

MONUMENTALIZING MADNESS: A DEPICTION OF THE RISE AND DEMISE OF DERSIM AS A CENTER FOR THE LEFT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the first statue of a madman in Turkey, which was erected in 1994 in Dersim (Tunceli), during the height of the civil war between the Partiya Karkêrn Kurdistan and the Turkish state. Following the story of Sey Uşen, a figure in between madness and holiness, this thesis portrays the rise and the demise of Dersim as a centre of the Left in Turkey. Depicting the ways in which the statue of Sey Uşen stands in negotiations with the monument of Atatürk, the founding father of the Turkish Republic, this thesis argues that the statue of Sey Uşen opens a ground to mourn for the ungrievable loss of the past. Along with offering a gendered analysis of the transformation of a madman into a religiously respected figure, it depicts the encounter of the Left with identity politics in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état. Based on an ethnographic fieldwork, it is argued that the state-sponsored policy of depoliticization towards Alevis is reproduced on a local level through discourses of culturalization by leftist inhabitants of Dersim.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The bus that we were in, commuting between Elazığ and Dersim (officially Tunceli), had just passed the sign showing that we have reached the Tunceli provincial border, when it suddenly stopped. A mixed group of security forces, composed of soldiers and policemen, approached the bus. When I noticed the soldier positioned on top of an armored vehicle, pointing his gun directly towards the bus, the song İsyân Ateşi [The Fire of Rebellion] by Grup Munzur was still playing in the cassette player of the bus. The commuters were chuckling and chattering in their casual ways. After some time for the driver to switch the music and prepare his permits, a man entered the bus shouting: “We are from the Public Security Branch Office. There is a denunciation and we have a search warrant. Can I see your IDs?” Before he finished his words, most of the passengers had already taken their ID's from their wallets in an indifferent manner. While he was checking the ID's, the Maoist song from just a few minutes ago was replaced by complete silence. Although he was just checking ID's quickly and repeating out loud everyone's name while giving them back, he investigated mine in detail and did not say my name while retrieving my information. After the man had left the bus, the lyrics about mountains and struggles resumed, as if nothing had happened. The Peace Process between the Turkish state and the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) is still ongoing, so I was surprised to be welcomed by security forces at the entrance of the province and asked the woman sitting next to me:

Çiçek: Is this a regular check or is there something extraordinary going on?

Woman: For how long haven't you been here?

Çiçek: This is my first time here.

Woman: So, you are not from here?

Çiçek: No, I am not.

Woman: That is why the cop looked at your ID for so long. [...] The place where we were stopped was a regular check point during the 80s... but in the 90s as well. Actually they deployed this point after the coup [of 1980] and since then until the war has stopped [in 2012] they stayed there. There were no regular checks for a while, but after the Gezi Protests they started again. [...] You know, people say that the troops were positioned somewhere near this point when they came for the Genocide [in 1938] as well. It seems it has a strategic importance (laughing).

The first public monument welcoming us in the city centre unsurprisingly was the statue of Atatürk, which is situated in Cumhuriyet [Republic] Square, informally called the Palavra [Lie] Square. A representation of a young woman was accompanying Atatürk across the road, the Statue of Human Rights. Just before reaching the point of arrival, we passed by the statue of Seyid Rıza (1863-1938) (the erection of the statue: 2012), one of the significant religious leaders of the resistance against the 1938 Dersim Genocide, which is situated at the centre of the city.



Figure 1: The Statue of Seyid Rıza. Photograph by Armanc Yıldız.

This was another affectively loaded moment of “entering the field”. Although I had seen photos of Seyid Rıza’s statue holding a big photograph of Berkin Elvan in the newspapers, the actual encounter was overwhelming. Berkin Elvan, who was fatally hit on the head by a tear-gas canister fired by the police on his way of buying bread in Istanbul, and lost his life at the age of 15 during the Gezi Protests, is thus placed at the centre of the city in the hands of Seyid Rıza. Seyid Rıza had also a surprise for me in his hand; right next to Berkin Elvan’s photo, there was a banner with the photo of İbrahim Kaypakkaya (1949-

1973). Kaypakkaya, the founder of the TKP/ML (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist), was arrested in 1973 in the mountains of Dersim and became one of the young dead bodies that the Turkish state left behind in its prisons. The installation of the photo of Berkin Elvan, the youngest Alevi murdered during the Gezi Protests, whose funeral in Istanbul was attacked by the police forces, and the photo of Kaypakkaya, whose doctrines are still so influential among Tunceli inhabitants under the wings of the executed religious leader Seyid Rıza, whose dead body could not even be buried, was like a ceremony of different generations of ghosts.

A couple of minutes after passing by the ghosts' ceremony, we reached the last stop. Since the bus terminal was under construction, the bus stopped right in front of the statue of Seyid Hüseyin. My first encounter with the statue of Sey Uşen, as he is called by Dersim's inhabitants, had a calming effect. Encountering with a statue of a smiling man holding a cigarette in his hand after encountering Seyit Rıza, Kaypakkaya and Berkin Elvan, was like the laughter coming at the end of the check point story.



Figure 2: The Statue of Seyid Hüseyin. Photograph by Armanc Yıldız.

However when I went closer, I noticed a poem written on the lower side of the statue, called “You did not die Seyid Hüseyin”. That is how I realized that Sey Uşen also takes his part in the ceremony of ghosts. However, Sey Uşen as a ghost, makes people tell mostly pleasing stories in the first instance. Instead of recalling heroic stories of resistance or dramatic events such as massacres, torture or imprisonment, different from the monuments in the city centre, the statue of Sey Uşen rather evokes remembrances about his life on the streets, his shabby appearance, his madness, his miracles, and stories of how he was healing Dersimlis [people from Dersim].

The last stop of the bus is the entry point of my research. Sey Uşen, who is coming from a holy lineage, was living on the streets of Dersim starting from the late 1960s, and became a religiously respected public figure after the 1980 coup d’état. I attempt to illustrate the ways in which Sey Uşen could find his place in Dersim’s public sphere in the form of a statue a year after his assassination in 1994. Following the story of Sey Uşen, my aim is to capture the change that Dersim experienced after the 1980 coup d’état. In other words, I suggest that the story of Sey Uşen tells us the rise and the demise of Dersim as a centre of the left in Turkey. Moreover, the statue of Sey Uşen captures the way that the left interacted with the rise of identity politics after the coup d’état of 1980.

After a brief historical background and methodology chapter, where I outline the life story of Sey Uşen with a brief historical background of the political atmosphere surrounding him and the way I approach the topic, Chapter IV seeks an answer to what kind of memory regime the statue of Sey Uşen forges. While portraying the aestheticization of Sey Uşen, Chapter IV also depicts the way his statue negotiates with the monument of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the “founding father” of the Turkish Republic. After putting forward the space that the statue of Sey Uşen opens to voice the ungrievable loss of Dersim, in Chapter V, I turn to Sey Uşen’s life story to examine closer how the way that Sey Uşen was perceived shifted.

Capturing the synchronicity of Sey Uşen's becoming a religiously respected figure with the castration of the Left after the 1980 coup, I attempt to depict the encounter of the Left with the rising identity politics. Lastly linking with the previous chapter, I argue that although the statue of Sey Uşen opens a space to transgress the "impossibility of mourning", it is not perceived as a ground to voice political claims in the eyes of Dersimlis having leftist political affiliations. Instead, eluding the rituals in practice from their religious contexts they contribute to the reproduction of the state sponsored culturalization policy of Alevism, which mediates through the decontextualization of religious practices and targets the codification of Alevi rituals as a part of national folklore.

2.0 ENTRANCE TO THE CITY OF SOULS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Collecting memories of Sey Uşen was like unpacking the silenced history of Dersim almost throughout a century. While having conversations about the statue of Sey Uşen, I ended up listening to the stories of the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the Dersim Genocide in 1938, the coup d'état of 1980 and the civil war in the 1990s between the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) and the Turkish state. Beside all the attempts of destroying it, the city still hosts a multiplicity of ethnic and religious minorities. It should be noted that Dersim is the only city in Turkey where Alevi population is in majority (Gültekin, 2010). As I will elaborate on later in the chapter, Dersim Alevism has a peculiar place in the Alevi tradition. The Armenian past, the intertwinement of Kurdish ethnic identity and Alevi religious identity makes the city's demographic structure more complex. In the following pages I will try to depict the environment surrounding Sey Uşen. Thereafter I portray the atmosphere of the time when the statue was erected and lastly I try to describe the peculiarity of Dersim Alevism which will be followed by the contemporary political atmosphere in which I conducted my ethnographic research.

2.1 Between the Two Catastrophes: The Armenian Genocide (1915) and the Dersim Genocide (1938)

Sey Uşen - whose birth year is not written on his gravestone but accounted as 1930 by Hüseyin Aygün, an independent researcher, lawyer and a parliament member of Dersim from the CHP [Republican People's Party] (Aygün, 2005) - was born in the middle of two catastrophes that fundamentally changed the demographic structure of Dersim. Beginning with mid-19th century, Dersim was defined by the Ottoman Empire and its follower, the Turkish Republic, as a place to “discipline,” “conquer,” “colonize” and “forcibly Sunnify” (Aygün, 2009). Until 1915, the population of Dersim was mostly composed of Alevi-Kurds

and Armenians.¹ As a result of the Genocide and the deportation by the government of Young Turks, the Armenian population of Dersim and all of eastern Turkey was tremendously diminished. Those who survived became “hidden Armenians” by converting to Islam (Altınay & Türkyılmaz, 2011; Çetin, 2014).²

The Dersim Genocide in 1938, which “overlaps with the Armenian grief” (Ketsermanian, 2013), can be seen in continuum with the demographic engineering policies of the newly established Republic of Turkey, such as the Armenian Genocide (1915) and the population exchange with Greece (1923) (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013:3). It left behind 13.806 Dersimlis’ dead bodies according to official figures, although others estimate the number of victims as 70.000 (Aygün, 2009). With the Tunceli Law issued in 1935, not only the borders of today’s Tunceli were drawn on paper; but also by the declaration of a rule of exception (Bruinessen 1994), the Genocide itself was designed as a way of implementing what was planned. Dersim as a region (450-500 km²) was divided into administrative sections. The centre was named as Tunceli, which literally means “bronze hand” (Beşikçi, 2013). Although the name Dersim is commonly in use and there are several campaigns aiming to “get back” the name Dersim, Tunceli is still the official name. The Genocide was followed by the evacuation of selected settlements and the relocation of Alevi-Kurdish population to Western Turkey (Aygün, 2010: 69-83). Bruinessen argues that, as a result of the destruction and demographic change, “not much is left of Dersim’s distinctive culture” (Bruinessen, 1994:155) in which the Armenian, Kurdish and Alevi cultures intermingled. Sey Uşen, who was born in Beydamı village, witnessed the atrocities of 1938 as a kid. Although I have heard several times how Sey Uşen lost his mother or other close family members in 1938,

¹ According to traveler accounts, the total population of the province in 1878 was approximately 136.000 and composed of 103.000 Kurdish-Alevis, 23.000 Armenians, and 10.000 Turks (Tosun & Bal 2013:139).

