



Problematising the Politics of Recognition and Its Impact on Conviviality: Fixing Ambiguity, Losing Heterogeneity

INTRODUCTION

The political context of my fieldwork in Burgaz in 2009–2010 was very much affected by the AKP’s democratisation packages. In these years, Erdoğan represented himself and his government as being “more democratic” towards non-Muslim minorities such as in the re-opening of the closed Sumela Monastery, in the Black sea region; and removing the ban on the minority community foundations’ right to register the properties currently in use (see Soner 2010, 424). The AKP came up with the “democratisation packages” notably the “Alevi Opening” and the “Kurdish Opening” including freedom of speech, language and giving more cultural rights to Kurds (see Efegil 2011; Kardeş and Balci 2016; Özpek and Mutluer 2016), and initiated a dialogue with the Alevis to discuss what their demands were (Soner and Toktaş 2011; Bardakçi 2015; Karakaya-Stump 2018; Mutluer 2016; Borovali and Boyraz 2015). Aktürk (2018) interprets these democratic attempts as Islamic multiculturalism and Muslim nationalism, through which, Erdoğan tried to give more power to Islamists and initiated a rhetoric that the oppression and the sufferings of ethnic and religious minorities (recognised and non-recognised) were all the faults of the Kemalist modernisation project. Erdoğan was deliberately trying to get the support of the Alevis, because the Alevis support the CHP, the Republican Party, founded by Atatürk. Atatürk is a very important figure for Alevis, because the secularism he brought lessened

the domination of Sunnis over Alevis. Erdoğan's democratisation packages and attitudes towards Kurds and Alevis (see Arıkan Akdağ 2016; Somer and Glupker-Kesebir 2016) were strategic political moves to gain more votes and to support the EU negotiations (see Çarkoğlu and Bilgili 2011; Bardakçı 2015; Kaya 2013).

During the years of the fieldwork, as these openings were at an initial stage, their outcomes were not yet known. In Burgaz, this political context created an atmosphere where the Alevis started to articulate their memories of toleration/coexistence by expressing the ways in which the Alevis had been oppressed during the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Besides the bitter and sweet memories of conviviality that we came across in previous chapters, Alevis expressed their collective memories of intolerance and sufferance, which reinforced a discourse of coexistence. While Passerini (1987) emphasises the individual differences in remembering, Halbwachs (1992) draws attention to the selective memory of groups. Some events are more significant to one group, while they are less significant to or forgotten by another group. With the emergence of public expression of minority memories, facilitated by neo-Ottomanism initiated by Özal and followed by the AKP government, Alevis expressed more vocally their memories of coexistence, as a part of an expression of their Alevi identity. While the Alevis were vocal in discussing politics of recognition by organising panels and memorials, the Kurdish Burgazlı were rather silent. In my interviews with them and our daily conversations, they stressed their similarities with Sunni Turks rather than articulating their differences, distanced themselves from the ideology of the PKK and articulated that their migration from southeastern Turkey was more due to financial and family problems than the Kurdish insurgency. This rhetoric of distancing from the PKK, emphasising on peaceful relations between Turks and Kurds echoed very much Erdoğan's public speeches (during the years of the fieldwork) where he despised the PKK, its leader Abdullah Ocalan as an anti-Islamic and violent figure, while depicting himself as the unifying and democratising one, who allowed the use of the Kurdish language in TV broadcasting, at schools and universities (see Aktürk 2018).

In this chapter, I explore the impact of politics of recognition on conviviality by focusing on two non-recognised groups: The Alevis and the Kurds,¹ in the ways in which they perceived these democratisation packages and articulated whether or what kind of recognition they wanted. In the first two sections, I focus on the relationships between the

non-recognised Alevi and the islanders, especially the Sunni Muslims, whose domination Alevi would like to resist. The politics of recognition of the Alevi hence complicated relationships among the Alevi and also Sunni-Alevi relations in Burgaz. Taking on board the diversity within Alevi, syncretism of Alevi religious practices, and complexity and multiplicity of Alevi identities, I explore the ways in which the debates on the politics of recognition had an impact on conviviality on the island. While Alevi articulated a discourse of inclusion by emphasising syncretism and similarity between non-Muslim faiths and Alevi; they reinforced a discourse of coexistence, by stressing their “difference,” separating their syncretic religious practices into “Sunni and Alevi components.” In Burgaz, syncretic religious practices are not uncommon between different faiths (see Chap. 5). Muslims participate in a mass in a Rum Orthodox church, Jews fast like Muslims. However, when an Alevi attended a mosque, such as on Kadir night, she was discouraged by some Alevi. In the third section, I take Amojgar’s life story, a Kurdish Muslim man, his migration from southeastern Turkey to Burgaz and the ways in which he positioned himself as a good integrated Kurdish man to Burgaz life, along with his silence on politics of recognition regarding the Kurds in Turkey.

ALEVIS’ MEMORIES OF INTOLERATION AND PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENCE

Having been suppressed under the Ottoman Empire due to Sunni dominance over the Alevi, when Modern Turkish Republic was built through the Kemalist modernist project, Alevi became hopeful that Turkish secularism will restrict Sunni domination. Alevi were content not to be recognised as a minority as long as the republic did not allow any display of religion in public (Zurcher and Van der Linden 2004, 127 cited in Soner and Toktaş 2011, 421). Under secularism, Alevi felt safer than they used to be in the Ottoman Empire and had been supporter of secularisation and the Kemalist modernisation project. Turkish Republican secularism aimed to keep state control over religious institutions through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), whose role was rather to control religions than the separation of the state from religions. *Diyanet*, instead of being equally distant to all religions of the Republic, was still Sunni-centric, based on the Hanafi School of Sunni Islam and did not leave space for other Islamic groups, such as Sunni Shafii, Jafaris and

Alevi (see Öztürk 2018; Soner and Toktaş 2011). From the early years of the Republic and until, *Diyanet* had been reformed following the 1960 and 1980s coup, and under the AKP rule (from 2002 onwards) (Öztürk 2018). Between 1960s until 2000, *Diyanet* played a controlling role in solidifying national unity, due to polarisation of the society under rightist and leftist political movements, which led to the militarist coup d'état in 1960 and 1980. Under the AKP rule from 2002 onwards, *Diyanet's* control was expanded to intervene social, public and religious life, with legal amendments to the Foundation and Duties of *Diyanet* (see Öztürk 2018). After the victory of 2007 general elections, the AKP, started a dialogue with the Alevi under “Alevi Opening” to discuss Alevi's demands for what kinds of recognition and/or rights. The AKP being a Sunni-centric and conservative entity, challenging Turkish secularism and criticising the Kemalist modernisation project, hence found itself in an oxymoronic relationship with the Alevi, who were supporters of secularism and Kemalism, in this initiation of “Alevi Opening.”

In 2009, Erdoğan visited a *cemevi* (Alevi gathering house and places of rituals), recruited Alevi for his party and attended Alevi breakfasts (Soner and Toktaş 2011, 429; Bayındır 2009, 17) as acts of unofficial recognition. Furthermore, the government organised workshops with Alevi-Bektaş groups to discuss their needs (Soner and Toktaş 2011, 430; Bardakçı 2015), however only two out of the seven workshops were attended by Alevi (see Borovali and Boyraz 2015). In 23 November 2011, Erdoğan apologised for the massacres of Dersim in 1938. Having Atatürk's picture, his own picture and the AKP logo, behind him, Erdoğan apologised by emphasising that these massacres were done under the CHP rule, Atatürk's party and it should have been the CHP party to apologise, but he did it to face the “dark pages in the history” (Efe and Forchtner 2015). This apology was seen both as a “more inclusive understanding of Turkish citizenship” but also as a “calculated manoeuvre in order to sideline with political opponents” (Efe and Forchtner 2015), namely the CHP party and its leader, Kılıçdaroğlu.

