

# The Ideology of Selective Forgetting. How a Political Massacre is Remembered in Turkey: The ‘33 Bullets Incident’

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## *Introduction*

When I began my study of the ‘Sociology of Border’, encompassing Turkey’s borders with Iraq, Iran and Syria, I indeed had no intention or even an idea that I would be engaged in the subject discussed in this article. I intended only to trace the evidence of a political massacre (the so-called ‘33 Bullets Incident’) that took place in 1943. But in doing so I began to comprehend how and to what degree our cognitive models of remembering are reshaped, how things had been forgotten and why they were later recalled in retracing the memory of what shapes a nation within the geographic boundaries of a country.<sup>1</sup>

I will use the results of my Sociology of Border study<sup>2</sup> and the 33 Bullets Incident as a case-study to elaborate on the selectiveness of remembering and forgetting and on the ideology that lies beneath this phenomenon. My aim is to discuss both the politics that shape the border and the rhetoric of its positions and to establish how and to what degree people in border regions can mobilize these positions and rhetoric in order to establish relations with the state.<sup>3</sup> I will examine not only their conflicts but also their accommodations with the state.

While investigating the 33 Bullets Incident, the concept of ‘remembering’ constituted the initial foundation of the research. As the research developed and the multi-layered narrative of the field unfolded, the frame of the narrative brought forth the concept of ‘selective forgetting’. In this way a new research topic of social memory developed which included both remembering and forget-

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally presented at the conference ‘Generations, Experiences, Testimonies’, organized by Tarih Vakfı [History Foundation] in September 2003 in Turkey. For this study, I have conducted research in Van, Turkey, in Özalp and Saray districts, and in the border villages Sırmalı (H(X)arapsojik), Damlacık (Rasik) and Değirmigöl (Milaningiz). See also Özgen 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Based on five years of empirical research in the villages and towns situated along Turkey’s borders with Iraq, Iran and Syria, this project entitled ‘The Sociology of Border (County Towns)’ utilized the methods of visual anthropology, the transcriptions of ‘recordings and in-depth interviews’, historical records, documents and textual analysis. I thank Alp Bugdaycı and my assistant Ferhat Öner who invested much effort in the project and Özlem Biner for her assistance in discussing and developing the study.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall insists that in a study on politics and its rhetoric, rhetoric should always be given positions (Hall 1993).

ting. By the term social memory I understand organic forms of collective remembrance, which should be no less challenged than the dominant narrative (governing mythology of memory) and the role and the meaning of memory for national identity. In recent years we have seen an explosion of studies on memory (Bell 2003). Bell points out:

‘Memory’, it appears, has today assumed the role of a meta-theoretical trope and also, perhaps, a sentimental yearning; as the idea of an Archimedean Truth has slowly and painfully withered under the assault of various anti-foundational epistemologies, memory seems to have claimed Truth’s valorized position as a site of authenticity, as a point of anchorage – albeit an unsteady one – in a turbulent world stripped of much of its previous meaning. In memory we trust. (Bell 2003: 65)

Bell reveals the very ideological terrain behind the threat of history being replaced in its entirety by memory. This not only paves the way for semantic confusion, it also facilitates the obscuring of a crucial political phenomenon, that is, the role of collective remembering in challenging memory defined as the nation’s ‘governing mythology’ (Bell 2003: 66).

I will follow a similar path throughout this article. The discussions of the ideology of the narrative and the dismantling of this ideology will gradually disappear to be replaced by a belief in the absoluteness of remembering. We do not question the ideology of the narrative anymore; we only doubt the metaphors of memory. While we carry out the discussion of what is being remembered, why and how, along the lines of the meaning of memory, we have tended to neglect its interpretations. Here my primary aim is to examine the forms of the persistence of the 33 Bullets Incident within the political history and national memory alongside both the meanings and the interpretations of the discourse built around the incident. My second aim concerns the role played by the notions of center and periphery in the historical understanding of the event. Rather than perceiving these in terms of a binary opposition, I will emphasize the necessity of considering the interrelations between peripheral factors and their individual relations to the center, the fact that this matrix of relations influences the center, the periphery and those on the periphery, and how these influences are exerted, to what degree and of course within which time frames. In other words, the aim is to grasp the constructed nature of the alliance between various power groups, which hitherto have hardly been felt, have been mostly and forcibly forgotten, masked with lies and denial, and can therefore only be unveiled through a different reading.