² Dersimlis played a peculiar role in the Armenian Genocide by refusing to concede the Armenians to the perpetrators and helping them to escape to Caucasus through Erzincan (Kieser, 2005:561).

according to his relatives' accounts, he did not lose any first degree relatives, but he grew up listening to memories of 1938 from the survivors.

2.2 The Leftist Mobilization in 1970s

As I will explain in detail in the next chapter, he left his family after finishing his military service. The stories of Sey Uşen moving to the centre of Dersim and living on the streets start from the late 1960s. The 1970s are an important decade in the history of leftist movements in Turkey. The rise of the leftist movements should be considered in relation to the attempts of neoliberalization dated back to late 1970s. This decade is generally referred to as the “pre-coup d'état” period which is narrated as the time of violent clashes between leftist and rightist armed groups (Ergüden, 2012; Ünüvar, 2013) as well as the violent conflicts between Sunnis and Alevis which resulted with the Alevi massacres in Maraş (in 1978) and Çorum (in 1980). In the mainstream historical narration, the pre-coup period is instrumentalized to justify the state sponsored violence which came to the fore with the coup d'état of 1980. However, from the eyes of the revolutionaries of this period, this decade is associated with the atmosphere of emancipation, transformation, rebellion and hope, primitivity, conflicts and frictions (Ergüden, 2012). In other words, the 70s witnessed mobilization of masses of people, creation of labor organizations and political organizations. It should be noted that it is the time period when the idea of armed struggle became popular among leftist organizations.³ Dersim hosted both legal and illegal leftist organizations and became one of the central cities for the Left in Turkey. This period witnessed the weakening of the Alevi religious authorities such as the institution of dedelik,⁴ which was officially banned in 1925 along with the Sufi

³ For instance *Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi* (People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey, THKP-C), and *Türkiye Kurtuluş Ordusu* (People's Liberation Army of Turkey, THKO), *Türkiye Komünist Partisi Marxist-Leninist* (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist, TKP/ML, and its armed wing TIKKO) were the three biggest leftist organizations of the time.

⁴ “Originally *dede* is a Turkish term that means grandfather, which has been used for religious leaders in Dersim since the arrival of holy lineages, *ocaks*, in Dersim in the course of the 12th century.” (Törne, 2012:73)

lodges and tarikat (Sufi order) as a part of the secularization of the Turkish Republic. While younger Alevi generations turned to leftist ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s, the dedes started to be portrayed as “charlatans exploiting ordinary people” (Dressler, 2008:285). Palavra [empty talk, lie] Square, which was one of the main gathering points of the leftist groups, was next to the park (today’s yeraltı çarşısı, underground bazaar) that Sey Uşen was generally hanging out according to my interlocutors’ accounts. People, whose remembrance about Sey Uşen belonged to the 1970s, mostly do not associate him with religiosity. They generally recall him as a madman, who was living on the streets without needing money.

2.3 The Entrance to a New World: The Coup of 1980

The resistance to neoliberal policies during the 70s was broken by the coup d’état of September 12, 1980. “For 20 years the workers smiled and we cried; now it is our turn to smile” said Halit Narin, the head of the Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu [The Confederation of the Unions of Employers, TİSK] right after the declaration of the coup (cited in Ünüvar, 2013:34). The rapid transition from Import Substitution Industry model to the export-led growth economical strategy in the early 1980, which resulted in the complete abandonment of social-state policies (Ünüvar, 2013:33), was symbolically expressed in the words of Narin. The emphasis on profitability, efficiency and strategy (Ünüvar, 2013: 44) in TİSK reports illustrates how the “neoliberal newspeak” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2006) found its place in the economical and political discourse in Turkey. In order to make the employers smile, the military authorities initiated the coup, closed the parliament along with the political parties and labor unions, declared the state of emergency and banned the exit from the country (Boratav, 2004).⁵

⁵Some figures can help illustrate the effect of the coup on individuals in the form of arrests, torture, losing job, passports and citizenship for being regarded as “suspect”: The numbers of people arrested and tortured went up to 1.000.000 by the 1990s, without having any restriction of detention period. 229 people died in the prisons.

Dersim, which was frequently described by my interlocutors as one of the main “veins pumping blood to the Left” in Turkey, has been drastically touched by the state sponsored political and physical violence after the coup. One of the stories of Sey Uşen, which popped up recurrently takes place in the post-coup setting. After the declaration of curfew, Sey Uşen, who could not see anyone on the street, went to the police station and asked the policeman: “Where are the people? Did you do the same thing you did in 1938? You killed everyone you could catch, didn’t you?”

2.4 The Rise of Identity Politics: 1990s

Following the castration of leftist movements by the coup, the PKK, which managed to survive underground, became an influential actor in Dersim. “Although there had always been Dersimlis in PKK’s upper echelons, Dersim was the only region of Turkish Kurdistan where the PKK had not gained a firm foothold” (Leezenberg, 2003:199) until 1990s. The declaration of OHAL, the Region of Extraordinary Law in 1987 with “a great deal of autonomy” along with the establishment of the new intelligence services in early 90s (Bozarslan, 2001:48) were the attempts of the state to repress the increasing Kurdish mobilization. The alliances made with the Hizbullahi, a Kurdish Islamist group, and collaborations with nationalist radical rightist groups, the state sponsored violence left behind 37,000 dead bodies in the civil war between the years 1984-1999 (Bozarslan, 2001: 45). During the 1990s, 300,000 soldiers and 95,000 village guards, who were only in the chain of command of their local chiefs, were placed in Turkish Kurdistan (Bozarslan, 2001: 47). Moreover, 417 villages in the region were evacuated and the population suffered from the

Officially 171 people were killed by torture in prison. While the deaths of 300 people remain unreported, 73 prisoner’s death was reported as “natural death” along with 43 prisoners’ death as “suicide in prison”. Security service kept secret files for 1 million 638 thousand people. 230 thousand people were put on trial based on these reports. Not only actors but also the published materials, cultural productions and associations were subjected to state violence. 23.677 associations were closed down and 937 movies were censored and more than 40 tons periodicals and newspapers were burned (Doğan, 2010).

food embargo along with the military repression (Leezenberg, 2003:207). Taking into consideration the migrants going to Europe as political refugees after the coup and during the civil war in 1990s, it would not be an exaggeration to state that Dersim started to host more ghosts than living bodies.

While the civil war was becoming more brutal, Sey Uşen participated in the ghosts' club after he was assassinated by a schizophrenic teacher in 1994, and his statue was erected in the following year by the initiative of Mazlum Arslan, the mayor at the time. The statue's erection coincides with the rise of identity-based demands voiced by both Kurds and Alevis. The year of 1994 witnessed another significant event: The conflict between the TIKKO, which is still regarded as a local leftist organization in Dersim, and the PKK in the mountains of Dersim. This conflict is interpreted as the PKK's attempt to become "the sole legitimate representative of Kurdish revolutionary aspiration in the region" (Leezenberg, 2003:205) not only by scholars but also by most of my interlocutors.

2.5 The Alevi Awakening

While the conflict between the Left and the PKK was taking place, and "the religion having become a major point of reference for identity formations", Alevis, who were in alliance with leftist movements began "to assert Alevi identity within a universalistic human rights discourse and secularist rhetoric of religious freedom and self-determination" (Dressler, 2008:286). After the assuage of the ban on associations and the embracement of Turkish-Islam, Alevi voluntary associations spread up all over the country (Bruinessen, 1996: 7) and a new wave of publications appeared on the basis of a communal identity (Kambar, 2010:655). This period is called as the Alevi Revival or Awakening by the scholars working on Alevism (Bruinessen, 1996; Tambar, 2010; Dressler, 2008). It should be noted that Alevi mobilization concurrently appeared with the appropriation of Turkish-Islam synthesis as a state policy

after 1980. This synthesis readdressed the Kemalist state ideology toward a conservative modernism, which is Islamic, but at the same time; secular and nationalist against the possible ethnic, religious separatism (Yavuz, 2003). We can make sense of this concurrence if we take into consideration that the Alevi identity is constructed throughout the time in opposition to Sunni identity as a result of the conflict between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires (Dressler, 2008).

2.6 A Peculiar Case: Dersim Alevism

Scholars estimate the population of Alevis in Turkey between 15 to 20 percent⁶ and “two-third of them speaks Turkish, and the rest either the Kurdish Kurmanci dialect or Zazaki (a northwestern Iranian language)” (Dressler, 2003). The position of Kurdish-Alevis was and still is doubly complicated in the rising identity politics based contemporary political atmosphere. Nationalist attempts from both sides have been trying to make the Alevi identity as a part of their own narrations. While the Turkish part tried to prove that Kurdish and Zaza languages are essentially Turkish (Bruinessen, 1997), the Kurdish part tried “to convince the Alevi Kurds that they really were Kurds and nothing else” (Leezenberg, 2003: 204). On the other hand, “based on distinct Zaza vernacular” (Leezenberg, 2003:200) Zaza nationalists declared that Dersimlis are Zaza, which is “a distinct people, or even a distinct nation” (Leezenberg, 2003:201). Being targeted by diverse discourses resulted in a very peculiar way that Dersimlis started choosing between different identities. For instance, similarly to Erdal Gezik, I encountered different identity appropriations within the same family; while the father identifies himself with Turkishness and the mother with Alevism, one child claims Kurdish identity and the other one states that he is a socialist (Gezik, 2012:9).

⁶ There is no census result showing the numbers of Alevis since Alevis are considered to be Muslim and the state does not recognize sectarian distinctions (Tambar, 2010).