The political context (2009–2010) within the “democratisation packages” of “Alevi Opening,” mobilised the Alevi in Burgaz to talk within themselves and with non-Alevi about what Alevism was, what Alevi wanted and how they should be recognised. The majority of Burgaz islanders support secular ideology, especially the elite, like the rulers of the Sports Club, who make the hegemonic claims and they resist political Islam and the AKP politics. Sharing secular ideology against the

domination of Sunni Islam was the common denominator between Alevis and the elite. Hence Alevis organised panels to discuss their politics of recognition, which were attended and supported by the many secular Sunni Muslims in Burgaz. This political ambiance opened the space for various views on what Alevism was, what kinds of recognition Alevis wanted, what their demands were as well as their articulation of collective memories of violence and intolerance. These collective memories played a very important role in Alevis' articulation of their identity. On the one hand, they referred to the events dating back centuries, when Alevis experienced oppression from Sunnis. These memories have been transmitted to later generations and talked about in public in Burgaz. For instance, just before *Hızır cemi* took place in Burgaz, I was having a chat with my Alevi informants. They mentioned that the Ottoman Sultan, Yavuz Sultan Selim, won the Çaldıran war in 1514 against the Safavids, who followed Shia Islam, and killed many Shias and Alevis. Alevis were protected by the Safavids. In order to keep control in Anatolia and to diminish Shah Ismail (the leader of the Safavids) Selim killed many Alevis in the region (Finkel 2007). Also, for this reason, the fact that Erdoğan named the third Bosphorous bridge in Istanbul by the name of Yavuz Sultan Selim, was received with uproar by the Alevis (Karakaya-Stump 2018, 58).

Massacres in Dersim, Çorum, Kahramanmaraş and Sivas (Madımak) are significant events among the collective memories of the Alevis (Shankland 1999; Neyzi 2004; Çaylı 2020). During the years of the fieldwork, these memories of intolerance enhanced the reconstruction a collective Alevi identity and solidarity to end the domination and sufferance under the Sunni Muslims. “We are what we remember” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 7), and “memory is the social construction of a social and cultural identity” (Bahloul 1996, 2) were relevant for the case of the Alevis. The past was being reconstructed with a new purpose in the present (Halbwachs 1992). Alevi identity is built on and transferred from one generation to another through collective expression of emotions of pain, and embodiment of mourning and remembering during the cem ritual as well in other memorials (like Madımak) (see Assmann 2011; Connerton 1989; Taylor 2003). In Burgaz, Alevis were very vocal with their collective memories of these massacres and also their departure from Dersim. Their settlement elsewhere was remembered as difficult times, which they referred to as *sürgün* meaning exile.

On 5 July 2009, Burgaz Alevis conducted their first memorial of the Madımak event in Burgaz. The fire in Madımak, has been interpreted as

an attack on Alevi and secular people in Turkey (2009a, 2009b; Dündar 2002). On 2 July 1993, Pir Sultan Abdal Celebrations took place in Madımak, Sivas in eastern Anatolia. Not all the participants were Alevi; there were also non-Alevi intellectuals and leftists, like Aziz Nesin, who attended the event and stayed at the hotel. The Sunnis attacked the cultural centre, the place of celebrations and made an arson attack to the hotel, which was burned down and 37 people died. During the Madımak memorial in Burgaz, an Alevi journalist was invited to talk about the event and a documentary about the fire was shown. It was held at Ay Nikola tea garden. This memorial was organised by young leftist Alevi, members of the Turkish Communist Party, and about 50 islanders—Alevi as well as some Sunni Muslims—attended. The main message of the memorial was that the people who were involved in organising this fire were not punished and that this event was symbolised as an attack on the leftists, thinkers and secular people, among whom there were Alevi. On 7 July 2012, Burgaz Alevi held another memorial, which was attended by 150 people (2012a). This was an important event because it united secular Sunni Muslims and Alevi around one cause: defending secularists and intellectuals. What was peculiar was that this memorial did not take place in the teagarden of *cemevi* but in the Ay Nikola tea garden. The head of *cemevi* at that time told me that he wanted to keep the “politics” out of *cemevi*. What he referred as politics was leftist and communist politics, as the ones, who wanted to organise this memorial were young Alevi, who supported the communist party. This was one of the examples, which showed that Alevi had differing political views, tensions and disagreements. The politics that was performed at *cemevi* refers to “politics of recognition” in the sense that it served directly and narrowly the Alevi identity. Another reason why he did not want it to take place in the *cemevi* tea garden was that he did not want to take the risk of a provocation. He thought that if there were disagreements and tensions during this memorial, related to leftist and or communist political ideology, then it would have damaged the reputation of the *cemevi*. Hence, he wanted to keep the “politics” out of the “cemevi politics.” In fact, there were two attenders, non-Alevi who did not want to stand up during the minute of silence for those, who died and people raised their voices towards each other.

Alevi form about 15% of the Turkish population. Burgazlı Alevi of Turkmen, Kurdish and Zaza descent, draw their roots from Anatolia, by emphasising pre-Islamic traditions from Zarathustrianism, manism,

shamanism, paganism and Christianity (see Karakaya-Stump 2018, 54), to claim that they have already been in Anatolia, well before the spread of Islam. They have esoteric teachings rooted in Sufism and pre-Islamic worshiping. They also have an attachment to Ali and the 12 imams, which they have in common with the Shi'a sect (Karakaya-Stump 2018, 54). Alevis also distance themselves from Sunni and Shia Islam, by emphasising gender equality (Karakaya-Stump 2018, 54), praising the importance and power of women in society, by referring to the gender roles rooted in Anatolia, before the coming of Islam, and by stressing the heterogeneity and the blending (*harman*) of pre-Islamic faiths and Sufism. This *harman* does not make Alevism less authentic; to the contrary Alevis emphasise this to strengthen their distinctiveness (see Karakaya-Stump 2020, for a comprehensive understanding on Alevism and its history). When it comes to practising religion, Alevi religious rituals and practices are different than Sunni Muslims. Sunni Muslims follow the five pillars of Islam: believe in one God, fast during Ramadan, pray five times a day, pilgrimage to Mecca and pay alms. Alevis do not go to the mosque; they do not pray five times a day; they do *cem* rituals in *cemevi*; they do not fast during Ramadan (the 9th month of the Islamic calendar), but fast for ten days during *Muharrem* (first month of the Islamic calendar). In Burgaz, what Alevis collectively wanted to do within this political climate, was to show the difference in performing religion in the *cemevi* and hence to have it recognised as a place of worship. In the following ethnographic observations, I will describe the Sunni Muslim rituals in the mosque and Alevi rituals in the *cemevi*.

I fasted on *Kadir* night,² on the 15th of September 2009, the holiest night for the Muslims and went to the women section of the mosque to follow the evening prayer. Muslims repent for their sins. If you wish something on *Kadir* night, it is believed to come true. If a person is very virtuous, people say, “s/he must have been born on a *Kadir* night.” In the mosque, men and women pray in separate rooms. During the *mukabele*³ on the *Kadir* day, there were more than 30 women aged between 40 and 70, and a few young women. They wore simple clothes, no colour coordination, baggy trousers or long skirts which makes it easy to pray. These women looked strangely at Beren, a secular, middle class woman, who came with full makeup and a phosphorescent, fashionable green scarf. One old woman approached her and tucked in Beren's hair inside the scarf. Some Sunni Muslim women were strict about what to wear and how to tie their headscarves in the mosque. Fatma, a Sunni Muslim woman,

redid my scarf and I told her that I could never tie a scarf correctly. After she remade my scarf, she said, “*alışılmadık götve don durmazmıŝ*” (“if your ass is not used to underwear, you will feel uncomfortable wearing it”). We laughed. I didn’t expect her to say such a thing in the mosque. With that saying, Fatma made it explicit that she acknowledged I was not a practising Muslim in a joking but also warning manner. During the *Kadir* night prayer, the imam recited parts of the Koran. Except a few Alevi women, all the women were Sunni Muslims. The pray in the mosque was longer compared to other salah (namaz). Some women, who had knee and weight problems, prayed sitting on a chair. At the end of the prayer, chocolate bars and canned soft drinks were distributed to the attendees. After the prayer, I went to Fatma’s house to break the fast.

