been documented by Braun and Clarke (2022). Braun and Clarke (2022, 48-50), in their comprehensive study on the critical components of thematic analysis, particularly focused on reflexive thematic analysis and referred to the process of analysing the findings. More precisely, in the process of reflexive thematic analysis, researchers aim to develop, analyse and interpret patterns within a qualitative data set (Braun and Clarke, 2022, 47), and this process essentially has a very critical mission for establishing the trustworthiness of the data because it requires researchers to continuously reflect on the data set and the themes they have obtained.

In the present study, the trustworthiness of the data was primarily ensured by incorporating the reflexive thematic analysis method into the methodological framework of the research. In addition, the findings were continuously scrutinised by an academic with a PhD in social sciences, which enabled researcher triangulation (Denzin, 2009) to be maintained.

4. Findings

In the (T)BP case, Alevi identity politics is centred around six main themes: human rights and equality, secularism and freedom of belief, social justice and development, social reforms, education and cultural rights, and women's rights. The Alevi identity, which is represented and manifested through these themes, is intended to highlight the Alevi community's pursuit of certain rights, e.g., protecting its socio-cultural and historical existence, ensuring gender equality, and realising rural development. By shaping their identity politics in line with these basic demands, Alevis aim to contribute to the consolidation of the democratic and secular structure in Türkiye, securing their rights and realising social integration.

Human Rights and Equality

The (T)BP defines itself as a party that pursues contributing to Türkiye 's rapid rise to the level of contemporary civilisation by conducting its activities in accordance with positive law, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 3). Adhering to the principles of the rule of law and advocating "equality in all stages of life" (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 91), the BP took a clear position against extreme ideologies and authoritarian tendencies, opposed social discrimination and separatism, and rejected ideologies or their representations, namely communism, imperialism, fascism, and Nazism, which may contain extreme right and leftist ideas (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 3). The BP also stated that it was against "the mentality that is based on differences of race, language, religion and sect, and that differentiates nationality according to skull structures" (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 3). Thus, (T)BP expressed the importance it attached to individual rights and freedoms, social peace and order (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 3). On the other hand, the BP argues that injustice, privilege and discrimination existing in society are not a natural condition and they should be eliminated. In other words, "political and economic dependence is described as a moment that can be overcome and perfected" (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 53) or a process rather than a universal necessity.

The (T)BP strives to bring together all citizens of the Republic of Türkiye without any discrimination and to unite them around common values and national consciousness (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 59). To put it differently, (T)BP puts a strong emphasis on "the consciousness of being common in destiny, sorrow, pride and ideal in unity and solidarity without privileges and classes" (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 2). For this purpose, it refers to the necessity of "establishing the democratic state of law with all its legal and social foundations, which will make it possible to realise and guarantee human rights and dignity, national solidarity, social justice, and the peace and welfare of the individual and society" (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 59) and the importance of "eradicating the seeds of religious, sectarian and racial separation in Turkey and making our social structure healthy" (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 2). (T)BP also addresses fundamental freedoms—

the rights to communication, travel, settlement, thought, belief, conscience, science, art, press, and assembly—and describes these rights as indispensable conditions for the individuals to be able to maintain their lives as a free being in a democratic environment (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 60). At this point, the concept of democracy requires closer analysis because the concept was interpreted in the context of human rights and the principle of equality. According to (T)BP, which repeatedly expressed its commitment to democracy, democracy is “the only political system that enables the free development of human personality” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 55). In this system, guaranteeing and respecting both minority rights and majority rule are essential. (T)BP also “opposes the violation of minority rights by the majority as well as the domination of the minority” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 55). In this respect, it can be argued that minority rights can be secured in a democracy based on the domination of the majority group’s will since democracy is predicated on participation and inclusiveness. In his speech, TBP Chairman Mustafa Timisli emphasises that (T)BP tends to build a society rooted in human love (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 10) and stresses that “real democracy where all people are equal before the law and can freely exercise their rights” without discrimination is the only way appropriate for Türkiye (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 6).