In terms of religious practices, Dersim, the only city where Alevis are in majority (Gültekin, 2010), enclose very peculiar elements. The integration of natural elements and the kinship relations into the religious practices are the specific characteristics of Dersim Alevism (Deniz, 2011:15). For instance, there are 100 aşiret [tribe] in Dersim, most of which are placed outside of the center, and the reis [chief] of those aşirets are regarded as *pir* and *seyid*⁷, religious leaders. It is believed that in the 12th century, nine Alevi holy lineages, *ocaks*, “presumably coming from Khorasan and Daylam arrived in Dersim” (Törne, 2012: 74). The aşirets claim that they are the descendants of one of those *ocaks* and they all have distinct *keramet* [miracle] (Deniz, 2011:44). The integration of natural elements into the religion becomes visible in the ritual of *jiyara/ziyaret*, which refers to visiting a holy place such as the grave of a holy person, trees, mountains, rocks, caves, rivers, lakes, water sources (Gültekin, 2004:63-64.) *Jiyara/ziyaret* are not only places to go to sacrifice animals, light candles and make wishes but also points of gathering and socializing.⁸ Lighting candles in the public space is one of the widespread rituals in practice in Dersim. Thursdays are regarded sacred according to the Alevi belief (Deniz, 2011:67). Every Thursday evening, candles appear in the small corners of the city, around the statues of Sey Uşen, Seyid Riza and the Human Rights/Zilan. Candle, which symbolizes the light and the fire, is lit in every religious ceremony since it is believed that it enlightens the path to follow (Deniz, 2011:76). When I asked how come that people can light candles any place that they want, Zeliha, with whom I met in Gola Çetu (Gola Xızıri)⁹, one of the most significant *jiyara/ziyaret* in the center of Dersim, explained to me the reason as following: “You know what is under this soil, my daughter? The blood...and what is above it, the souls... The souls of our deaths. For

⁷ *pir* and *seyid* refer to the holy figures of the families which are descendents of the holy lineages (Gezik, 2012:189) .

⁸ See Ozan Munzur’s short documentary called “Jiare”. Available online <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKSIIw7-oCE> (accessed on 10.06.2014)

⁹ The *jiyare/ziyaret* of Gola Çetu is not in its original place. Due to the Uzunçayır barrage construction, the original place of Gola Çetu *jiyare/ziyaret* was submerged in 2010. The BDP (Peace and Democracy Party, the representative of Kurdish movement in the parliament) municipality decided to build a large park called Gola Çetu and relocated the *jiyare/ziyaret* in the park.

centuries we are dying without knowing whether we will have a grave or not. That is why every corner is jiyara in Dersim, we are living with souls.”

2.7 Dersim Becoming the Specter of Turkish Politics

Dersim’s becoming the specter of the Turkish contemporary political arena happened during the Democratic Initiative Process, in Turkish açılım süreci initiated by the AKP [Justice and Development Party] government with the discourse of improving the standards of democracy with regards to the ethnic and religious groups’ conditions (AK Parti Tanıtım ve Medya Bakanlığı, 2010). The initiative was composed of different projects targeting the Kurds, Greeks, Armenians and Alevis. On the 10th November 2009, the 71st death anniversary of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the “founding father” of the Turkish Republic, Onur Öymen, a deputy of Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People’s Party, CHP) blamed the AKP government for not being consistent on fighting against terror, and compromising with the implementation of softer discourses such as “do not let mothers cry anymore”. By stating in the parliament “Didn’t the mothers of Dersim, of Cyprus, of Gallipoli cry? No one told at that moment let’s not make mothers cry” (Tuna&Orhan, 2013:9-10) Öymen opened the Pandora’s Box containing the knowledge of the Dersim Genocide (1938), which was officially silenced until then. Afterwards, Dersim, where CHP is considerably well supported in comparison to the rest of the country, started to be openly “diagnosed” by the AKP¹⁰ and the BDP supporters¹¹ with the so called Stockholm syndrome. Although Dersim “overcame” this syndrome in the last two local elections by electing the Kurdish parties (DTP and BDP), the city still has a peculiar place in the Turkish Kurdistan which makes the Kurdish movement feel insecure before elections.

¹⁰ Kamış, Mehmet. (80.08.2010) “Celladına Aşık Olmak” *Zaman* available online http://www.zaman.com.tr/mehmet-kamis/celladina-asik-olmak_1025254.html accessed on 07.06.2014.

¹¹ Demir, Ferit (04.03.2013). “Ahmet Türk’ten Tunceliliere Şok Sözler” CNNTURK available online <http://www4.cnnturk.com/2013/guncel/05/04/ahmet.turkten.tuncelilere.sok.sozler/706646.0/> accessed (07.06.2014).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Taking into consideration the critical and reflexive works on the process of writing ethnography and doing fieldwork, I avoided framing my fieldwork as a “bounded area” to stand away from “an overdetermined setting to discover otherness” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997:5). My fieldwork started in Budapest, continued in Istanbul and Berlin and finally ended up in Dersim. While having conversations with Kurdish political refugees living in Budapest and Berlin I realized how the label of Stockholm Syndrome effectively contributes to the otherness of Dersim within Turkish Kurdistan. With the motivation of “writing against culture” (Abu-Lughod, 1991) I focused on the relations between the statue of Sey Uşen and the monument of Mustafa Kemal, the so-called “loved one” if we followed the logic of the Stockholm Syndrome, to capture the ground for negotiation that the statue of Sey Uşen opens.

Being in conversation with Dersimlis living outside of Dersim, both in Berlin and in Istanbul, gave me the opportunity to catch stories from different temporalities which helped me to reconstruct the story of Sey Uşen both as a madman and as a seyid. In total I conducted 27 interviews and spent one month in Istanbul, one week in Berlin and a month in Dersim.

In order to protect the privacy of my interlocutors, I kept their names anonymous and used pseudonyms to denote their speech. However, I did not conceal the names of public figures such as the mayors of Dersim. Most of my interlocutors have Alevi-Kurdish background and except three of them they are either engaged in leftist or the Kurdish movement. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with the mayors of Dersim, while the rest of my interviews were unstructured (Bernard, 1995).

As I was interested in what is lacking as much as what is materially present without prioritizing one over another (Navaro-Yashin, 2012) I preferred to let my interlocutors “express themselves in their own pace” (Bernard, 1995:209). Unstructured interviews offered

me the chance to catch the connections that my interlocutors establish with the statue of Sey Uşen. Not conceptualizing the state as “tangible social institutions or stately persona” but as “the sites of everyday life, where people attempt to produce meaning for themselves by appropriating the political” (Navaro-Yashin, 2002:135), the unstructured interviews helped me to grasp the way that the state operates in Dersimlis’ expressions.

The presence of the non-present and the lost frequently appearing in the interviews lead me taking seriously the ghosts or in Zeliha’s words, the souls. Considering the statue as a form that “the state poses itself as an artifact” (Ahıska, 2011:12) I portrayed how haunting, which belongs to “the structure of every hegemony” (Derrida, 1994:37), operates. That is the reason I preferred using Dersim instead of Tunceli since the struggle around taking the name Dersim back is one of the concrete examples illustrating that “hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting” (Derrida, 1994:37).

4.0 THE STATUE OF SEY UŞEN

Upon entering the city of Tunceli, set spectacularly on steep hillsides above the river Munzur, one is greeted – as is true for any other Turkish city – by statues of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the ‘founding father’ of modern Turkey. Yet walking down a few lanes from the main square, one encounters a different sight: again a statue, but this time of a man holding his cigarette in hand and who seems lost in contemplation. The erection of the statue in 1995 was reported by the mainstream media as such: “Turkish parliamentary deputy chairman Kamer Genç paid 150.000TL in order to erect a statue of a mentally sick person at the centre of Tunceli.”¹² For the first time Dersim (today officially Tunceli) was mentioned through the trope of madness in its time in the mainstream media instead of numbers of guerillas who were “rendered ineffective” or martyred Turkish soldiers. Diren Solmaz’s poem “Ölmedin Seyit Hüseyin” [You did not Die Seyit Hüseyin], which won the competition organized by the municipality, is written on the lower part of the statue along with the name of the contemporary mayor from Sosyal Demokrat Halkçı Parti, (Social Democratic People’s Party, SHP¹³), Mazlum Arslan who initiated the erection of the statue and the contemporary Turkish parliamentary deputy chairman Kamer Genç as the donor. A fountain right next to the statue was also built at that time. The plants covering the statue were planted by the BDP municipality during the mayorship of Edibe Şahin (1999-2004). Even though the statue is surrounded by plants and there is an iron wire around the plants, especially on Thursday nights’ people light candles next to the iron wire as is the case for two central statues: The Human Rights/Zilan Statue and the Statue of Seyid Rıza.

¹² From the documentary “İnsanın Deli Dediği” directed by Egemen Adak and Hira Selma Kalkan.

¹³ CHP along with other political parties was banned after the coup d’état of 1980. SHP was founded as a result of “a major split among the ranks of the social democrats after the return of the electoral competition in 1983. By receiving 24.8 % of the vote in the 1987 elections SHP became the main opposition party. In 1990 SHP became a full member of the Socialist International. In 1995 SHP unified with reformed CHP. (Docherty & Lamb 2006:289) ; (Ayata & Ayata, 2007:212).



Figure 3: The Inscriptions of the Statue of Sey Uşen. Photograph by Armanç Yıldız.

During our conversation, the previous BDP mayor Edibe Şahin mentioned her discomfort with the height of the Sey Uşen statue: “The statue reflects the mentality of the time when it was erected. I had a project aiming at its modification but I couldn't realize it yet. I was planning to lower the statue down, and make the water flowing from the fountain (which is right next to the statue) to come out of the hands of Sey Uşen statue, so that people would be able to drink water from his hands.” What she was referring to by “the mentality of the time”, which is embodied in the unreachable position of the statue, is the result of the emergency rule established in 1987, when the state attempted to establish its repressive forces to establish excessive control, which is expressed as “controlling even the flying birds” in one of my informant’s words.

The statue of Sey Uşen was opened with a state ceremony at which the governor of the province and the chief of police were also present in a time period when, in Mazlum Arslan’s words, “everyday a number of guerrilla corpses were brought into the city”. By expressing her wish to reshape the statue in such a way that would allow people to interact with it, Edibe Şahin subtly proposes an alternative way of governmentality, where the local government, which poses itself in the form of this artifact, embraces the people instead of looking down on them. “While commissioning the statue of Seyid Rıza, my prior concern was its accessibility. [...] Now kids tell their mother that they are going to sit on the lap of

their grandfather to get permission to go to the centre” states Edibe Şahin to accentuate the BDP’s different political stance.