Several months later, on the 18th of February 2010, there was the *Hızır cemi*, at Burgaz Cemevi. *Cem* means Alevi gathering to worship and perform rituals, and *cemevi*, is the Alevi gathering house, where they worship and perform rituals. As Alevis are not recognised as a separate religious group, their *cemevi* is not considered as a place of worship. As a part of the politics of recognition within the Alevi opening, Alevis wanted *cemevis* to be recognised as a place of worship and their bills to be paid by the government like the churches and synagogues. I wanted to understand how *cem* was performed and this was the first *cem* that I had ever entered. Alevis use the term “*ceme girmek*” (entering cem), which refers to entering this communal gathering and being a part of it. I had asked Nuri, the head of the *cemevi*, to let me know when there was *cem* in *cemevi*. When he called me to say that there would be a *cem* gathering, he was very happy to see me participating in it. Nuri wants the *cemevis* to be legitimised as places of worship. As *cemevis* are not legitimised as a place of worship, they are registered as cultural foundations (see Özkan 2018). The *cemevi* in Burgaz is also registered and named as a cultural foundation, but all the islanders call it *cemevi*. It is the only one on the Princes’ Islands. As a part of the politics of recognition, Nuri wanted to invite Cem TV channel to broadcast the *Hızır cemi*, however, the TV people could not make it. Nuri wanted non-Alevis to come and observe their ritual and that was why he told me to invite my friends. He publicised the event and invited everyone especially the mayor of Princes’ Islands from the CHP party (Republican Party), who also attended. The mayor always came to any cultural and religious event taking place on the island just to keep close with the public and also give the message to the Alevis that the CHP supported them.

After the *cem*, Nuri also put the photos of *cem* on Facebook, under the Burgaz *cemevi* page.

Just before the *Hızır cem* ritual, Alevi women brought *lokma* (a pasty cooked by women, which symbolises anything shared between the people who enter the *cem*) and fruit to distribute at the end of the *cem*. They lit candles at the entrance. Contrary to the mosque, during *cem*, women and men sat together and performed the *semah* ritual (whirling). At the mosque, men and women cannot be in the same room. In the *cemevi*, most of the women wore scarves, which were not tightly wrapped, some also had it lie on their shoulder, and a few women even did not wear it. This was in contrast with how the women were dressed in the mosque and how they corrected each other's scarves.

In the mosque, the imam is the only leading figure and everyone else prays the same way. However, during *cem*, people share the performance and are given different symbolic roles to perform. When I did participant observation during *Hızır cemi*, the people who sat next to me explained these symbolic roles. For example, *kapıcı* (the doorman) welcomed people at the entrance. Two young girls were given the role of being *süpürgecis*, who mopped and cleaned but this cleaning symbolised the spiritual cleaning of the self. *Gözcü* (observer/watchman) was responsible of the organisation and sitting arrangement of the room. Furthermore, in Sunni Islam, photos, especially of the religious figures are prohibited; dance and music are not allowed in rituals. However, the posters of the prophet Ali, the Sufi leader Hacı Bektaş Veli and Atatürk are displayed inside the *cemevi*. *Semah* (whirling) and *saz* (the fretted instrument) are at the core of the rituals.

Dede is the most important religious leader for the Alevi. *Dede* must have direct blood links to the prophet Ali. He transmits Alevi philosophy, religious and historical knowledge and morality through reciting poems and telling stories by playing *saz*. As there is no *Dede* in Burgaz, the *Dede* comes from another district of Istanbul to the island, to lead the *Hızır cemi*. One of my informants told me that the competency of the *Dede* is judged by his wisdom, proficiency in poetry, music, his knowledge of oral Alevi traditions and his eloquence. The way he tells the stories about religious figures such as prophets and Sufi leaders, about how to be virtuous and good human beings is very important. During the *Hızır cemi* where I participated, through playing *saz*, *Dede* transmitted the story of *Hızır*, who is an important saint in Islamic-Alevi cosmology but also an ambiguous figure, blurring the boundaries of mortality and immortality. *Dede* narrated:

God said that there would be a storm and flood and that *Nuh* [a prophet] should prepare a boat and get a couple from each animal species and people of different races. People were too corrupted, that's why God punished them. The storm and the flood started to destroy everything. *Hızır* arrived and stopped the storm and the flood. The purpose of this *Hızır cemî* is that whenever we have a problem, *Hızır* will save us. We cannot see *Hızır* with our own eyes; we can only see *Hızır* with the eyes of an open heart. We, lay people, cannot see him, but in difficult times we feel *Hızır* and we say this person came our way like *Hızır* to solve our problem [*Hızır gibi yetiştî*].

Later on, Ali's sons, Hüseyin and Hasan's murder in Kerbela were mourned over and made the *cem* very emotional. The Kerbela war is one of the significant events over which Alevis and Shias mourn during their *cem*. After the separation between Ali and Muaviye, the sons of both claimed to be the Caliphate. In the Kerbela war, Muaviye's son Yezid and his army killed Hüseyin and Hasan's (Ali's sons) followers. For instance, in this *cem*, when *Dede* was talking about Hüseyin and Hasan's murder, the public started to say, "Damn!" (*lanet olsun*). They started to get very emotional, men and women started to cry. People gently sobbed and I saw napkins appearing in women's hands. Men cried openly as well. When the public was singing Alevi songs, they were tapping their knees in a painful and mournful way. Nonetheless, this was not like the Shia morning, in the form of beating themselves up. The way of showing their sorrow was not by hurting their bodies. *Dede* said loudly and provocatively: "We are Alevi and nothing else. Alevis should worry more about being a good Alevi than worrying about the politics of being an Alevi. This emotional bond we have, and our mourning is what it means to be Alevi. We should do *cem* every Thursday." I was very moved by the ambiance and the sense of collectivity during *cem*. It was a collective expression of emotions of pain, and embodiment of mourning and remembering (see Connerton 1989; Taylor 2003; Assmann 2011). Alevi identity builds on the collective sufferance and violence that they faced especially from the Sunnis during the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. As *Dede* pointed out the collective mourning was strongly related with Alevi identity. They hold on the collective memories and *cem* in the *cemevi* to practise their rituals and to keep away from the domination of Sunni Islam practices.