Secularism and Freedom of Belief

The (T)BP argues that the freedom of religion and conscience of individuals should be respected within the scope of secularism and freedom of belief and no one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of religious belief. Moreover, if it is in accordance with public order, public morality and law, “free religious rites and ceremonies” are considered within the scope of secularism and freedom of belief (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 59-60). Avoiding the use of religion as a tool or foundation in state-building is crucial for maintaining the principle of secularism because secularism has a vital value in terms of guaranteeing the free practice of religion on an individual basis, realising the separation of religion and state affairs and eliminating the abuse of religion at the public level (BP Party Charter and Programme, 1969, 59-60). The (T)BP, which defines itself as “in favour of the separation of religious affairs from the affairs of state, world and politics” (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 4), refers to another concept associated with secularism: Communitarianism. There is no religion-communitarianism contradiction in the (T)BP’s conception of communitarianism. Rather than a rigid and unidirectional understanding of communitarianism, the (T)BP draws on a variety of sources, from scientific, religious and humanitarian principles to customs and traditions. The (T)BP’s understanding of this approach leads to the definition of Islam as a religion that encourages social transformations and the meeting of religion and communitarianism on the common ground of human love (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 90; TBP Party Programme, 1972, 57). With a communitarianism founded on such moral convictions, religious beliefs are prevented from being “used as a tool by the state to divide and oppress those who think differently and to exploit workers” (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 90). As a result, the (T)BP sees the principle of secularism as a fundamental instrument in the establishment of peace on the social plane, and in this context, it adopts that religion should be recognised as an individual right in the establishment of freedom of belief. This conception of the (T)BP is considered important in terms of establishing a balance between the free exercise of beliefs and the guarantee of state

neutrality (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 122-123).

Another issue that should be emphasised and comes to the forefront in this theme is the importance the (T)BP attributes to the Republic. Described as the most progressive and democratic form of state, the Republic is affirmed as the representation of a fully independent and democratic political order in which all classes and strata can operate freely. In this respect, the Republic, which ascribed value to socio-economic, legal and secular elements, allowed the Kemalist revolution to destroy the feudal state, abolish theocratic institutions and “put an end to sectarian oppression with the principle of secularism” (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 85). In that sort of an understanding, “the Presidency of Religious Affairs has no place in a secular Republic” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 57; TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 90) or “it should be [re]organised in such a way as to ensure balance and equality among various belief groups and respect their freedom of belief and conscience” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 5) because the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB) creates a monopolistic structure in religious education, preventing the representation of different belief groups and ensuring equality and balance among them. Accordingly, the (T)BP argues that all belief groups that exist in the society and struggle for life should be represented in the religious administration organs of the state—the DİB—rather than a particular sect. Otherwise, in a social plane where a single sect or belief group is emphasised, a monopolistic conception of faith emerges and a situation of oppression and domination over other belief groups arises. Concludingly, the (T)BP contends that different beliefs and groups should be represented equally with a more just and inclusive approach in the religion-state relationship (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 4).

Social Justice and Development

The (T)BP, like any other political party, has certain ideological and political objectives. However, rather than discussing the findings related to its ideological formation, its perspective on the theme of social justice and development will be prominently presented. In this connection, it can be noted that the (T)BP is a supporter of reformist, progressive and revolutionary thought and aims to develop Türkiye within the democratic order rooted in freedom. Believing in the need for radical changes in the existing order, the (T)BP advocated the development of the country “in economic, social, political, financial, agricultural, commercial and cultural terms” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 4). The (T)BP claimed that the work and actions of the state and the private sector should be designed by a central planning body—the State Planning Organisation—to prioritise national interests and realise the desired reforms. However, although a mixed economy model was adopted, the control of critically important sectors was placed under the control of the state and the remaining areas were left to the private sector (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 61):

“We are in favour of the nationalisation of our main war industry, heavy industry, large power plants, large public works (irrigation, lake and swamp drying), all mines (finder, bonus, premium rights remain), petroleum, transportation and PTT works related to public services, foreign trade (import and export), banking and insurance, and the remaining fields should be left to the private sector in principle.”