Mazlum Arslan, who is remembered by some of my interlocutors as the first and the only mayor of Dersim who was hanging out in the city with security forces, was elected as a result of a boycotted local election in 1994. Zülfikar Bey recounts this period as follows: “There was a dirty war going on. Our comrades were massacred. As an indication of social solidarity, we boycotted an election that we could easily win.” As it would be expected, Mazlum Arslan’s account of this period is quite different: “The political atmosphere was totally polarized. Despite of all those threats coming from different groups, I insisted on democracy. Then the public also showed that they wanted democracy. I was elected with the votes of % 44 of the population [16.615 votes, %44.84 of the total votes¹⁴].” In the 90s intensively conflictual political atmosphere of Dersim, where there was no room for anything else but friends and enemies or “us” and the state (Bruinessen, 1994) the success of a SHP member is quite significant.

While having a conversation about the statue of Sey Uşen, Mazlum Arslan remarked that “Sey Uşen was a public figure [halka mal olmuş bir kimseydi]. And we were the municipality of the people [biz de halkın belediyesiydik]. We wanted to honor what people attach value to.” In *İnsanın Deli Dediği* [What Human Calls as a Madman], the short documentary movie about the life of Sey Uşen, his nephew expresses her shock at the funeral as such: “When I saw people who were very upset I couldn’t know how to react. Dersimlis loved him so much. Although we were from the same family, they were far closer to him. I felt as a stranger in the funeral.”¹⁵ The massive participation of Dersimlis in the funeral and the heavy ambiance of lament are reasons that led Mazlum Arslan to commission the statue:

¹⁴ Yerel Seçim: http://eski.yerelnet.org.tr/secimler/il_secim.php?ilid=62&yil=1994&bbb=5284 accessed 30.05.2014

¹⁵ From the documentary “*İnsanın Deli Dediği*” (2008) directed by Egemen Adak and Hira Selma Kalkan.

“It was the most crowded funeral of Tunceli. When it was heard that Sey Uşen was murdered people got so upset, it was so tragic...”

4.1 Sey Uşen’s Assassination

Although there is a consensus on the tragic feature of Sey Uşen’s death, the tragedy originates from a different source in different narrations. Özgür (30), a Parti Cephe (Party-Front) member, stated that Sey Uşen was murdered as a result of a fascist attack. He emphasized twice that the murderer was from Konya, a city which is commonly labeled with Sunni Islam driven conservative tendencies (Akın at all, 2013). Ali (38), a minibus driver affiliated with the BDP, thinks that Sey Uşen was killed by the police because he had the knowledge of a secret.

Whereas in my small-talk conversations with Dersimlis living in İstanbul, the Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization (JITEM), which is known for its use of contra guerilla methods, was commonly named as involved in the murder, no one narrated the assassination of Sey Uşen as a JITEM motivated action in Dersim. When I specifically asked about JITEM’s possible involvement of the assassination, Erdal (40), who is working as an ambulance driver, laughed a bit and said: “Why would JITEM bother to get in contact with a schizophrenic teacher to kill Sey Uşen? They were killing people on a daily basis in the streets in those days [...] But you might be right actually, if they would have killed Sey Uşen explicitly there would be a massive mobilization, people would attack them. During Berkin Elvan protests, when İbo¹⁶ passed between the police barricades and the protestors’ barricades the clash between them stopped until a protestor took İbo outside of the clash-zone. They were afraid to harm İbo, since they know people would get very aggressive.” Halil, a journalist, Cengiz, the former party leader of Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi

¹⁶ İbo is one of the contemporary *madmen* living in Dersim.

(Freedom and Solidarity Party, ÖDP), and Rıza, known as a *dede* of the people¹⁷, and Mazlum Arslan recounted that Sey Uşen was killed by the stone that a schizophrenic teacher threw at his head while he was sleeping on the street. Mazlum Arslan, who knew the schizophrenic teacher personally from his years of high school administration describes the murderer's situation as follows: "He was sometimes coming to my room when I was the director of Cumhuriyet High School, to ask for permission to leave early or being absent. Whenever I asked for the reason he came up with excuses such as he should fight against the Russians or he has secret meetings etc. I wrote several petitions to Ministry of National Education for his removal from his duty but they never responded."

While Halil, along with Cengiz and Mazlum Arslan, interprets the assassination he puts forward that the murderer was jealous of Sey Uşen: "Look, both of them are madman, right? One of them is a public figure, everyone takes care of him, buys food, offers cigarettes and is happy when Sey Uşen comes and talks to them. But no one likes the other schizophrenic guy. It is a jealousy crisis." Although one can rightly expect from a statue to forge the stories of important moments in the life of the person it represents, the different accounts of Sey Uşen's assassination illustrate that the statue of Sey Uşen cannot even fixate a narration about his death.

4.2 The Cult of Monumentalization: Public Monuments as Zombies

While telling me his memories of Sey Uşen, Mazlum Arslan stopped a moment and said: "It has been long time, I don't remember things and events in detail. But I cannot forget the moment when he slapped me in the face (laughing). I was in high school and my only fault was to call him by his name. He approached me and slapped me." I was surprised when I

¹⁷ *Dede* is a socio-religious leader in Alevi communities. The phrase "halkın dedesi" implies a difference between the *dede* of the people and the *dede* of the state who are paid by the state as officers of *cemevis*, the Alevi cultural associations which are not officially accepted as worship places.

heard the story of the slap since in accordance with the majority of my interlocutors Mazlum Bey used the adjective of harmless as one of the first words to describe Sey Uşen. In a facetious way I asked whether his decision to erect the statue had to do with the slap. He explained the reason without mentioning the slap again: “I thought that Sey Uşen shouldn’t be forgotten. I wanted to let new generations know about his life.”

David Harvey interprets the motivation behind erecting statues as an attempt of authorities aiming “to corral memory into a monument; they wish to memorialize and monumentalize in some way or other. They don’t want it to be alive, they want it to be dead” (Pender, 2007:21). Although in the literature concerning public monuments, statues are generally seen as the attempt to fix a certain form of historical interpretation (Crapanzano, 2004), and a tool to mastering the past from the perspective of the present (Ahıska, 2011), as it seems from the memories of his assassination that the statue of Sey Uşen could not fulfill its *raison d’être*.

Max Weber construes the relation between art and salvation religion as a competition which resulted with art taking over “the function of a this-worldly salvation” by providing “a salvation from the routines of everyday life, and especially from the increasing pressures of theoretical and practical rationalism” (Weber, 1946: 342). The common ground of aestheticization and religiosity for him is the practice of “emotional propaganda and mass appeals” (Weber, 1946: 343). Religiosity started to share the propagandist ground with the visual representation of living bodies as a novelty of the Turkish Republic in this geography.

Although there were few figurative sculptures produced in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, the sculpture as a form was debatable. Specifically three dimensional sculptures were banned due to their similarity to idols. Until the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the photograph and the sculpture as artistic forms were considered problematic although a few of them entered to the Ottoman land (Tekiner, 2010:32). In Jean-Luc Nancy’s words, the idols,

fabricated god, which were banned in several religious traditions, gained legitimacy with nation states (Nancy, 2005:31). In the Turkish case, the statues of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which started to appear during Mustafa Kemal's life in the 1920s, were the first concrete forms of expressions of the newly emerging nation state. To propagate the new regime's ideals, the spread of Atatürk statues were legitimized with reference to progress and civilization (Ahıska, 2011:11-12). Meltem Ahıska puts forward that along with the growing cult of Atatürk, his depictions as a "semi-god" figure, "contributed to his monuments being regarded as equally sacred" (Ahıska, 2011:13). In accordance with Weber's approach to the common propagandist ground of aestheticization and religiosity (Weber, 1946: 343), the statue of Atatürk is on the one hand a product of secularization, and on the other hand it continues playing with sacredness. It seems possible to state that both reason and affect are involved in the production of the fabricated god in the case of Atatürk statues (Ahıska, 2011:12). By simultaneously using a modernist form of expression and playing with nationalism and its "religious overtones", "[t]he state poses itself as an artifact" (Ahıska, 2011:12).

Conceptualizing the statue of Atatürk as the embodied expression of the state helps us to understand the spread of Atatürk statues all over the country right after the coup d'état of 1980. The generals profited well from the coincidence that the year 1981 was the hundredth anniversary of Mustafa Kemal (Tekiner, 2010:194). Kenan Evren, who was the Chief of General Staff and the Chief of the State during military regime between the years 1980-1983, established the legitimacy of the military rule based on the claim that the military follows the route of Atatürk. "We are either on the left or on the right, we are on Atatürk's route" made Atatürk the reference point of people looking for legitimacy (Tekiner, 2010:190). Starting from the late 1920s and peaking after 1980 coup d'état the image of Atatürk, which was

sacralized and eternalized through various representations, became the representation of the Turkish state in the public sphere.

The aestheticizations of Atatürk's image went hand in hand with the effort of standardization. In 1994 the new set of standards on how to erect Atatürk status was determined by the Turkish Standards Institution. Today, the low quality fabrications found in every primary and high school surround people of this country both mentally and physically. Michael Bilig suggests that what reproduces a nation is banal, insignificant practices, every day encounters with symbols such as the national flag. What he refers to as double neglect is the tendency of reducing nationalism "to a surplus phenomenon" and forgetting to analyze "how established nation-states daily reproduce nations" (Billig, 2005:193). He claims that taking into account the banal nationalism would have a double remembering effect: that of banal nationalism "by which nation-states are reproduced is to be remembered," along with "the habits of thought which have encountered a neglect of this reproduction" (Billig, 2005:194). The cult of Atatürk in that respect seems to me the psychic glue of Turkishness which is the most significant element of banal Turkish nationalism.

However, beside its powerful and successful establishment of Atatürk cult; Atatürk monument as any other monument is not free from evoking memories against its grains. The widespread practice to name a mini-bus stop as Beton [concrete] because of its closeness to an Atatürk monument is one of the attempts to reverse the memory regime evoked by the monument emphasizing its zombiesque characteristics. However, these kinds of reversals are not powerful enough to transform the memory regime ossified by the Atatürk monument. For instance, the performance of sculptor Ragıp Çeçen who erected a 3 meters high Atatürk statue at the Kızılay Carrefour [the central square of Ankara] to protest Melih Gökçek, [the mayor of Ankara from AKP], or the leader of a trade union who threatened the government by going to Anıtkabir and complaining about them to Atatürk illustrate clearly that the

Atatürk cult provides justification for those who are in need of it to voice political demands. (Tekiner, 2010:191).