When people practise religion ("lived religion"), people do so in diverse ways, and during their religious engagement, they sometimes confirm and sometimes disregard religious norms (see Sağlam 2018). Everyday practices of Islam take various forms of negotiation, interpretation, and

discursive engagement with religious norms (see Asad 2009; Saglam 2018; Mahmood 2005; Simon 2014). When people discuss their individual or public alterations in religious practices, they might also tend to stand by their practice by articulating why and how they do a certain practice or ritual, in their way. Within this diverse island context, when the islanders practise religion in various forms (e.g. a Sunni Muslim woman swims in the sea in her bikini, while she is fasting, another Sunni Muslim man drinks alcohol in some evenings, but attends also the Friday sermon) as well incorporating syncretic practices (e.g. a Jewish fasts like a Muslim, a Muslim child makes a cross when he is scared), they accept these alterations and syncretic practices without arguing “what is a correct way.” Nonetheless, when one group tends to argue that “their way is the correct way,” this creates a discourse of toleration. For instance, some Sunnis in Burgaz argue that Sunni Islam is “the correct way” in difference to how Alevis practise religion. I heard Sunnis criticising the ways in which Alevis practised Islam. Once, I went to the money rotation day of a Sunni Muslim women group. Most of those women practised regularly and went to the mosque during Ramadan. They read bits of the Koran during these money days and also talked about religion. One day, one of these women said: “It is important to know *tecvîd* [how to read the Koran accurately, with precise pronunciation and intonation], and you know Alevis for example, they do not pray *fatîha*⁴ correctly.” These conversations highlight that when Sunnis claim that the way they practise is the correct way, Alevis see this as oppression, domination even assimilation.

I wanted to understand what the head of the *cemevi*, Nuri, thought about the situation of the Alevis and *cemevis*. I interviewed him two times and we also had casual chats at the garden of *cemevi*. Nuri articulated that Alevis faced assimilation due to the fact that the Directorate of Religious Affairs did not recognise Alevism as a different sect of Islam. He added that in school religion classes, Alevism and the history of Alevism were not taught and the obligatory religion lessons were saturated with and dominated by Sunni Islam. Nuri also wanted the *cemevis* to be legitimised and emphasised the importance of *cemevi* for the Alevis in Burgaz through saying that “If *cemevi* had not been built and functioning today, *we* [Alevis] would have disappeared.” Normally, there should be *cem* every Thursday evening. However, as there was not a *Dede* on the island and it was difficult to invite *Dede* from Istanbul every week, *cem* took place very irregularly. For example, during my fieldwork year, there was *only one cem* performed in Burgaz. In Burgaz, it was not the *cem* in *cemevi* but the

sociality at the *cem* tea place, next to the *cemevi*, that kept the Alevis together. Many Alevis hang out, have tea, play cards, organise social events like *mantı* (tortellini) day and play saz at this tea place.

The building of *cemevi* in 1996 in Burgaz had complicated the relationships between Alevis and Sunnis. On the one hand, some Sunni Muslims reflected that building the *cemevi* divided the Muslim community into two groups. For example, one Sunni Muslim woman said, “Alevis used words like ‘we’ do it like this, ‘you’ do it like that more after the *cemevi* was built on the island.” She, however, added and emphasised that she never had any quarrels with Alevis and they were very good neighbours. Some other Sunni Muslims said that everyone should be able to practise their religion freely and that it was very good to have *cemevi* in Burgaz so that Alevis could practise their rituals in their place of worship. As *cemevi* is not recognised, it implies that their religious practices “do not count.” The fact that some of the orthodox/strict Sunnis claim their practice is the correct Islam, creates tensions, competitions and antagonism between those Sunnis and Alevis, in the ways Hayden (2002); Hayden et al. (2016) argue. To the contrary, as we have seen in Chap. 6, recognised millets’ religious leaders, notably of the Sunni Muslims, Jewish and Rum Orthodox, do not show antagonistic tolerance towards each other.

Alevis and Sunnis expressed these tensions towards each other, only when Sunni Muslims claimed that their practice was the correct one. Nonetheless, those who claim the legitimacy of “correct Islam” constituted a very small group in Burgaz. On Burgaz, most of the Sunni Muslims who practise Islam, such as fasting during the whole month in Ramadan and praying five times a day; also drink alcohol except for the month of Ramadan. Many practising Sunni Muslim women do not wear a headscarf, swim in their bathing suits while they fast and vote for the secular Republican Party (CHP). Some Muslims do not practise at all. Some Alevis and Sunni Muslims both drink alcohol during Ramadan, in contrast to the strict Sunni Muslims. I heard from many Sunni Muslims, both the ones who practise and those who do not, that they found Alevi philosophy closer to theirs than that of some Sunni Muslims. They stated that Alevis were open-minded, Kemalist, secular and not “bigoted” like religious devout Sunnis. This is similar to the urban settings in Turkey, where Alevis embraced Kemalism and secularism in order to resist the domination of the Sunni Islamists (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 223). From 1990s onwards, middle-class secularists (most of them being Sunnis) became interested in visiting Alevi places of worship (*cemevi*) to learn more about Alevi

traditions and cultures (ibid., 146). For these secularists, “Alevi constituted the society of Atatürkism” (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 146).

In Burgaz, one can see shared ways of living, and how, common political ideology brings unity among the Sunnis and Alevis. For instance, the regular attendees of the mosque are a minority within the Sunni Muslim community. There are around 3000 Muslims in summer in Burgaz. During the *Kadir* night, around 250 Sunni women and men attended the mosque. The Friday prayers are attended by around 100 Sunnis, who are mainly men and most of them are the sellers in the Friday bazaar, who do not live in Burgaz. In Burgaz, it is common for Sunni Muslims not to follow Islamic rules, such as not drinking alcohol. Many restaurants are owned and ran by Alevis, who serve Rum mezes and alcohol. Sunni Muslims, Alevis and non-Muslims all hang out together at these restaurants and consume alcohol. This is why Burgaz islanders say that “Ramadan passes Burgaz in tangent” as many Sunni Muslims do not fast and continue to drink alcohol during Ramadan. Besides client/owner relationships, these Alevis and Sunni Muslims form and maintain their friendships through hanging out together in cafes and restaurants, through running their restaurants and shops next to each other, or working together as waiters. They play backgammon, watch football matches or go to the bazaar together. Their political views, secularism and keeping away from Sunni religious domination bring together Alevis and Sunnis. This is one of the reasons why many Alevis, like Nuri, are happy to live in Burgaz. Nuri said: “the good relations between Alevis and Sunnis should be an example to all the Alevis and Sunnis in Turkey.” Politics of recognition of Alevis bring them closer to the secular Sunni Muslims as they both would like to resist the domination of Sunni Islam and the AKP’s political Islam. However, these sometimes might distance the Alevis from the practising Sunni Muslims, if Sunni Muslims argue that their way is the correct Islam.

From the descriptions and analysis of the rituals at the *cemevi* and the mosque, one can observe that Alevis and Sunnis have significant differences in practising and performing religion. Therefore, one can understand that they would like *cemevi* to be recognised as a place of worship, because the religious practices are different, they do not want to be imposed Sunni Islamic practices and be forced to practise religion in the mosque in the ways in which Sunni Muslims do. However, the diverse ways of practising Alevism and the variety of leftist organisations that Alevis are affiliated with made it difficult for the Alevi organisations to unite “Alevisms under one roof” (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 145). Alevis thus

have particular demands, such as the *cemevi* recognition as place of worship, but they do not want to be recognised as a religious minority (Soner and Toktaş 2011; Karademir and Şen 2021), because a group-based minority categorisation will fix and reduce their diversity, and will push them towards an emphasis on the religious part of their identity, while Alevism incorporates a diversity of Alevi cultures, local and vernacular differences in practices, eclectic and syncretic religious rituals, and a philosophy of life. Instead of being recognised as a religious minority, the Alevis, they united under these 4 demands (Karakaya-Stump 2018, 58):

- 1) legal recognition of *cemevis* as Alevis “places of worship”, which would make them eligible to receive government subsidies currently granted only to mosques and the few remaining churches and synagogues;
- 2) an end to the compulsory building of mosques in Alevi villages;
- 3) the removal from school curricula of mandatory religion classes, which are based solely on the teaching of (Sunni) Islam; and
- 4) the elimination of Directorate of Religious Affairs, or its reformation, so as to ensure the state’s impartiality vis-à-vis all faith groups.