With such an approach, the (T)BP tries to develop a balance mechanism by including the possible contribution of the private sector in the process while maintaining the active role of the state in economic development. In this way, people will be able to realise themselves freely without being subjected to the “domination

of capital” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 65) and everyone in need will be supported “without discrimination of men, women, nationality, race, skin colour, religion, and class” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 54).

In one of his speeches, the TBP Chairman Mustafa Timisli highlighted the economic imbalances between regions, which led to the undermining of social justice. According to Timisli (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 8), the policies developed by the ruling powers in line with their interests and practices, e.g., landlordism, have created inter-regional imbalances and “deprived regions” in Türkiye. In this direction, first, agricultural and land reform was highlighted to eliminate “village development in all respects and in every aspect” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 4), the primitive and outdated economic system, especially landlordism (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 109) and “wage slavery” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 54), which may lead to the free self-realisation of the individual. Secondly, it was underscored that “in every village, construction, agricultural-credit, production, consumption and sales cooperatives will be established to sell their products at value prices” and thus “social, national and economic development” will be achieved (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 65). The aim of this implementation can be explained as follows: “understanding of development will be human beings, the driving force will be democratic people’s power, and the ground will be democracy for the people” (Statute and Programme of TBP, 1980, 100). In this way, social justice, economic development and democratic reforms that could offer solutions to Türkiye’s problems would be realised.

Social Reforms

The (T)BP adopts an understanding of social progress and modernisation. By referring to the concepts of “Revolutionism, Reformism, Progressivism,” it is underlined that the outdated structures that prevent the society from reaching the level of modern civilisation should be eliminated and the characteristics unique to the Turkish nation should be revealed without corruption (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 61). The (T)BP’s understanding of social reform is formed around the axis of “always struggling against bigotry” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 61) and is shaped in a context in which the society should always move forward and not be stuck in the past. The (T)BP’s understanding of social reform, which functions as a mechanism of checks and balances in terms of both preserving historical identity and modernisation, has adopted national interests and modern civilisation as its motto. In this direction, a four-stage reform process is envisaged to address the problems of the people with an understanding of social development expanding from the centre to the periphery (BP Election Declaration, 1969, 6):

1. “Mass village development reform
2. Education and training reform
3. Labour and development reform
4. Administrative and personnel reform”

In addition to these reforms, it is noted that “villages will be provided with roads, water, electricity, trainers, teachers, schools, human and animal health officers, midwives and art courses as soon as possible” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 65). Through these reforms, it is desired that the social order will be subjected to a radical reform process and the people will be able to reach the humane living conditions they deserve. In this respect, it can be implied that the (T)BP develops a reformist

understanding of reform that puts a critical emphasis on the welfare and well-being of the society and the establishment of a social structure based on the principle of justice.