Unsurprisingly the monument of Atatürk was the first public monument in Dersim. It is today situated at the main square of the city, which is officially called Cumhuriyet [Republic] and unofficially called Palavra [lie, empty talk] Square. When I asked where the name Palavra comes from, I received different answers.



Figure 4: The Statue of Atatürk. Photograph by Armanc Yıldız.

For instance, Deniz (27), who is a university student, talked about the high number of unemployed people who pace back and forth in the square all day and talk about politics all the time. Hasan Çakmak, who is an author of *Yeni-Sentez*, an online journal where writings, commentaries about Dersim is published, narrates the story of the name Palavra as a product of the years of 1978-79. During the 1970s, when Dersim became an important centre for the Left in Turkey and grew to be the dominant local actor during 1970s, people were gathering at the main square of the city and talked about politics the whole day. Çakmak, who identifies as one of those leftists hanging out in the square, states that the public was concerned about the splits into fractions and that was how the Left lost its credibility in the eyes of the public. The name Palavra is a sign of this process of loosing reliability.¹⁸ While passing by the square together, Barış, a BDP supporter university student from Amed [officially Diyarbakır], the cultural capital of Turkish Kurdistan, said: “I don’t know, if it would be in Amed, I would tell that it is because of the statue of Beton [Concrete], but here we are in Tunceli, right? You never know (laughing).”

Barış’s cynical comment, the use of Tunceli instead of Dersim and the comparison he makes between Amed and Tunceli say a lot about the Kurdish movement’s approach to Dersim. İsmail Beşikçi, who is the first Turkish scholar worked on the Kurdish issue and was imprisoned for 17 years because his works were considered propaganda is the first one who wrote about the 1938 Dersim Genocide and analyzed the contemporary support that CHP gets in Dersim as the Stockholm Syndrome (Beşikçi, 1990). Beşikçi did not only play a significant role in shaping the Kurdish movement’s vision about Dersim but also to those academics working on Dersim. Baskın Oran, who is known for his works on nationalism and minorities in Turkey, gave the opening speech during the “1st International Tunceli (Dersim) Symposium in 4-6 October 2012”, where he interpreted the fact that the votes of CHP in

¹⁸Hasan Çakmak “Palavra Meydanı” *Yeni Sentez* accessed June 6, 2014 http://www.yeni-sentez.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=154

Dersim is far higher compared to the rest of the country as a result of Stockholm Syndrome (Oran, 2010). The fallen last two digits of the year of Atatürk's death, which connote his eternal presence, offer a suitable ground for people who tend to analyze the peculiar political inclination of Dersim. However, I argue that, the story of Sey Uşen tells us another story rather than the love for the eternal executer.

4.3 Aestheticization of Sey Uşen

The statue of Sey Uşen is the second public monument in the city centre. Taking into consideration the repertoire of monumentalization that I tried to illustrate above, Sey Uşen statue which was commissioned by the SHP mayor and financed by Kamer Genç, the contemporary vice president of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, ushered a novelty in the way that "[t]he state poses itself as an artifact" (Ahıska, 2011:12). Erecting Sey Uşen's statue which cannot ossify any narrative about the person it represents but rather produces non-coherent, unsure, open ended, unfixed stories about his life and even about his assassination, points at the fact that the SHP in Dersim differentiates itself from the CHP's repertoire of monumentalization. In other words, SHP which emerged as the social democratic wing of the CHP, established a new mode of expressing the local government presence in the public sphere of Dersim.

In order to grasp the change in the mode of the state's action a differentiation between memorial and monument can be helpful. Michael Rowlands, who suggests a symbolic division between them, states that "the former is about the healing embrace of remembrance and reconciliation, whereas the latter are usually celebratory and triumphalist" (Rowlands, 1999:130). I think the statue of Sey Uşen can be conceptualized as a memorial rather than a monument. In that sense, going against the repertoire of monumentalization of its time the statue of Sey Uşen does not celebrate anything that people should remember coherently but

rather it opens a space to mourn by officializing Sey Uşen's body as a grievable one, because as Arthur Danto puts forward, the monuments can only commemorate the memorable (Danto, 1985:152), and hence, we might add, the permissible or officially recognized. While doing so, in a geography where Kurdish guerrillas' dead bodies cannot be buried in public funerals, his funeral being organized by the municipality and the opening of his statue becoming a public event with the participation of local governors promote him as a "good dead." In an atmosphere where mourning for guerrillas' dead bodies is officially banned, Sey Uşen's becoming grievable opens a space for mourning for the "good dead". Leaving the way that Sey Uşen became grievable for the following chapter, I argue that the erection of Sey Uşen's statue thus underlines the illegitimacy of the Kurdish movement in the eyes of the state which leaves behind non-grievable deaths (Özsoy, 2010).

While obscuring the public recognition of guerrilla's dead bodies as a memorial, the statue of Sey Uşen opens a space for people to tell stories which go against the constitutive taboos of Turkish state without constructing a coherent narration, in other words a counter memory regime. For instance, the story that I encountered most frequently about Sey Uşen's life was the allegory he made between the coup and the 1938 Genocide. The coup was followed by the declaration of curfew. The curfew meant for Sey Uşen, who was living on the streets, encountering with no-one but soldiers for a day. Although people accounted on differently, the common point of various narration was that Sey Uşen ended up shouting at the soldiers: "What did you do to the people? Where are the people? Did you do the same thing you did in 1938? You killed everyone you could catch, didn't you?" Different interlocutors integrated various motifs to their accounts such as Sey Uşen throwing stones at a police station, or crying for the loss of his mother during the Genocide and the like.

While talking about this specific event, Mustafa (50), who is a relative of Sey Uşen, started telling me how the village of Sey Uşen, Beydamı, experienced 1938: "Beydamı was

one of the lucky villages. The villages across the road were completely destroyed. My grandfathers from both sides, my aunt and my father's uncle they were all burned alive in Türtüşmek during the Genocide. And before 1938, there are stories of 1915 as well. Brad Pitt is my relative. Can't you see that we look similar (laughing)... During 1915, the Christian missionary school brought kids to USA; the dad of my grandfather was one of them. In Beydamı village people were in contact with those in USA until they died. I remember those letter exchanges from my childhood."

Considering the official aggressiveness towards anybody who voices the Armenian Genocide 1915 and Dersim Genocide 1938 which were the constitutive elements of the state policy of Turkey until recently, it seems possible to state that the sovereignty of the Turkish state is constituted through the prohibition of mourning in Turkey. I argue that erecting a statue of a person who does not have any triumphalist or celebratory stories to evoke has strong links to the "interdiction of mourning" (Nichanian, 2002) experienced in this specific region. In most of my interlocutors' imagination Dersim connotes a geography which opened its mountains to the oppressed of the region; "socialists, communists, Armenians, Kurds, Alevis we are all here... What those mountains witnessed is not comparable to any others" says Doğan, one of the founders of Munzur'un Delileri [Madmen of Munzur], an ecological organization. Therefore, Dersim experienced the "interdiction of mourning" on an extreme level. A geography which is touched by criminalization of mourning for the Armenian Genocide 1915, for the Dersim Genocide 1938, for the state sponsored violence of coup d'état 1980 and for the results of the civil war between PKK and the state which peaked at mid-1990, the statue of an ambivalent character became a suitable object for people to tell stories which are subtly challenging the official state discourse embodied in Atatürk statue.

"If mourning allowed for grieving" overcoming the feeling of loss through the lapse of time might be possible states, Yael Navaro-Yashin (Navaro-Yashin, 2009:15). In her work

on Cyprus she discusses melancholia with reference to ‘ethnic conflict’. She asserts that “when the person who has been lost is one who belongs to the community of the so-defined ‘enemy’, the loss is not symbolized as a ‘loss’, and therefore it is not grieved over” (Navaro-Yashin, 2009:15). When the feeling of loss is not registered or ritualized it can generate melancholia as “a psychical subjective state where the object of loss is largely unconscious to the identity of the mourner and where, therefore, the loss is irredeemable, ambivalent, and lingering” (Navaro-Yashin, 2009:16). Furthermore, she proposes the notions of spatial melancholia and melancholic objects to show that melancholia mediates also through objects and non-human environments (Navaro-Yashin, 2009:17). In Navaro-Yashin’s conceptualization, Sey Uşen cannot be taken as a melancholic object, since he is an officially recognized, a grievable body. However, I think what the statue of Sey Uşen does is to open a space to voice Dersimlis’ unrecognized loss. That is why it can be taken as a memorial rather than a monument and indirectly contributes to the healing process. Without romanticizing the loss or attempting to picture what is lost (Nichanian, 2002) in Benjaminian fashion, like a collector who tries to capture the sequences of this story, I suggest thinking about the Sey Uşen statue as an object onto which the melancholia in the air of Dersim is projected. While evoking stories which are subtly challenging the constitutive taboos of the Turkish Republic, the statue of Sey Uşen negotiates with the statue of Atatürk which is situated in a parallel street. This negotiation illustrates that the electoral preference of Dersimlis should be interpreted by critical lenses instead of easy labels such as Stockholm syndrome. As the title of the poem, “You Did Not Die Sey Uşen” suggests, the existence of the Sey Uşen statue can be seen as the agonizing object, the “persistence of a present past or the return of the dead which the worldwide work of mourning cannot get rid of” (Derrida, 1994:101).

5.0 THE STORY OF SEY UŞEN

Mustafa: We should position Sey Uşen correctly. If not this society would have another trauma. And believe me, this is the last thing we need.

5.1 Before Coming to Dersim: Sey Uşen at Home

I had the chance to conduct interviews with four family members. I visited Çiçek (around 75) and Zülfikar (55) in their house with Mustafa (50). Mustafa, who is a minibus driver, became one of the key figures for researchers working on Dersim. He contributed to most of the documentaries made on the Dersim Genocide 1938. Before contacting him, I did not know that he is a relative of Sey Uşen. He introduced me to two relatives of Sey Uşen and accompanied me during the interviews conducted with Zülfikar who is Mustafa's maternal uncle and Çiçek, Mustafa's mother.