In these demands, the clear message is to end the domination of Sunni Islam imposed on the Alevis. Most of them also requested, as a 5th demand, the transformation of Madımak hotel into a museum of shame to commemorate the lives lost in the attack in 1993 (Çaylı 2020, 7; Karakaya-Stump 2018, 58). The end of domination weighs more than the demand to be recognised as a minority. Alevis do not frame their demands under liberal multiculturalism, which highlights cultural, political and religious differences as a distinct group but they stress their demands as human rights, democracy, equal citizenship, secularism, dialogue, and social inclusion (Karademir and Sen 2021; Özyürek 2009). In the next section, I will problematise the ways in which politics of recognition reinforces a coexistence discourse and explore the ways in which it strengthens Alevi identity but yet it creates disagreements and tensions among the Alevis and hinders conviviality.

PROBLEMATISING POLITICS OF RECOGNITION AND ITS IMPACT ON CONVIVIALITY

Alevis form a very heterogeneous group (see Navaro-Yashin 2002; Bayindir 2009; Shankland 1993; Özkan 2018; Karademir and Sen 2021). For instance, in Burgaz there are Zaza, Kurdish and Turkmen Alevis, who

differ in ethnicity and in the languages they speak. There are different political views, differences in practising Alevism, and various perceptions of Alevism, which creates tensions and disagreements among the Alevi about how it should be recognised. Especially, in 2009–2010 when it came to the fourth demand of the Alevi (the elimination of Directorate of Religious Affairs, or its reformation, so as to ensure the state’s impartiality vis-à-vis all faith groups), Alevi in Burgaz disagreed among each other whether it should be abolished or what kind of reformation it should undergo. Taking into account the heterogeneity, diversity and syncretism of practising religion among the Alevi in Burgaz, the politics of recognition forced the Alevi to make a choice, and to clear out “Alevi components” from the “Sunni components.” This then reinforced the discourse of coexistence which required the Alevi to define themselves, fix their multiplicity of identities and reduce their diversity to fit into one box.

In this section, I explore the ways in which politics of difference hinders the embodiment of diversity as a part of performing conviviality. As we saw in Chap. 5, in Burgaz people embody and share different religious practices from each other, and this blurs the boundaries of religious differences. The politics of recognition ruptures this conviviality in an artificial and divisive way. The Alevi, who share practices with Sunnis, are seen to be assimilated by other Alevi. In Alevism, there is a synthesis of many faiths, which they have incorporated in their practices and made it a particular, distinctive faith and philosophy. The politics of recognition and difference then prevents Alevi to share practices with Sunni Muslims, because they need to show how they are different than them. Some Alevi oppress those Alevi who attend and share Sunni practices.

For example, in Burgaz, some of the Alevi (such as the leftist and/or non-practitioner ones) expressed that the Directorate of Religious Affairs should be abolished stating that in a secular state the practices of religion should be private. In their way, it is a criticism of the transformation of *Diyanet* under the AKP rule. This group was not tolerant towards Alevi who shared some Sunni Muslim practices. For instance, during the Kadir night, some Alevi also went to the mosque. These non-religious, left-wing and non-practising Alevi interpreted the attitude of Alevi, who shared some practices with Sunni Muslims as assimilation under Sunnis. After the prayer in the mosque during Kadir night, which I explained earlier in this section, my atheist and communist Alevi friends, who worked for the Turkish Communist Party phoned me. With them, we consumed alcohol, had barbeques and discussed communism. On that *Kadir* night,

they were going to give me the communist weekly newspaper. I told them that I was at the mosque. They did not like this. I met them at *cemevi* tea garden. We played cards together. I told them that I could not stay longer because I was invited to have tea with some Alevi women some of whom were at the mosque. An Alevi girl, Elif, was also in that women's group. They asked me: "was Elif also in the mosque?" When I replied "yes" they were very surprised and said, "this is an example of an Alevi being assimilated in Sunni ways of practising religion!" When Elif came to pick me up, they asked: "was the mosque packed?" in order to annoy her. Elif had told me that she did not approve of their attitude, because they wanted to impose their own atheist and communist views on others. She also said that if there was something in *cemevi* for the *Kadir* night, she would have gone to the *cemevi* but as nothing was organised, she went to the mosque. While in Chap. 5, the Jews and the Muslims showed an embracing attitude of taking and sharing practices with each other, in this case, some Alevi did not appreciate taking and sharing practices with Sunnis. The Alevi who take and share practices from Sunnis see these practices as syncretism; however, the ones who do not share, see it as "assimilation." Even though Alevi performed their agency in sharing a practice—as they are sharing it with the dominant group who does not recognise them—this act was seen as "assimilation" by the Alevi, who refuse to share practices.

In 2009-2010, in Burgaz, some Alevi wanted Alevism to be recognised by the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a separate sect and the *cemevis* to be recognised as places of worship. The head of the *cemevi* in Burgaz, Nuri, also argued that Alevism dated back to thousand years BCE and that Alevism was the synthesis of all the religions of Anatolia and Mesopotamia including Zarathustrianism, manism, shamanism, paganism and Christianity (see Soner and Toktaş 2011, 424). Nuri said that even though, Ali⁵ is one of the most important religious figures in Alevism, Alevi are not only the followers of Ali, like the Shi'a Muslims (see Shankland's 1999, 139). The trilogy, Allah, Muhammed and Ali, is important. During the *cem* ritual, Alevi light three candles for them. Nuri told me that the trilogy (God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit) and light are also present in Christianity. This trilogy comparison does not intend to match Ali with Jesus and so on, however Nuri just wanted to show the presence of trilogies in both Alevism and Christianity. Identifying this kind of similarity between Christianity and Alevism was also present among Alevi in Turkey (Shankland 1999, 146). Whenever Nuri talked about Alevism, he always pointed out the similarities between Alevism, Christianity,

shamanism, manism and paganism and singled out some differences from Sunni Islam. In Burgaz, the Alevi, who would like to be recognised as a separate sect stressed that Alevism existed well before Islam and hence should be appreciated and recognised. However, within this group, there were still disagreements. Some Alevi in Burgaz saw Alevism within Islam, so they argued that the government should recognise Alevism as a sect of Islam. However, some argued that Alevism had nothing to do with Islam, emphasising that Alevism existed before Islam as it is a synthesis of all the religions of Anatolia, by emphasising the differences between Sunni Islam and Alevism. Emphasising these differences was a stronger claim of politics of difference; which underplayed, however, the fact that Alevi and Sunni shared some practices with each other.

Alevi and Sunni are not only religious beings and many of them share common lifestyle, political views and philosophy of life. Most of the Alevi in Burgaz in fact emphasised that they are not religious. Even though the *cem* ritual should take place every Thursday night, there was only one *cem* performed this year on the island. These Alevi in Burgaz, whether they wanted the abolition of the Directorate of Religious Affairs or the recognition of Alevi as a separate sect, wanted to resist Sunni domination and did not want Sunni practices to be imposed on them or simply did not want to practise religion at all. The process of politics of recognition pressures Alevi to fix ambiguity and heterogeneity of their practices and perceptions of what Alevism is and to stress the differences between Alevi and Sunni.

In Burgaz, some of the Alevi, who were not religious also saw Alevism more as a culture, tradition (including Alevi literature, rituals and music) and a way of conducting one's daily life (see Shankland 1999, 2003; Karakaya-Stump 2018). They interpreted Alevism as a holistic concept arguing that Alevism was a combination of faith, practices, ethics, philosophy of life and culture. In response to the fact that many Alevi emphasised the cultural side of Alevism, the government had proposed that the issues of Alevi could be dealt with by the Ministry of Culture, which appeared recently again in September 2022, as the AKP proposed to have an Alevi committee at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This received another criticism as this implies that *camevi* would not be recognised as a place of worship.