Education and Cultural Rights

The (T)BP claims that educational and cultural rights should be preserved and made more qualified. With respect to this, the party aims to ensure that everyone has access to quality education and to recognise and support cultural differences in society. By assigning a broad scope to fundamental rights and freedoms, the (T)BP advocates that individuals and societies should be able to produce and express their ideas freely. Scientific and artistic activities in such an environment will bring contemporary educational principles (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 60). Otherwise, in the words of the (T)BP Deputy Chairman Kemal Oğuzhanoglu, the education system would continue to be “shaped according to the self-interests of those who hold the means of production in their hands” (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 30). According to the (T)BP, Turkey’s current education system is an insufficient system, seen in underdeveloped third world countries and dependent on foreign countries. Since the current education system is not capable of responding to the concrete needs and social reality of the country, it will not be able to contribute to the goals of development and modernisation. In this sense, the (T)BP promotes the development of an education system that combines theory and practice, develops a production-oriented approach, is based on national culture, is consistent and focused on solving social problems (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 115-117). According to the (T)BP, “to solve the problem of primary education as soon as possible; to make all citizens literate” as well as “to prevent sectarian discrimination in places where religious education and training is provided and, in the textbooks, taught in these places, and not to put religious education and training under the monopoly of a certain sect” are the key requirements in ensuring a comprehensive and efficient education system (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 5). Furthermore, with a “secular, revolutionary, reformist, populist” education policy in line with Turkish culture and Atatürk’s principles, vocational and technical education would be given importance and village institutes and instructor institutions would be revived (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 63-64). On the other hand, it is also emphasised that the religious education of individuals should be reformed to establish equality between different belief groups and the pressure on different belief groups should be ended. At this point, the following reforms are intended to be implemented in religious education and training (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 63-63):

1) “During religious education and training, students will be instilled with the consciousness of secularism, revolutionism, reformism and progressivism, unity and solidarity, and tolerance.

2) Discrimination and separatism in the field of religious education shall be definitively ended.

3) Religious education shall be in Turkish.

4) Religious teaching and education shall not be monopolised by a particular religion or sect.

5) Schools and institutes providing religious education and training will be rehabilitated and transformed into institutions that train clergymen equipped with the knowledge to meet today’s needs.”

According to the TBP Deputy Chairman Kemal Oğuzhanoglu (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 8-9), in an education system where these reforms are not implemented, individuals are motivated to protect and safeguard existing power relations and structures instead of gaining the ability to think critically and the desire to serve the society.

Regarding cultural rights, the (T)BP expresses clear and significant rights and demands. The (T)BP adopts an understanding of art and aesthetics that sees art as part of social responsibilities, takes into account the interests of the people and adds value to the concept of freedom. Such an understanding of art contributes to the problems of labour, the liberation of the working class and the glorification of revolutionary values, while reducing bourgeois culture and foreign dependence. Therefore, it is argued that “the art that has been used as an instrument of exploitation and numbing by cultural imperialism will be replaced by folk art, and the self-art values of the Turkish people will be compiled, organised, encouraged and disseminated” (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 117). In order to achieve this, “schools, dormitories, libraries and reading rooms will be opened with the income of foundations” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 4), “the tombs and monuments of former Turkish greats, writers and folk poets will be restored and turned into touristic sites” (BT Statute and Programme, 1969, 66), and “the voice of the people will be made known to the public by giving importance to Turkish folklore and music and by making publications on Turkish folklore and music through all kinds of state broadcasting organs” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 4-5).

Women's Rights

The (T)BP “gives wide coverage to women’s rights and freedoms” (BP Statute and Programme, 1969, 5). By referring to increasing and securing the rights and freedom of women in social life, the establishment of gender equality is also advocated. It is stated that equality between women and men is not only legal but also essential in “education, work and wages” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 62). The idea that women should be employed in accordance with their abilities, which is described as a social and economic necessity, “considers motherhood as a public service” (TBP Party Programme, 1972, 62). In the performance of this service, the mother and woman should be protected in order not to be crushed under increasing responsibilities.

The TBP Chairman Mustafa Timisli directly associated the emancipation of women to the emancipation of society (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 9). Therefore, the emancipation of women at the social level is characterised as a social issue rather than an individual issue. The strengthening of the role and position of women in society would bring about the progress and welfare of the whole society. However, to achieve this, the idea that women should be “equal with men in education, work and wages” is insistently emphasised and it is also underlined that “women will be given the free and honourable place they deserve” (1977 General Election Radio Speeches, 1977, 9). This approach reflected in the (T)BP’s texts and discourses is a manifestation of the tendency to see women as an active and equal member of life rather than a passive actor in social life. However, “since the rights granted to women by the existing laws are not based on a solid economic and social foundation, the woman in our society is considered as the most exploited being” (TBP Statute and Programme, 1980, 124). In this respect, the (T)BP recognises the need to achieve full legal, social and economic equality for women.

