

Summary

The "Alevi Revival" and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey

An Ethnographic Study of Social Relations in the "Saint's Town" of Hacıbektaş

Naohiko Imajo

This dissertation is ethnographic research on the "Alevi Revival" and the secularism of the Republic of Turkey. Based on fieldwork in the "saint's town" of Hacıbektaş, it examines how the "Alevi Revival" is experienced in people's lives.

In political philosophy and the sociology of religion, scholars have considered secularism the foundation of liberal democracy, a guarantee of equal and fair debate in the public sphere. However, anthropologists have criticized the public debate that secularism opens, arguing that it does not necessarily lead to healthy discussion.

In the Republic of Turkey, where Sunni Muslims form the majority, secularism takes on more complex dimensions than in Euro-America. The Alevis, a discriminated minority, have supported secularism to achieve equality with the Sunni majority. The "Alevi Revival" in the 1990s marked a significant shift, as the Alevis politicized and radicalized their religious and political identities, bringing their previously hidden origins to the forefront.

In the introduction, I organized previous research on this "Alevi Revival" and identified three problems with the earlier study. First, although some studies discuss the "Alevi Revival" from the perspective of the linear model of "secularization" to "religious revival," this model is insufficient for analyzing the complex impact of the "Alevi Revival," such as the attitude of considering piety as an anachronism.

Second, some applied the critique of secularism to the politics followed by the "Alevi Revival" and revealed that the category of "Alevi," which is inherently ambiguous, has come to be defined "religiously" as "the other of Sunnis." Scholars have understood this way of

definition as the consequence of the politics against the state to ensure religious equality with the Sunnis. However, focusing only on the state-religion relationship, these studies fail to examine how the category is applied in people's daily lives, leading to conflicts and tension among themselves.

Third, the study that focuses on the role of patrilineage is noteworthy as it questions how the category is defined and applied in social relations. It argues that one defines oneself as an Alevi, not based on religious practices and doctrines but on affiliation to the Alevi patrilineage, called "ocak." However, this perspective might open a reductionism that oversimplifies one's complex personality to a single birth affiliation.

This study aims to capture the moment when the "Alevi" category operates and circulates in everyday life, neither focusing solely on the religious sphere nor reducing it to patrilineage. It focuses on the Alevi-dominated town of Hacıbektaş in the Nevşehir province to observe how the "Alevi" category operates and circulates. Named after the 13th-century saint Hacı Bektaş Veli, it is considered one of the most prominent visiting sites for Alevis. The town has been politicized since the "Alevi Revival" and has become a symbol of Alevi solidarity. However, Hacıbektaş is not only the religious and political center of Alevis. It is also the place where everyday life goes. Through analyzing ethnographic materials, this study examined how the politically and religiously defined category foregrounds and operates in everyday life, creating tension and conflict between visitors and locals.

Chapter one outlines the brief history of Hacıbektaş, while chapter two describes a visiting tour to Hacıbektaş organized by an Alevi association in Istanbul. The third and fourth chapters explore how the religious definition of the "Alevi" category creates tension between the visitors and locals of Hacıbektaş on both social and individual levels. The fifth and sixth chapter portrays how the locals of Hacıbektaş relativize the "Alevi" category, which is defined "religiously" as "the other of Sunnis."

The ethnographic research conducted in Hacıbektaş uncovers tensions and conflicts between the visitors and the locals surrounding the "Alevi" category. This paper reveals that visitors have adopted a counter-narrative in response to the state's arbitrary enforcement of secularism. At the same time, the locals of Hacıbektaş and the place itself are reduced to the narrow definition of the "Alevi" category, which is inherently ambiguous.