So, the government used Alevi's diversity of views and their internal disagreements as a pretext to ignore and to procrastinate to respond to the demands of the Alevi, by taking an easy way out and telling the Alevi

to first unite and come to an agreement about what kind of recognition they would want, for instance, whether to grant Alevis recognition, or whether to legitimise *cemevis* under the Directorate of Religious Affairs or under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. These democratisation packages remained mostly symbolic and superficial, as the core issues demanding Constitutional amendment (such as the recognition of the *cemevis* as places of worship, the status of Alevis in the Religious Directorate of Affairs and the removal of obligatory religious classes dominated by Sunni-Hanefi Islam tradition from the educational curriculum) were not handled (Bardağcı 2015, 360). Furthermore, the civil war in Syria in 2011, and Erdoğan's position against the Assad regime and him being a Nusayri within the Shia sect of Islam and Erdoğan's hostile and discriminatory rhetoric towards Alevis loaded the Alevis (Mutluer 2016). In one of his speeches, Erdoğan stated that the AKP was trying to raise a devout religious youth, which reaffirmed his political agenda (2012b). Such a statement created question marks about the genuineness of the AKP's tolerance of Alevis, secularists and non-practitioners of religion. In the following years, Alevis were disappointed by Erdoğan's conservative and authoritarian tone, dominated by Sunni-Hanefi values, disregarding Alevi values, traditions and Alevis' demands from the state. With this disappointment and feeling of oppression, Alevis were eager supporters of the Gezi protests in 2013, during which Alevi neighbourhoods faced some of the most brutal and disproportionate police force, where the majority of deaths took place (Mutluer 2016, 152; Bardağcı 2015, 366). Alevis felt again another loss of trust from the state (Mutluer 2016).

While Alevis were vocal about their demands and discussion of politics of recognition, the Kurds in Burgaz were reluctant and silent. What I perceived in these years of fieldwork that being ethnically Kurdish did not unite the Kurds of different faiths, notably Alevi Kurds with Sunni-Şafi Kurds. There was a disconnection between the Zaza-Turkish-Kurdish Alevis, who came from eastern Anatolia (Erzincan, Dersim/Tunceli, Sivas) and the Sunni-Safi Kurds from southeastern Turkey (Muş, Van, Ağrı). The former group came to the island earlier (in the 1950s) and the latter group came to the island in the 1980s and 1990s. These two groups hang out separately and refer to each other as "they" or "other." The Kurdish Alevis hang out with the Zaza, Kurdish and Turkmen Alevis, while the Sunni-Safi Kurds hang out with each other and Sunni Muslims. Coming from the same region and being Alevi trumped the common Kurdish ethnicity. This

also complicates the unity of the Kurds in Turkey, and hence, of the politics of recognition of Kurds as an ethnic minority. In the next section, I explore Kurdish opening in 2009–2010 and the silence of my Kurdish informants in Burgaz about this process.

KURDISH OPENING AND SILENCE IN BURGAZ

When the AKP government took power in 2002, Erdoğan wanted to bring changes for a more democratic government improving the conditions for cultural pluralism and human rights (Kayhan Pusane 2014, 85). He thought that relying on and taking Islam as the connecting common denominator, meeting the cultural demands of the Kurds, granting them rights would not cause fragmentation to national unity (Kayhan Pusane 2014, 85). Kurds had been suffering from the military operations of the state against the PKK as well as from the PKK's oppression (Efegil 2011, 30). The Kurdish "opening" as the "Kurdish democratic initiation package" included economic help to the southeastern region, disarming the PKK, and broadcasting in Kurdish (Efegil 2011, 166). The AKP tried to disarm the PKK and to enhance the region's economy in order to lessen the power of the PKK and the PDP (a Kurdish nationalist political party named DEHAP, which later changed to HADEP) (Efegil 2011, 30–32). The AKP, later, reinitiated a peace process with the Kurds in January 2013 and there were no military/armed conflicts with the PKK until the general elections in 2015 (Özpek and Mutluer 2016, 131).

Nonetheless, the instability of the PKK in starting and stopping violent attacks due to power fights between the jailed founding leader Öcalan and the PKK militants, the disagreements among pro-Kurdish politicians, the AKP's ambiguous political position and the lack of support from the opposition parties, the CHP and MHP, hindered the peace process and the Kurdish opening (see Kayhan Pusane 2014; Toktamış 2019). The Kurdish "opening" was perceived to have failed as it did not handle regional, neither linguistic nor cultural autonomy for the Kurds which required a constitutional change (Kardaş and Balcı 2016). The situation shifted against the Kurds, when the AKP lost its votes to the pro-Kurdish, secular HDP and the nationalist party MHP. AKP's votes decreased from 49.8% in the previous election to 40.8%. HDP party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, Democratic Party of the Peoples) entered the government by passing the threshold of 10%, by getting 13.12% of the votes on 7 June 2015 General elections, while the CHP kept its votes around 25.1% and MHP

increased its votes from 13% to 16.3% (Özpek and Mutluer 2016). The AKP lost its majority in the parliament. In order to gain back its votes, the AKP ceased the peace process and started military actions again against the PKK and jailing HDP members between the two elections, July and November 2015 (Toktamış 2019). Erdoğan in the end, made the party gain back votes from the nationalists and also the Kurds, to whom he promised stability again, and got the majority in the November elections in 2015 (Özpek and Mutluer 2016).

During the fieldwork years (2009–2010), Kurds in Turkey were sympathetic towards the AKP, who followed a peaceful approach towards the needs of the Kurds. During my fieldwork, I did not come across a collective Kurdish activism. The difficulties that my Kurdish informants expressed to me were about the adaptation to the life in Istanbul and hardship while doing menial work as told by my Kurdish informant, Amojgar. What I would like to shed light in this section is the silence of my Kurdish informants during the years of 2009 and 2010 in discussing the “Kurdish Opening” in Burgaz; because it was the time where their linguistic, religious, cultural and economic needs were just being discussed and they were in the “wait and see position,” and also maybe because my ethnic background was Turkish. The Kurdish opening had not yet reached a deadlock. Amojgar is of Şafi Kurdish origin from Muş, in southeastern Turkey. His story is interesting because he was one of the first Kurdish people to come to work in Burgaz and he narrated me his escape story from his village and how he ended up in Burgaz. He started his story like this:

I came to Burgaz first in early 1980s, when I was around 10–12 years old. My family was going through financial difficulties and I had some tension with my family. So, I escaped from the village and came to Izmit first [a city in the Marmara region], which was a random choice. Furthermore, the conditions in my village were very poor. We did not have proper roads and we had electricity and water problems. While I was in Izmit, I visited my relatives, who lived in Istanbul. There, I found out that jobs were available building houses and horse-cart driving in Büyükada [the biggest Princes’ Island]. Kurds from other villages of Muş and Van were also doing these jobs in Büyükada. But the conditions were horrible. 7 workers had to sleep in one single bed while working in housebuilding. So, I took the horse-cart driving job. As I was young, I was bullied a lot.

When I asked my other Kurdish informants, who worked as cooks and waiters in Burgaz, they also talked about the poor conditions they had in their village that made them migrate to big cities to earn money. There was a common tone in the way they talked to me. They mentioned being belittled, bullied and oppressed and how they experienced difficulties adapting to the new life and the working lifestyle in the cities, but they never attributed these hardships to their Kurdish ethnic identity.