5. Discussion

The theme of human rights and equality has a vital importance and reflex in terms of Alevi identity politics, especially in terms of ensuring social justice and eliminating historical injustices, discrimination and inequalities in the collective memory. This reflex is important in terms of “show[ing] Alevis how important the demand for equality is,” as Ata (2007, 88) recognises. Alevis, who have been subjected to various socio-economic and political discrimination or marginalisation based on their beliefs and identities, have declared their reactions with the principle of “standing against discrimination based on race, language, religion and sectarian differences.” The Alevi community, marginalised due to their religious and cultural differences, has become an important representative of the struggle for human rights and freedoms, social justice and equality in Turkish political life. Reaching a similar conclusion, Kehl-Bodrogi (1996, 55) states that the Alevi community’s opposition to the Ottoman central authority led them to assume a mission as fighters for social equality and justice. Moreover, various demands, e.g., “equality of all before the law” and “the elimination of sectarian differences,” can respond to Alevi demands for equal citizenship on a social level. As Koçan and Öncü (2004, 484) argue, this demand, which is the source of the reinterpretation of the demand for citizenship in Türkiye, has the potential to provide a system of rights that protects the neutrality of culturally different groups and their demands for equal citizenship. In this vein, the (T)BP’s emphasis on the concept of democracy in the context of human rights and equality provides a strong basis for the search for justice and freedom of belief, which are the main demands of Alevi identity politics. On the other hand, the meaning attributed to democracy and its understanding of freedom corresponds to the imagination of a public sphere in which Alevis can freely exist in Turkish society and freely represent their identity. In this public sphere, the imagination of a “classless and privilege-free” society, which is interpreted as “the corporatist views of Kemalism” (Yümlü, 2008, 171-172), aims to overcome or eliminate the social, economic and political inequalities that Alevis are exposed to. In the face of “lack of political and economic privileges and low socio-economic living standards,” it is “natural for Alevis to develop such mechanisms for their existence” (Güler, 2007, 102). Thus, the acceptance and visibility of Alevi identity at the political level is demanded “as a basic human right” (Sökefeld, 2008, 17).

The (T)BP’s policies on secularism and freedom of belief are important and worthy of discussion in the context of Alevi identity politics. The stance against religious discrimination and the emphasis on secularism, which are produced and presented to the society because of the practices that the Alevi community as a belief group has been subjected to, are directly related to the social demands of the social segment in question. The argument developed by the (T)BP with reference to the principle of secularism intends to guarantee freedom of religion and conscience, while suggesting that religion should be separate and distant from state affairs. In this way, the Alevi community can develop a mechanism to protect itself against historical oppression and assimilation. According to Ertan (2016, 10), this mechanism is to organise around universal principles—secularism and citizenship. The fact that Sunnism shapes the secularism debates in Türkiye and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB) ignores Alevi community’s social demands has made the development of such a mechanism essential. In this respect, the elimination of sectarian references in religious education and administration and the equal distance and representation of all faith groups in Türkiye are supported. In essence, this reflex fulfils an important

need regarding the Alevi community's demands for freedom of belief. Besides, it can be implied that the (T)BP's arguments about the Republic and the Kemalist revolution are closely related to Alevi identity. More precisely, with the Kemalist revolution, theocratic structures and sectarian oppression in Türkiye were abolished and religious freedom and equality were tried to dominate life. Shankland (2003, 156) connectedly concluded that Kemalism was a shield protecting Alevis from persecution. In this process, in which the principle of secularism played a leading role, Alevis began to expect that their beliefs could be guaranteed and began to perceive the Republic as the most democratic and libertarian state model. This manoeuvre of Alevis provides an important opportunity for the preservation and visibility of their identity. However, Güler (2007, 142) argues against the view that Alevis supported the Republic in an absolute sense due to concerns, such as modernity and progressivism, and concludes that in reality they did not support the Republic at all. Andrews (1992, 33) reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that the expectation that the establishment of the secular republic would lead to an improvement in the situation of Alevis has proved futile over time.