Çiçek lives in the same building with some relatives including Zülfikar in Türüşmek (Aktuluk), a former Armenian neighborhood (Antranik, 2012). When I told her my name she took me as one from Dersim and that is how I realized that Çiçek is a widespread name in the region. At this very moment I also realized why people were starting directly to talk with me in Kırmancki after I introduced myself. The interview with Çiçek was the only one that required translation since I do not speak Kırmancki and she does not speak Turkish.

According to her story, Sey Uşen comes from a modest family living in the Beydamı village of Pertek. He had one sister, Beser, and three brothers; Ali Haydar, Yusuf and Baki. Çiçek Teyze emphasized more than once that Sey Uşen was a healthy person both mentally and physically before his compulsory military service. He had a girl before going to the military service and when he came back they had a boy as well. But when he returned "He was not talking much, he was behaving differently than before. He developed some sorts of obsessions. He had some jealousy attacks as well. He was jealous of his wife."

Zülfikar who has been living in Germany for years and came back to Dersim for holiday had an overlapping narration with Çiçek: “I remember him as an aggressive person. He stabbed his wife once... and then she left the house. Mustafa’s aunt raised their two kids, she organized their marriage etc. [...] You know in feudal societies there are never ending disputes over land and animals. In one of those daily clashes, Sey Uşen Amca [uncle] threw a stone at İsmail Amca’s head [one of the villagers, who belongs to the same aşiret, [tribe]. The guy got half-paralyzed, he couldn’t talk afterwards. Can you imagine no one made a complaint about Sey Uşen Amca. No one would go to the gendarmerie in our village, but it also shows the value they regard to human life, right? After that event, Sey Uşen Amca [uncle] left the village.”

Referring to the widespread rumors that Sey Uşen caught his wife with his brother when he returned from the military service, he stated that: “There is a lot of gossip about Sey Uşen Amca [uncle], probably you heard about it already.... But what would you expect from a community that does not produce anything other than gossip... Imagine that there is no television, no electricity, no proper routes for going to the city, nothing... [...] Before doing his compulsory military service Sey Uşen Amca was a road construction worker. It is a hard job, not an easy one. He had kids. He was a healthy person. When he came back to the village after his military service, he was a different person.”

I encountered Zeliha (around 65) in Gola Çetu (Gola Xızırı) jiyare/ziyaret which is situated at the point where the river Munzur meets the brook of Pülümür. Every Thursday a group, mostly women, gathers in Gola Çetu jiyare/ziyaret to sacrifice an animal(s), and light candles.



Figure 5: Gola Çetu. Photograph from the Documentary of Ozan Munzur, “Jiare”.

At Gola Çetu there were 15 women sitting in front of the rocks and chatting in Kırmancki. Women were gossiping about the ones who came for sacrificing animals and left before I arrived. When I said, I am conducting a research about the statue of Sey Uşen, a women in Gola Çetu presented Zeliha to me as a descendent of the Kurêsan tribe, thus a relative of Sey Uşen. The belief in Dersim Alevism that the Kurêsan tribe is the eternal processor of Dızgun/Duzgı,¹⁹ which is one of the most significant symbols in the belief system, places the Kurêsan tribe in a high-position in the social hierarchies of the tribal system (Deniz, 2011:45). In accordance with Zülfikar and Çiçek, she told me that “something happened” to Sey Uşen during his military service. “After he came back, we don’t know why but he hated his wife. He resorted to the mountains. He was unable to stay at home any more. And then he left the village, his family, his two kids and his wife...”

Whereas his relatives bring to the fore the compulsory military service as the turning point in Sey Uşen’s life, many people who knew Sey Uşen from the time he passed in the centre of Dersim, the story about the military service is replaced by another in which he caught his wife with his brother. Ali’s narration is a good example to illustrate how the story of betrayal may become a reference point that people feel strongly attached to. I had a chance

¹⁹ *Dızgun Bawa* is a mountain near to *Qıl/Kıl* village of Nazımiye district. The holiness of the mountain comes from a story of a shaper who was able to turn the land green by his stick during winter. One day his father followed him secretly and saw *Şaheyder*’s miracle. At that day, *Şaheyder* escaped from him to the mountain because he was ashamed of having miracles in the presence of his father, and he never came back. This legend is accepted as the myth of origin of Kurêsan tribe (Deniz, 2011:121).

to have a long conversation with Ali and his close friend Hüseyin while having dinner. Ali and Hüseyin are close friends and they are both engaged in the Kurdish movement. While Ali (38) presents himself as a supporter of the BDP representative of the Kurdish movement in the parliament) Hüseyin (40) associates himself with the PKK (Kurdish Worker's Party, the guerrilla organization of Kurdish movement), from its socialist wing, as he put it. Ali is a driver commuting between Elazığ and Tunceli and Hüseyin is running a restaurant at Harçık, nearby the Harçık Bridge where Seyid Rıza's troops started the resistance against the Genocide of 1938 according to the story I was told to on the way to the restaurant. At some point the discussion transformed into a dispute culminating in Ali leaving the table for a while. Just before he left we were talking about the act of becoming mad based on a story of betrayal:

Ali: Besides all that, imagine you caught your wife with your brother... It is like dying. But imagine moruk [dude], your wife with your brother. It is terrible.

Hüseyin: I don't know Ali, what is the difference? Cheating is a form of betrayal; it is not important with whom she is betraying. I was denounced to the cops by my brother. My wife started to work for the AKP when I was in prison. Did I get mad? No, I broke contact with my brother and I divorced. No one would erect my statue (laughing).

While Hüseyin was telling us his story of "betrayal" Ali started to shout to emphasize the significance of the family and the difference between a betrayal of a family member and an "ordinary" betrayal (by a stranger) before leaving.

5.2 The Military Service or Betrayal: Possible Reasons of Becoming Mad

In the above narratives, both the reasons for going mad coming have specific gendered connotations in Turkish society. Taking into account that the murder of a woman by a man is considered as concern of the "private" realm and goes generally unpunished or at best is punished less than it is required due to the easily bestowed reduction in penalty, going mad from being made a cuckold offers a plausible narration not only in front of the court but in

public as well. As Ulmschneider (1995) puts forward, any crime against a woman perpetrated by a man can be considered out of the political; because rape, sexual harassment, battery and murder are not only acts of violence, but the manifestation of the structural male domination over women. Although the family is defined by Turkish law as the basic unit of the society constituted by equal spouses (Koğacioğlu, 2004), the civil codes allows the judge to adjudicate based on what is perceived as commonsensical or “tradition”. For instance, Dicle Koğacioğlu argues that honor crimes are considered as the consequences of “tradition” and “culture” in Turkey. Conceptualizing it in the realm of culture or tradition decouples honor crimes from patriarchy and results in the creation of an “other”, namely Kurds whose life is squeezed in the tradition attributed to them. When honor crimes are coded as “tradition”, the political context is ignored and the institutional structures reproducing them are therefore ignored (Koğacioğlu, 2004).

Ayşe Gül Altınay argues that the myth of the military nation serves establishing the male dominance in the family based on his experience of the military service. The compulsory military service is associated with the cultural, national characteristics of the country. The political-military difference produced by the state through the exclusion of women from the army is propagated as a “natural” cultural difference (Altınay, 2004). This cultural difference is transformed into the superiority of the husband based on the fact that he possesses the knowledge of the barracks, in other words the knowledge of the nation, of arms, of machines, of the homeland (Altınay, 2004:78). Being dominated by the male partner reflects itself in the definition of the woman as an object to be protected. The state privileges the husband who is carrying the burden of protecting the woman and the honor of the family on the level of jurisdiction by providing him the reduction in punishment in cases where a woman cheated on him. That is how the discourse of “protecting the woman” contributes to the perpetual reproduction of the state institution’s mobilization around the notion of honor.

Moreover, the way that Ali got angry and left the table while discussing the honor of a man and the significance of incest can be read as a performance of masculinity which expresses his attachment to the notion of family.

Through the notion of honor [namus] the trauma belonging to the female sphere can be connected to the “ordinary” trauma of the male world namely compulsory military service. The myth of the military nation became the dominant discourse of the state during the early republican period and it rose upon the racial nationalism and its military nature introduced by social scientists (Altınay, 2004). The male subject, who is granted a reduction of punishment based on the claim that he purified his honor, is mobilized in order to protect the honor of the country by the compulsory military service which is not convertible to any other kind of compulsory service. Since 1909, with the acceptance of non-Muslim citizens into the Ottoman army (Hacısalıhoğlu, 2010), every male citizen of this geography has experienced at least holding a weapon if not making actual use of it, or – if refusing to do so – has been exposed to humiliation in order to get a doctor’s report “diagnosing” homosexuality or physical deficiency. Conscientious objection is not officially recognized in Turkey and what follows declaring the conscientious objection is either social death or imprisonment for an unknown period based on an unregulated procedure (Öğünç, 2013).

Nükhet Sirman puts forward that the construction of masculinity in Turkey has strong roots in the nation building process. What is expected from the male subject is first to be a part of the army where they will transcend their ethnic, class and gender position in the social hierarchy in order to become a part of a larger hierarchical organization and secondly becoming the reis [leader] of his nuclear family. In this way the male subject can become a political actor in the newly established state without carrying the hierarchies of the former structure which is fundamentally based on the larger family structures (Sirman, 2000; Kandiyoti, 1996).

The construction of masculinity during military service reflects itself in everyday language as well, for instance a man who has not yet finished his duty of military service is not counted as a real man (Altınay, 2004: 78). The structural reflection of this is that a man should finish his national duty in order to have a regular job or to get married. Becoming a man requires being successfully a part of the unquestionable military hierarchies and bearing the possible outcomes of this structure. The compulsory experience of living in a military barrack for 6 to 12 months, being trained for killing, being indoctrinated with the ideological justifications of the existence of a strong army, being subjected to diverse practices of violence coming from soldiers of superior rank results in many cases with psychological problems. Those who are not able to psychologically or physically endure this cannot finalize the process of becoming a “real man.”

5.3 Sey Uşen as a Madman

Although the relatives agreed that he was no longer the Sey Uşen that they knew when he returned from the military service, their narratives about the new Sey Uşen are not in harmony. Both Zülfikar and Mustafa, who were members of illegal revolutionary leftist organizations during their youth and passed several years in prison due to their attachment to revolutionary leftist movements, are clearly in opposition to mystifying Sey Uşen, while the female relatives (Çiçek and Zeliha) believe that Sey Uşen had spiritual power.