What I came across on the island is that people who did menial jobs, regardless of their ethnic or religious origin or the time of their arrival, faced difficulties due to the differences in lifestyles and working conditions in the cities and the Princes' Islands which were different from their villages. There was a big contrast in the way the upper-middle class lived their lives and the ways in which Zaza Alevi, Sunni and Safi Kurds lived back in their villages. Amojgar recalled that when he first came to Burgaz, the island was a place of fun. The Rum *gazin*os were open in Ay Nikola, people used to dance and enjoy themselves. Amojgar said that today, he felt sad not to see the Rum dances in Ay Nikola. This nostalgia for the past, and remembering the times of the Rums was also present in Nuri's, Orhan's and Ajda's narratives. Amojgar's recollection of the 1980s was different from the elder generations. While the elderly people of Burgaz, who have lived since the 1940s and 1950s recalled that the life on the island "died" in the 1980s, because many Rums left; Amojgar did not know the old times. Coming from Muş, he found the island "like a luxurious garden in heaven."

Later, some jobs became available in the building of the sewage system in Burgaz. The existing sewage system used to dump the waste in the sea and the islanders wanted to find a solution. One of the civil societies in Burgaz, whose members were mostly upper-class Jews and Sunni Muslims, came up with a new sewage project, raised money from the islanders by organising social events at the social clubs both in the SC and the BC and managed the construction of a new sewage system. Amojgar heard about this job opportunity in Burgaz and started working in the sewage system and also driving horse-carts. The other horse-cart drivers were Zaza Alevi from Erzincan. There was another man from Muş who worked in Burgaz. On the other hand, Amojgar had a relative working in Kınalıada (another Princes' Island), where, there were jobs in the building sector and in laying cables for the post office. Amojgar emphasised that he did not particularly choose to come to Burgaz because of that co-local man (*hemşeri*). *Hemşerilik* plays a role in chain migration, in the ways in which, one

co-local (*hemşeri*), who settles in a city, calls for his relatives from the village of his origin, from his kinship networks, when jobs become available. This man in Burgaz did not call Amojgar particularly for that. Through this network of jobs on the Princes' Islands, he found more jobs in Istanbul such as in the building sector and worked as a chef in restaurants. While he started saving money and send some of it to his family, who had migrated to another city in the Marmara region. He reconciled with his family and started living in the flat below them. However, there was another family problem. He had met his wife, who is also of Kurdish origin in early 1990s, who lived on another Princes' island. They fell in love. However, when his uncle came to visit Amojgar's father, Amojgar learnt about the arranged marriage (*beşik kertmesi*) that he was already destined for. Cross-cousin marriages in eastern and southeastern Turkey are common, and some Alevi in Burgaz also married their cousins. However, the ones who do not want to marry their cousins, especially when they fall in love with someone else, resist the tradition. So, Amojgar had to escape again and came back to Burgaz. He took up the horse-cart driving job again and married his love.

When Amojgar reflected back on the times when he lived in his village, he used the discourse of coexistence/toleration by saying, ““Turks and Kurds had good neighbourhood relations in my village. I, for example, went to the mosque of the Turks and not to the mosque of the Kurds.”” He wanted to present himself as a very well networked Kurdish person, a part of Turkish culture and networks, and even closer to the Turkish neighbours than Kurdish ones. When we were talking with him and his wife about which languages they speak at home, Amojgar and his wife highlighted that they did not teach Kurdish to their children. Amojgar's wife also stated that her father did not want to talk to them in Kurdish in order for them to learn Turkish. Rather than talking about politics of difference (e.g. ethnicity, language, religion) regarding the demands of the Kurds and the differences between Kurds and Turks, Amojgar pointed out more to the cooperation and good neighbourly relations between Turks and Kurds in his village and he also added, “I do not differentiate between Turks and Kurds” (“*Ben Türk – Kürt ayrımı yapmam*”). The politics of recognition of the Kurds as an ethnic minority was absent in his narrative. Throughout my fieldwork, the Kurds in Burgaz did not mobilise or discussed in public, what kinds of rights they wanted. It is difficult to know, but Amojgar's silence could also be interpreted that by living in a diverse

place as Burgaz, he did not want to get involved or present himself as part of politics of difference and hence in order not to “tint” his life in Burgaz, he might have kept himself away from discussing the politics of recognition and rights of Kurds in Turkey. He mentioned having feared from the PKK for instance, by saying, “The PKK would tell us not to send our children to schools; we were scared, so we did not send children to school”; nonetheless in his narrative, he stressed more that people left their places of origin because of the tensions of kinship they experienced within their families, their poor living conditions and traditions like arranged marriages, that individuals were expected to conform. Because of these kinship tensions and poor living conditions, Amojgar decided to leave and build a life on his own in Burgaz. While he was doing this, he also went through hardship, got bullied for being young and coming from a different setting; however, he married the one he loves, and today, he is happy to have made his decisions for himself. Amojgar finished his story by saying that: “Among all the other islands, I chose to live in Burgaz because I like the intimacy on the island. Today, whenever I go to the pharmacy, grocer or walk on the island, people know me and I feel at home.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen in Chaps. 4, 5 and 6, in Burgaz, people’s differences are respected and different religious communities feel free to practise their religion in various degrees and they also take and share practices in a syncretic way. Therefore, when one sees Burgaz as an ebru pattern, as some islanders do, one can mark that there are distinct patterns, hence differences are not erased but rather practised, respected and valued. Nonetheless, they are not like mosaics, because these community boundaries are not clear cut. As people embody each other’s differences, they take, replicate, reproduce and share practices and also share daily life, and these boundaries are fused into each other.

This cultural context gave way for the Alevi to articulate and emphasise their Alevi identity and way of living. For this reason, Alevi see conviviality in Burgaz as an example for intercommunal living in Turkey, where they are free and happy to live, to have their *cemevi*, even though it is not recognised as a place of worship but as a cultural foundation. The political context during the years of my fieldwork was within a flourishing and vibrant context, where the democratisation packages mobilised Alevi in

Burgaz to make panels and invite islanders from all ethnic and religious backgrounds to their discussions about Alevi history, what Alevism(s) was, what they wanted from the government. Hence, this vocality created a greater dialogue between the Alevis and the non-Alevis on the island. One can definitely see that Alevis' sense of belonging in Burgaz gets stronger as they can be Alevis. In other words, the fact that they can be more Alevi, makes them more and more Burgazlı. For instance, as we saw in Chap. 4, Alevis in Burgaz also recalled their bitter and sweet memories of conviviality in Burgaz. Quarrelling, fighting and playing marbles with the earlier established settlers in Burgaz and feeling sad about their Rum friends' departure also signify their sense of belonging in Burgaz. When, at the end of the interview, I asked Nuri what Burgaz meant to him, he said, "I was born in Burgaz and I have 60 years of friendship with my oldest friend. You cannot find these long friendships in Istanbul or somewhere else for example." This demonstrated that he separated Burgaz from everywhere else. His years in Burgaz and his lifelong friends from there made the island a unique place for him. He added:

[T]he islanders do not know how to walk on the streets of Istanbul. We do not know what traffic is, here on the island, we walk in the middle of the streets. Burgaz is a *büyüülü* (mysterious) place; it has its own way of life. Burgaz means the sea, the seagulls and the pine trees for me. Whenever I go outside of Burgaz and I see seagulls and pine trees, it reminds me of Burgaz.

What Nuri said was similar to the memories of Orhan, Ajda, Amojgar and many other Burgaz islanders, whom I met and talked with. These memories and performance of conviviality in Burgaz strengthened the islanders' attachment and sense of belonging to Burgaz. This was also how Amojgar had framed his narrative of Burgaz as a place of beauty and intimacy.