A third theme that opens the door to important debates in terms of the politicisation of Alevi identity is social justice and development. An understanding of development based on the realisation of social justice and the elimination of all forms of discrimination is adopted. The idea that such an understanding should dominate life contains an important potential for the demands for social equality internalised in the Alevi identity and offers various clues about the wishes and expectations of Alevis. Several policies, such as agrarian and land reform, co-operatives and the elimination of economic imbalances between regions, are formulated in terms of social justice and are aimed at eliminating the economic disadvantages in rural areas where Alevis reside. This positioning against landlordism and feudal remnants provides a fertile ground for eliminating the economic exploitation and abuse system and regional exclusion that Alevis are subjected to. The idea that Alevi communities should be developed socio-culturally and economically is in line with the (T)BP's policy on the self-realisation of the individual in a free environment. Ultimately, in parallel with this idea, Alevi identity can become more visible on the axis of social justice and gain representation on the political arena. Yümlü (2008, 256) states that "this is a unique experience in terms of the fact that a small-scale experience has been realised in the path of identity equalising politics in order to reveal the visibility of Alevi identity in the social and political sphere." On the other hand, the (T)BP's ideological commitment to freedom, ascribing value to democracy and seeking an anti-authoritarian order is aligned with the Alevi community's critical reflex against the state and central authority. Güler (2007, 164) attributes this oppositional identity of Alevis and their emergence as a political force to the "socio-political conjuncture." The (T)BP, which "concretises the existence of sectarian influence in the political sphere as an important representative of legal Alevi politics" (Yümlü, 2008, 256), can make its cultural and political demands more effectively heard through its reform approach, which leads to the Alevi identity being addressed not only as a matter of faith, but also as a political project that can be formulated in a broader context within the framework of social and economic justice demands.

The meaning that the (T)BP attributes to the concept of social reform emerges as another fundamental theme that is important for Alevi identity politics. According to (T)BP, the theme of social reform, which is constructed on the axis of "Revolutionism, Reformism, Progressivism," contains strong content in terms of eliminating reactionary

structures and eliminating practices of exclusion and discrimination that Alevis are exposed to. On this matter, certain reforms that emphasise the necessity of village development, education and infrastructure provide a perspective for the solution of socio-economic problems in rural areas where Alevis reside and enable Alevis to participate in social life as equal citizens. Furthermore, the (T)BP's emphasis on secularism and freedom of belief may pave the way for a freer and more visible Alevi identity in the public sphere. In this way, the (T)BP's reformist and social justice-oriented party policies will contribute to the construction of a political level grounded in securing the fundamental rights and freedoms of Alevis and ensuring that they are not marginalised because of their beliefs.

The (T)BP's reformist stance on education and cultural rights is of vital importance for eradicating discrimination and ensuring social equality in Alevi identity politics. Critical of sectarian monopoly, the (T)BP's advocacy of equality in religious education for other faith groups in society is in the nature of offering a solution to the discriminatory policies Alevis are subjected to. As Massicard (2007, 228) argues, "being part of a community based on a cultural heritage allows one to step outside the religious dimension on which there is no consensus." However, the (T)BP's insistence that "religious teaching and education will not be monopolised by a particular religion or sect" implies that religious education should be carried out on a more equal footing under state control. Adopting such an approach is considered as a step towards the establishment of a structure that protects not only the cultural rights but also the religious freedoms of the Alevi community. According to Massicard (2007, 80), this approach will lead Alevis to "a level of social escalation and strong political socialisation." On the other hand, the (T)BP's demands in the context of cultural rights are important for the preservation and development of Alevis' cultural identity. The "compilation, organisation and promotion of the Turkish people's own artistic values" can be interpreted as a manoeuvre to increase the visibility of the Alevi cultural heritage. Accordingly, it is aimed to free Alevi cultural codes from the patronage of Sunni culture by emphasising folk art and local values against bourgeois culture that leads to cultural imperialism. In this way, the (T)BP tries to build a vision for Alevi culture that can exist with its own unique identity.