At the very beginning of the interview Zülfikar stated that I should not take Sey Uşen as a seyid: “We should stick a little to science, no? He was a mentally sick person. I don’t want to mislead you but it is not correct to approach Sey Uşen Amca as a god-like figure; he was a schizophrenic person at the end. He was hospitalized by his family twice in Elazığ, in the mental asylum between the years 1970-1980...”

Except Zülfikar, Mustafa and Halil, a journalist from Dersim who made the report of the erection of the Sey Uşen's statue to the news channels, no one I spoke to mentioned the time Sey Uşen passed in the mental hospital.²⁰ On the contrary, people who attach to him some sort of spiritual power would tell the story of Sey Uşen in contrast with a mad person. For example, Rıza (40), who is referred among people as “halkın dedesi” [the dede of the people]²¹ and who is working as a state officer, makes a comparison to show how the case of Sey Uşen is different from a story of a “common” mad person: “He is someone who never resorted to violence, that is how you define madness... It comes from delirium²² which means restlessness, violent attacks, unconscious actions. He doesn't fit to the scientific explanation of madness. He was completely at peace with society. He was a naïve and completely harmless person. He was not meddling with anyone's concerns. I am not in favor of attributing any groundless values to anyone, but he was not mad. You know there is a guy called Nietzsche's madman. This mad guy made Nietzsche so well-known. Everyone was afraid of him, people were not going to the forest where he was living because they feared him; but Nietzsche had a special relation with him, he was visiting him in his half-built wooden house to talk to him. [...] I call Sey Uşen's story rather as an *aykırı hayat* [counter life] similar to Nietzsche's madman.”

Everyone I spoke to, except Mustafa and Zülfikar, used the same words, harmless and innocent, as the first adjectives to describe Sey Uşen. I propose to think about this consensus on his harmlessness and naivety in relation to the plausible reasons for becoming mad in Turkey. In this case, being harmless and naïve can signify lacking manhood. To clarify, he is not considered as a “real man” because he was betrayed by his wife and he could not

²⁰ Hüseyin Aygün wrote an article about Şey Uşen right after his death where he mentions his clinical history as well. Aygün, Hüseyin. (2005) “Dersim’de Bir Sey Uşen”. Bianet. available online: <http://eski.bianet.org/2005/08/26/65850.htm> accessed on 21.05.2014.

²¹ *Dede* is a socio-religious leader in Alevi communities. The phrase “halkın dedesi” implies a difference between the *dede* of the people and the *dede* of the state who are paid by the state as officers of *cemevis*, the Alevi cultural associations which are not officially accepted as worship places.

²² In Turkish going mad is *delirmek* and mad is *deli*. Delirium and *delirmek* has a sound similarity but there is no etymological link between them. While *deli* comes from Uyghur Turkish delirium has a Latin root.

successfully become a part of the nation by fulfilling the requirement of a soldier. Becoming mad instead of becoming a real man is a deficiency illustrating an inability to fill the existing gendered category. Being unable to complete the stages of becoming a man in Sey Uşen's case is perceived as a somber event. Muzaffer (40), a photographer who runs a photography studio, which he inherited from his father in the city centre, describes Sey Uşen as such: "He was a miserable man. I don't know if it is just gossip or not but he caught his wife with his brother they say. He lost his mind after that, they say. [...] It is a pity." Ulaş, one of my interlocutors (50), whose childhood passed in Dersim, states that Sey Uşen struck a chord with his story: "As far as I remember he caught his wife with someone else on his return from military service. His existence was in a way touching a sensitive ground of masculinity."

5.4 The Constitution of a New Identity: Sey Uşen Becoming a Budela

When I mentioned Sey Uşen's prophecies to Ulaş he was quite surprised and told me that in his circle Sey Uşen was perceived as a mad person: "People were behaving rudely towards him as they were behaving towards others living on the streets, laughing at him etc. Once, someone torn to pieces with a razor blade his newly bought clothes". When I started to collect Sey Uşen's stories I realized that a shift in perception happened around the 1980s. During the 70s when Ulaş was a high school student, Sey Uşen was mostly perceived as someone to laugh at. Only after 1980 did Sey Uşen start to be associated with holiness in diverse ways such as being perceived as seyid or budela. It seems possible to make an analogy between the history of Turkey and the story of Sey Uşen for the period between the 1970s and 1990s.

Starting from the mid-1960s, Dersim became one of the cities where the mobilization of leftist groups became dominant both in the urban and rural areas. For instance, Dersim's mountains were one of the fundamental places for Türkiye İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu

(Turkish Worker's and Peasant's Liberation Army, TİKKO), the armed branch of TKP/ML. In Zülfikar's words "Dersim was pumping blood into the revolutionary movements. Look at the founders of the big leftist organizations, you will find many Dersimlis. Dersim was known with its bravery, as a centre of rebellion. All those superstitions, madness, whatsoever were attached to Dersim recently."

Mustafa's and Zülfikar's narratives were in accordance about the change that Dersim experienced and the transformation in the way that is perceived today: "There is a strong leftist damar [vein] in Dersim. The results of elections would not show this. But all those people in different political parties today have a past in some of the revolutionary leftist groups. If you chat with them a little, even CHP members will tell you something like "I was also a member of TİKKO." But after September 12th [referring the coup of 1980] another period started. You know all those horrible torture stories inside and outside prisons. They did everything to clean us, the obstacles in front of the imperialist and capitalist forces. For what? For establishing the rules of imperialism... We were resisting against the January 24 Decisions.²³ That was the first thing they put in practice. An apolitical atmosphere was created after the coup. [...] After the 80s the radical Kurdish movement rebelled. Now Dersim is pumping blood into the patriotic Kurdish youth movement. The flow changed its direction; it is flowing towards the opposite side. People either join the PKK or they accept the apolitical individualization. This is the period of identity politics..." Both Zülfikar and Mustafa Bey spent several years in jail right after the coup d'état. Zülfikar had to leave the country after his provisional release. The above quotation of Zülfikar summarizes well the widely accepted interpretation of the 1980 coup and its aftermath among diverse leftist groups.

²³ The package of economic stability measures which came to be known as the January 24 (1980) decisions are interpreted as the implementation of neo-liberal policies to Turkey (Ünüvar, 2013).

On the micro level I think the story of Sey Uşen follows a sort of similar pattern. Çiçek and Zeliha recount that after leaving the house, Sey Uşen stayed in the mountains for a while. During the 70s when he first came to the urban centre of Dersim he was perceived as an object of humor. Zülfikar narrates this period as follows: “People made him crazier in the centre. The society triggered his aggression. His first degree relatives were mocking him, by calling him piç [bastard] they were making him angry as if they were watching cinema, they were making fun. If you behave in that way to a normal person you will drive him crazy as well.”

In this decade he was hospitalized twice by his family to the Elazığ mental hospital. Zülfikar narrates his process of hospitalization as follows: “He was subjected to all kinds of tortures such as electroshock, bastinado or being beaten by nightsticks. These were the contemporary treatments applied in the mental hospitals back then. They were disciplining people through violence in those days. Then, he returned to the village for a short time period, I remember he was calm after all those tortures. He couldn’t stay long in the village and that is when he went to Dersim-centre after 1980.”

Sey Uşen became a part of Dersim inhabitants’ life in a different way after the mid-1980s. He was not only the failed man who triggers masculine sensitivity – he was generating a spiritual energy as well. Rıza (40) who started to be perceived as *dede*²⁴ when he was 24 describes Sey Uşen as a *budela*: “In Dersim there is a long tradition of *budelalık*. What we call as *budela* is someone who is naïve and who is carrying a spiritual power in him. There are *budelas* in every tribe, not only in Kurêsan, the tribe of Sey Uşen. But Kurêsan is well-known since they moved to the city centre; others are living in the countryside. [...] We are

²⁴ Derived from my interview with Rıza: “I don’t call myself *dede*. People started to recognize me as *dede*. Çiçek: How did this happen, how did people start to believe that you are a *dede*? Rıza: They started to see me in their dreams. In these dreams I guided them. Then they started to consult with me. Çiçek: Is it only about this recognition or you had an internal process as well? Rıza: I saw *yaradan* [the creator] in my dream. He told me to go somewhere and find someone. I went there and asked for this guy, he was there. I talked to him and the process started like that.”

parts of the same spirituality [...] He was constantly in love with himself. When you are in love you don't feel like talking to someone. That was Sey Uşen's situation. He was in constant conversation or clash with and lover of himself." Rıza returned to Dersim in 1983. He states that at that time Sey Uşen was not yet a phenomenon. After finishing his military service, he moved to the city centre in 1993. At that time Sey Uşen was known by many Dersim people, according to him. From Germany, Switzerland, Sweden; Dersimlis were coming to see Sey Uşen.

The news from Dersim belonging to the decade of the 1970s are mostly about clashes between leftist organizations and the state security forces, both soldiers and police officers.²⁵ While Sey Uşen was being tortured during the 1970s in Elazığ mental hospital, the dominant atmosphere on the streets and in the mountains of Dersim was represented in the mainstream media channels mostly with the motif of violence. When Sey Uşen moved to the center of Dersim for the second time after the coup, everyday life in Dersim had sharply changed. In an atmosphere where the previous forms of encounters with state power were not in operation anymore the gender roles were also transformed. In other words, the public demonstrations on the street, the everyday clashes between security forces and leftist groups were replaced with the security forces' domination by the means of imposing curfews, making the security forces' vehicles always present in the street, making ID checks a regular occurrence of everyday life and the like. The domination of public space by the security forces, the massive arrests, and the state sponsored violence becoming an everyday practice can be interpreted as the castration of the Left in Turkey. Sey Uşen's transformation from an object of humor to a respectful person coincides with the castration of the leftist movements, one of the dominant actors regulating the everyday life of Dersim before the coup.

²⁵ See the online archive of Milliyet national daily: <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/>

Along with the decline in the leftist movement, post-coup period also witnessed the mobilization of Alevis in both Turkey and Europe for recognition of Alevi identity and the end of discrimination in public employment and schooling (Yavuz, 2003). As a result of this mobilization, “Alevi ritual and religion acquired a degree of visibility in the urban milieu as never before, leading a burgeoning chorus of commentators to depict contemporary Alevism as a “public religion” (Tambar, 2010:645). My interlocutors recounted on the Alevi revival in relation to the damage that the leftists caused in the realm of religion. Mehmet (30), who is working at the BDP municipality, puts forward the relation between the Left and Alevism in the 1970s as such: “During the 70s the Left imposed what Europe experienced 50 years ago. Atheism... Rubbish... For them belief system was a products of feudalism and tradition. They were not aware that they were damaging the society. Now everyone is talking about Alevism, so it means that Alevism is dying.”

