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Narrating the Past on the Stage from a Minoritarian Perspective

How does the Alevi community employ theater for the constitution of post-memory and to deal with the post-traumatic feelings?

The Alevi religious minority makes up the largest religious minority in Turkey. The history of Alevis has been one of oppression and persecution, especially since the 16th century, as the followers of a local Islamic tradition under the hegemony of Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire. The Alevis were marginalized since then, and through the discourse of heresy, their exclusion was justified. In the face of such adversity, Alevis preferred to live as closed communities, isolated in the highest villages. The inception of the Republic of Turkey as a secular nation-state in 1923 was initially promising for them, but the regime remained implicitly Sunni Muslim. The exclusion and oppression of the Alevis as 'non-Muslims' have been the necessary constituents in the formation of Turkish identity and national unity. Thus, the Alevi community's experiences of citizenship and belonging continued to be characterized by precarity as they occupied a category of 'national abjection.'

Theatre is a way to reveal what is systematically hidden and what is not told in the official narratives; to fill the narrative gaps of the nation from the perspectives of marginalized and oppressed subjects. According to Marianne Hirsch, new generations remember the past as mediated by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. The Alevi community engaged theatre into their struggle of recognition mainly through re-enactments of specific events revealing the violence they had been subjected to in the past. So, theatre functions as a site for the constitution of post-memory, the transmission of post-traumatic feelings to the young generations of the Alevi community, and thus serves as a tool for community-building and solidarity.



Bio: I completed my BA in Philosophy at Boğaziçi University. I received my MA in Philosophy at Galatasaray University. My primary research interests are gender studies, migration, diaspora studies, critical theory and performance studies. I am doing my Ph.D. in the Department of Communication Studies at Kadir Has University and working as a researcher of the ERC Starting Grant project, "Staging National Abjection: Theatre and Politics in Turkey and Its Diasporas". Throughout my Ph.D. I will be researching how the Alevi community used theatre to struggle with the processes of national abjection and to negotiate the politics of belonging in Turkey and its diasporas.