The politics of recognition was approached differently by the Kurdish and the Alevi Burgazlı. My Kurdish informants were reluctant to talk about the Kurdish opening. Amojgar portrayed himself as a well-integrated and networked Kurdish person, and emphasised "peaceful coexistence" between the Kurds and Turks in the region when he came from. His silence and reluctance might also be interpreted as his wish for not articulating a divisive discourse of coexistence, and to hinder his life and conviviality on Burgaz. One should also take into account the difference of positions of Kurds and Alevis in Burgaz. While the Alevis settled in 1940s

onwards to Burgaz, own property and run restaurants and cafes, they have a more established place on the island, compared to the Kurdish who migrated to the island later on, from 1980s onwards as menial workers. While Alevis shared secular ideology with the Sunni-Muslims and non-Muslim summer inhabitants, who make hegemonic claims; Kurdish islanders did not, in the sense that they followed a more conservative and religious life and were closer to the AKP politics in the years of the fieldwork.

In the case of Alevis, they articulated a discourse of coexistence at the cost of practices of conviviality. As Burgaz islanders embody each other's religious practices, the politics of difference forced Alevis to artificially separate "Alevi components" from "Sunni components." Alevism is an unorthodox religion, which has synthesised practices from Manism, Shamanism, Christianity and Islam, and Alevis are a heterogeneous group, with different perceptions of what Alevism is. In Burgaz, the islanders take and share religious practices with each other. Hence, this process of asking for recognition has hindered how Alevis talked and reflected about their syncretic and shared practices. Especially in Burgaz, a Jewish person fasts like a Muslim, or a Muslim makes a cross when he gets scared (see Chap. 5), and these practices are seen as a part of daily life; also, because Christianity, Judaism and Islam are all recognised minorities in the Turkish legal system. However, when Alevis' shared practices with Sunni Muslims, this was seen as assimilation, and oppressed the Alevis, who shared Sunni practices, such as going to the mosque on the *Kadir* night or organising a *mevlut*. *Mevlut* or *Mevlid* is the celebration of the birth of Muhammed, which is an Islamic religious custom of the late Ottoman Empire, is re-appropriated in the last 50 years in funerary gatherings as well as in celebration gatherings such as after circumcision of male children. An Alevi informant of mine said that organising a *mevlut* in the Islamic sense is not among Alevi traditions and hence organising a *mevlut* can also be seen for an Alevi to be assimilated. Nonetheless, I participated in a *mevlut* organised by Alevis, who also invited Sunni Muslims. Burgaz islanders use the term *mevlut*, when they organise a death anniversary of someone, regardless of the religion of the deceased one. I have attended *mevlut* organised by Rums, Jews, Alevi and Sunnis, for the death anniversary of their beloved ones. Organising *mevluts*, and/or attending the mosque is a part of island conviviality. Rums, Alevis, Muslims and Jews attend the church on important Rum Orthodox religious days and this is not seen as being assimilated under a particular religion but it is seen as practising, sharing and

reproducing Burgaz life. However, as Alevis were trying to be recognised, when they share a practice with the Sunnis, this can be seen as assimilation, which goes in contrast with the conviviality on the island.

Taking into account the differences between Sunni ways of practising religion in the mosque and Alevi ways of practising in *cemevi*, one can see how different the religious practices are. As Young (1990) points out, laws which are blind to differences have assimilating and oppressive effects towards the non-recognised groups. This is also shown and felt by the Alevis in Burgaz, who try to resist Sunni domination in various ways (e.g. organising panels, emphasising their non-religiosity, embracing secularism and asking for particular demands from the government). However, this process of asking for recognition was difficult for both the Alevis, who are not exclusively religious beings. Alevis, like everyone else, have multiplicity of character, interests and multiple identities. The politics of difference and recognition, therefore, ruptured people's conviviality, because it undermined what Alevis and Sunnis shared, it forced the Alevis to separate their syncretic practices and lay stress on religious differences between Alevism and Sunni Islam in order to receive recognition.

Young (1990, 166) suggests that the politics of difference strengthens group solidarity. The politics of difference in Burgaz created solidarity among the Alevi inhabitants to an extent; because the debates on politics of recognition created disagreements and frictions among the Alevis. The Alevis, who shared practices with the Sunni Muslims (e.g. going to the mosque) were oppressed by the Alevis who disapproved syncretic practices that shared Sunni practices. This complex and ambiguous situation of the Alevis (including their heterogeneity, eclectic and syncretic practices) echoed in Cowan's (2001) problematisation of minority rights discourse concerning the "Macedonian minority" within which ambiguities must be denied and differences should be fixed. Building on Cowan (2008, 12), who criticised Kymlicka's perception that bounded groups already exist in the country awaiting the state's recognition and that minority rights and multicultural policies should protect, and on Karademir and Sen (2021), who showed the deficiency of Kymlicka's (1995) liberal multiculturalism, I problematised the process of asking for recognition. Politics of recognition reinforced a discourse of coexistence and disapproval of syncretic practices of certain groups (Alevis should not practise Sunni practices), which hindered the embodiment of diversity in the performance of conviviality. It created the need for the non-recognised group to define, who they were

and categorise their practices in order to resist the domination of the Sunni Muslims and to be recognised by the Turkish government. Alevi is heterogeneous and have different perceptions on Alevism is and disagree among each other (such as whether to abolish the Directorate of Religious Affairs or how to reformulate it and have place for the Alevi there). This works as an advantage for the government to procrastinate, ignore and take an easy way out and not to take any action regarding the demands of Alevi. This ping-pongification or boomerangification of vicious circling then fatigues the Alevi and make them lose more and more their trust from the state.

In Turkey, being a recognised minority does not come with a protection of rights. As Karademir and Şen (2021, 156) argue, the minorities in Turkey do not “enjoy” their minority rights. To the contrary, the recognised *millet*s notably, the Rums, Jews and Armenians have suffered greatly from the Turkification and homogenisation policies, which have attacked their economic power and identities and lessened their numbers in Turkey (see Chap. 2). The treaty of Lausanne did not make them equal citizens, rather minorities were pushed into “an isolated, apolitical and marginalised life” (Karademir and Şen 2021, 156). In 2022, when I talked with some of my Alevi informants, they expressed that they would not like to be recognised as a minority. Alevi would like to see themselves as a part of the majority and at the centre of Turkish politics and culture. My Alevi informants articulated that they have always been in Anatolia, and there are the protectors of secularism and follow Atatürk and its republican values. Their approach also implies that if one has to recognise another, that puts the one who recognises on a higher level than the one who is asking for recognition. Hence, Alevi do not want to see Erdoğan as the one who recognises them. I end this chapter with a phrase from an Alevi informant (by referring to Erdoğan), “who are you to recognise me?” (sen kim oluyorsun da beni tanıyacaktım?). One can also interpret this as a coping mechanism to deal with not being recognised, but I interpret this more like a demonstration of power, independence and rejection towards Erdoğan, to say that Alevi are not at his mercy.

NOTES

1. Alevi, Kurds and Zazas are not three distinct groups separated from each other. There are Kurdish Alevi, as well as Zaza Alevi; Sunni Zazas and Alevi Zazas, Sunni Kurds and Alevi Kurds. For an extensive discussion and

historical overview of these overlapping ethnic, religious and linguistic categorisations, please refer to Chap. 2 of this book.

2. The night when the Quran started to be revealed to Muhammed.
3. Women read pieces from the Koran each day around noon at the mosque during the month of Ramadan.
4. One of the most common and important prayers in Islam
5. After Muhammed's death, Ali was the fourth Caliphate. Ali was Muhammed's cousin and his son-in-law. There was a division between who should be the Caliphate, Ali or Muaviye. This tension separated the Muslim world into two.

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