When I asked Rıza, the dede of the people, about the positioning of the left towards religion he started to talk about the 1970s, prioritizing the corruption within the religious communities: “In Dersim- Alevism the institution of dedelik is transmitted by father to son. It is not transferred by el vermek [lending hand]. This system was abused. Everyone started to collect *çıralık/çırılık*²⁶. The problem was that people who didn’t have the qualification to practice dedelik started to call themselves dede. In Dersim leftists were reacting against the fake/false dedes. But they fundamentally refused the whole notion of dedelik. They didn’t separate the fakes from the others.” After the coup, Dersim was left over completely naked in the absence of revolutionary forces, the discredited religious leaders and its disappearing Kırmancki language (Munzuroğlu, 2012:85). I argue that Sey Uşen’s becoming of a respectful figure can be explained with the simultaneous rise of Alevi visibility and the castration of the left. Since the persistence of previous forms of masculinities would also

²⁶*çıralık/çırılık* is a small amount of money, food, clothes, or valuable that is given to religious figures in response to their religious service (Gültekin, 2010: 85).

reveal the “lacks” in the subjecthood of leftists, Sey Uşen as a “lacking man” could become a respectful figure among leftist based on his kinship relations with a holy lineage.

5.5 Culturalization of Sey Uşen

While I was writing this thesis, Uğur Kurt (30) was murdered by the police, in 22nd of May in the cemevi²⁷ of Gazi Quarter, a working-class Alevi neighborhood in Istanbul, hosting migrants from Dersim and known with the dominant presence of legal and illegal leftist organizations. The murder of Uğur Kurt is depicted by the Pir Sultan Abdal Association, one of the oldest Alevi associations in Turkey, as a part of the continuous state sponsored violence: “We, Alevis, have been attacked by the sovereigns for 1600 years. Inheriting the long tradition of assimilation, denial, massacres, the AKP government and the police forces under its control continue to claim lives. Those who were marking our houses, who were forcing us to migrate from our lands, claimed our nine souls in the last year. The state continues to massacre Alevis, Kurds, Armenians, revolutionaries on the pretext of fire warning shots.”²⁸ The nine souls/losses mentioned in the declaration refers to nine Alevi young men who were killed during the protests of the Gezi Park, which started in the summer of 2013, in different cities of Turkey.

As evident in the declaration of Pir Sultan Abdal association, the visibility gained in the public sphere does not contribute the political demand for recognition of Alevi identity. Kadir Tambar exposes this process through the example of *semah*, a dance performed as a part of the central Alevi religious ritual, the *cem*. Through *semah*’s popularization around 1970s as a form of folkloric dance and being performed by youth groups at festivals and cultural events, the Alevi identity became visible in the public space. However, the public visibility contributed the codification of *semah* as a folkloric, thus non-religious performance.

²⁷ *Cemevi*, which literally means a house of gathering, refers to the worship place for Alevis in Turkey.

²⁸ Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği, <http://www.pirsultan.net/haberdetay-214-tum-yoldaslarimiz-ugur-canimiz-hak-ka-yurumustur.html> (accessed on 10.06.2014).

In this way, eluded from its religious context, an Alevi ritual became a part of the national folklore without posing a threat to the state promoted nationalism (Tambar, 2010). Rather than opening a space for voicing the different communities' contributions to the existing cultural sphere, the visibility of decontextualized elements lead to no more than "touristic curiosity" (Bilal, 2008:243), which present a theatrical frame where the different cultural productions are reduced into consumable products such as the Alevi rituals, Armenian music, the Rum house and the like (Bilal, 2008:242). Banu Karaca suggests that state institutions "prefer a tamed version of diversity, one that is clearly divorced from political claims. The state of on the ground politics notwithstanding, art has become the preferred platform on which to address issues of diversity" (Karaca, 2013:167). In a framework in which "an aestheticised notion of multiculturalism that conceptualizes most minorities in Turkey as nostalgic reminders of a multi-ethnic empire" (Karaca, 2013:167), the culturalization became one of the effective tool of governing the diversity.

During my conversations, I expressions of disturbance were quite often when it came to government's Alevi politics. Beside their opposite political stance, I argue that people who are identifying themselves as leftist contribute to the reproduction of the state discourse by culturalizing Sey Uşen. For instance, while discussing with Ali about Sey Uşen's holiness, Hüseyin stated that, he kisses the hand of dedes and pirs and lights candles in jiyare/ziyaret. Yet, he is not doing so because he believes in the religiousity of those practices but because he wants to pursue what was transmitted to him from his father: "It is our tradition, that is our culture and we shouldn't let it be forgotten." The example Hüseyin gives illustrates well the sensitivity of protecting a religious practice belonging to a religious minority, which is constantly attacked by the state and the Sunni majority, by separating it from its religious context.

The conversation I had with Mustafa and Zülfikar also demonstrates the intermingled zones of religious and non-religious practices. While Mustafa was translating what his mother Çiçek was narrating about Sey Uşen, he started telling me about the moment when a wise old man appeared to him: “I was six years old. You know the notion of Newroz. We celebrate Newroz by visiting our jiyare/ziyaret. Villagers go to the riverside in front of their village and all villagers gather in the Muzur River side. That day, I saw what everyone was describing; an old guy who has a long and snowy beard sitting on a tree. When I attempted to tell this to my friends he warned me and said that they won’t see him. And they didn’t actually. Another time it happened at home. He told me again to not tell it to people since they won’t see him. They again didn’t see him. We, fukara [poor] Marxists... I don’t know how close we are with Marx and Engels as relatives, but I never marginalized this social perception, never arrogantly looked down on it. These are society’s common values. If we cannot replace them with others we have to accept it. For instance, whenever we want to have a meeting with Marx, he doesn’t appear but our dedes are always already here.” The replacement of Marx and what he symbolizes with the existing “values” of the locality without referring to their places in religious realm is a good illustration of the attempt of leftists trying to make peace what is left out in hand after the coup.

My conversation with a member of Parti Cephe (Party-Front) presents an illustration of ambivalent relation that leftist are engaged with religion. I met Özgür at a dinner organized by the Eğitim-Sen, university teacher’s trade union. After having an interrogation-like inquiry session including questions such as for whom I was working for, why not Zilan statue or revolutionary martyrs but Sey Uşen and the like, I was accused of legitimizing superstitions stuck to Sey Uşen. When I could express that I am not really looking for what he called superstitions, the stream of the discussion sharply changed. After an hour, at some point Özgür started telling me how he was impressed when he first attended a cem. “Dedes were

licking a heating stove and taking meat out of the boiling cauldron. It was so impressive.” While expressing his excitement, he was assuring his limits as well by making me sure that he is not a religious person: “I am not against protecting these sorts of values, but you know, believing is something else.” While talking about Sey Uşen, it was surprising for me to hear so often that “I don’t believe this kind of things but you know what happened once”. While Erdal was telling his memories about Sey Uşen he started by clarifying that he is not a believer: “If someone else would told me this, I wouldn’t believe him, but Sey Uşen knew always in which pocket of my jacket I put my cigarette. [...] Once, Sey Uşen was hospitalized and you cannot imagine how many people came to visit him. People believed that he had a spiritual power.” While Erdal puts forward his hesitant fascination, Ferit was quite sure that there was nothing fascinating about Sey Uşen: “Do you really believe that Sey Uşen was a holy person, I thought you were scientist (laughing). He comes from Kureysan tribe that is where his so called holiness comes from. People still go to his grave. I think he was a good person and became a character in Dersim. That is all.”

In the light of the ethnographic findings that I could only give a hint above, I argue that there is a tendency to culturalize Sey Uşen which goes hand in hand the culturalization of Alevism among people who identifies themselves as leftists in Dersim. While the state refuses to recognize the religious characteristics of cemevi and insists on categorizing it as cultural association, making claims based on “cultural values” contributes to the state promoted decontextualization process. Although leftist political positionality is constructed in opposition of the sovereign, the way that they embrace the Alevi religiosity after a decade of ignorance or even destruction, reproduces the state policy of culturalization through decontextualization in local level.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In Gola Çetu a woman approached me to ask whether I am married or not and advised me to visit Sey Uşen's grave, light a candle and take a piece of soil from his grave. This soil and the candle will bring luck and help me find a proper husband. The visit to the municipal cemetery, where Sey Uşen's grave is located, was one of the affectively loaded moment of my fieldwork. Walking among the flags of different revolutionary bodies planted right next to several graves, I was feeling like marching in a demonstration organized by dead bodies. Sey Uşen, was one of the old participants of the march and does not carry any flags but candles and artificial flowers. Last four lines of Diren Solmaz's poem, which are written in the façade of the grave, were barely readable because visitors have been lighting candles around his grave and the marble faded out: You are laughing at our/ callused hearts/ and frozen faces/ what is the rush Seyit Huseyin/ are you going to that city we do not know?²⁹

Sey Uşen's place in the dead bodies' parade is the central concern of this thesis. The main attempt is to capture how the left of post-coup period deal with a figure that is in between of holiness and madness. Sey Uşen's becoming an agonizing object after the erection of his statue is the main focus of Chapter IV. While depicting the negotiation between the monument of Atatürk and the statue of Sey Uşen, Chapter IV argues that Sey Uşen as a grievable figure opens a space for mourning for the ungrievable loss of the past. Reconstructing Sey Uşen's life story, Chapter V offers a gendered analysis of the possible reasons of getting mad that popped up in the interviews. It depicts a shift in the perception of Sey Uşen, or in other words, the transformation of a madman, a "lacking man" into a *budela* in the aftermath of the coup d'état of 1980. Describing the ways in which the interlocutors give meaning to Sey Uşen as a *budela*, it suggests that despite their oppositional political stance, interlocutors identifying themselves as leftist reproduce the state promoted approach

²⁹ Nasırlaşmış yüreğimize, buz tutmuş yüzümüze/ Bakıp gülüyorsun/ Söyle Seyit Hüseyin bu acele niye/ Yoksa bilmediğimiz o şehre mi gidiyorsun?

to Alevism: by decontextualizing religious practices, they contribute the culturalization process of Alevism in local level.

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