Ultimately, the (T)BP puts forward a policy on women's rights rooted in freedom and equality. This policy is in consistent with the Alevi identity politics' demands for social equality and justice. Historically, Alevism, as a belief system based on the equality of men and women (Andrews, 1992, 74; Shankland, 2013, 10), desires women to participate and be more visible in social life. The idea that women should have equal opportunities with men in "education, work and wages" also corresponds to the cultural heritage of Alevis. The discourses linking the emancipation of women with the emancipation of society offer a perspective, as per the search for collective solidarity and social justice, which are important for Alevism. Additionally, the tendency to see women as an indispensable and determining actor in social life supports the Alevi identity's struggle for freedom and equality. In this connection, the (T)BP, which develops a reformist perspective on women's rights and responsibilities and defends women's rights with a supervisory approach (Yümlü, 2008, 212), provides a context that strengthens the Alevi community's struggle for identity and equality. However, Sökefeld (2008, 185) concludes that gender equality did not exist, and the male-dominated structure continued to exist in many institutional mechanisms, including the family.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to reveal how the demand for recognition of Alevi identity was constructed. In other words, the current study focuses on understanding and making sense of the social, political and cultural themes through which the demand for recognition of Alevi identity is presented to the society. In this study, a single-site case study approach was adopted and party programmes and statutes, election manifestos and official treatises were used as primary data sources. The main findings demonstrated that Alevi identity politics in the (T)BP case was constructed around a range of themes, including human rights and equality, secularism and freedom of belief, social justice and development, social reforms, education and cultural rights, and women's rights. The politicisation of Alevi identity in the political sphere is of critical importance for the achievement of social justice and the elimination of historical discrimination in the context of human rights and equality. The Alevi community has demanded equal citizenship against the discrimination it has been historically subjected to and this demand has been met with the democratic discourses of the (T)BP. In addition, the theme of secularism and freedom of belief has also found a place in the (T)BP's policies as a protective shield against discrimination based on belief and the preservation of Alevi identity. The theme of social justice and development was also reinforced by the reforms aimed at eliminating the economic backwardness of Alevis, who were disadvantaged in rural areas. At this point, the (T)BP's approach to the social and economic problems of Alevis in rural areas can be addressed through social reforms. Finally, it is found that the (T)BP's attitude towards gender equality in relation to the prominent theme of women rights is in a close harmony with the importance that the Alevi community has historically attributed to the equality of men and women.

Each of the themes that emerged as a result of the research provided a fertile ground for increasing the visibility of Alevi identity politics and defending its rights. Moreover, the findings clarified that the Alevi identity, which was not only a religious issue, had a broad perspective based on socio-economic and political justice demands. Consequently, it can be concluded that the (T)BP has an important function in the construction of Alevi identity politics and this function eventually contributes to the consolidation of the democratic and secular system in Türkiye.

To sum up, the current research was designed to explore the themes through which the demand for recognition of Alevi identity is tried to be made visible in the specific case of the political formation founded in 1961 with the sectarian references of Alevis in Türkiye under the names of BP and TBP. Thus, its scope intentionally remained associated to this ultimate purpose. However, further research can be conducted to shed light on different facets of the (T)BP and Alevi identity politics, such as the failing aspects of Alevi identity politics, the factors that may have affected the failing side of the party politics, and the possible correlation between the (T)BP and Alevis-oriented political movements.

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