## *On Methodology and the Case Study*

*The 33 Bullets Incident: "I was shot in a solitary corner of the mountains"*<sup>4</sup>

The 33 Bullets Incident, also called the Seyfo River "Massacre" (*Geliye Seyfo*) by local people, refers to the murder of thirty-three Kurdish villagers accused of smuggling in Van-Özalp, Kotor River (*Kotur-Seyfo*) (Aslan 1989: 27), Çilli Mountain Pass (Beşikçi 1992: 85) in 1943. The incident has been brought up in diverse contexts in Turkish political history and interpreted accordingly: as an act of CHP (*Republican People's Party*) violence towards poor villagers in 1948 (Beşikçi 1992: 15), as a way to exercise control over the CHP's ruling power and Prime Minister İnönü at the TBMM (*Turkish Grand National Assembly*) meetings in 1956, as an example of the TSK's (*Turkish Armed Forces*) violence towards the people and the state symbolized by the power of the army in the 1970s (Arif 2001), and finally as a particular form of oppression and violence towards the Kurdish people after the 1980s (Aslan 1989: 31, 43-44; Beşikçi 1992: 45; Göktaş 1991b: 63). The official history of the left knew of this incident from Ahmed Arif's poem 'Thirty-three Bullets' and remained content with this interpretation; at the same time, the incident was developed on the same basis, although with the opposite interpretation in official Turkish history. For example, Kenan Esengin, a comrade-in-arms of General Muğlalı, who gave the order to shoot, said "It was impossible to control the events in the border area according to normal standards...." (Esengin 1974a; 1974b: 21). A most recent discussion of this subject emerged in connection with Abdullah Çatlı's trial. Columnists, ideologues, politicians, popular and sometimes populist political scientists debated the "General Mustafa Muğlalı Affair" again. The latest news on this subject has been that a barracks on the Van-Özalp border in which the villagers had been imprisoned before they were shot had been named after General Muğlalı.<sup>5</sup>

Divorced of all historicist, ideological and statist interpretations, the basic story of the 33 Bullets is as follows:

On the night of July 30, 1943 at landmark No. 356, by the Kotor River (Kotur-Seyfo), Upper Koçkiran Village, Özalp District in the city of Van, 33 villagers<sup>6</sup> were killed without a proper trial. The incident was brought up in the

<sup>4</sup> "In a solitary corner of the mountains, at the hour of Morning Prayer, I lie stretched, long, bloody..." Translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat (1982), Ahmed Arif's famous eulogistic poem about the incident is memorized by many leftists without their being aware of its content (Arif 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Newspapers: *Milliyet* (13 May 2004), "Askerin Muğlalı Kışlası Sürprizi"; *Radikal* (16 May 2004), Ayni Özgürel "Yarayı Kaşımak: 33 Kursun ve Muğlalı Paşa"; *Posta* (13 May 2004), "Kışla Sürprizi".

<sup>6</sup> There are doubts about the number. For instance the number of dead and their names given by Beşikçi based on the 1956 TBMM minutes are inconsistent with the data provided by Aslan.

TBMM in 1948. Despite an official application dated February 7, 1948,<sup>7</sup> by the DP (Democratic Party) Kütahya Deputy Fikri Apaydın and the Eskişehir Deputy İsmail Hakkı Çevik, an examination could only be initiated in 1949. According to the verdict number 950-8 dated February 3, 1950, the General Staff Military Court found General Mustafa Muğlalı, who had been 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Inspector in Diyarbakır at the time of the incident, guilty and sentenced him to death, although his punishment was later reduced to 20 years imprisonment; he died in Ankara Gülhane Military Hospital in 1951 (Beşikçi 1992: 79; Aslan 1989: 41) and thus his file was closed. After a period of silence between 1951 and 1956, the case was re-opened in the TBMM by the DP as a reprisal of the accusations of the CHP's "discrimination towards minorities" during the events of September 6-7 (Beşikçi 1992: 78). This time, the Assembly demanded that ex-prime minister İsmet İnönü take up a position, accusing him and the entire CHP of complicity. The case, discussed in the TBMM on February 12, 1956 and February 25, 1956, was closed because of 'the limits of action and various amnesty laws', as was concluded within the report of the TBMM Commission of Investigation and the discussions at the National Assembly (Beşikçi 1992: 79).

In the following section I shall consider local knowledge and interpretations of the event. Thus this research<sup>8</sup> is based on oral narratives collected in the course of in-depth interviews using oral history techniques, such as the narrative analysis of various written documents and interviews with key persons. In addition, I have also included other scholarly works and memoirs on family, tribe (*aşiret*) and national history, which I have treated as narratives and scrutinized accordingly. Then I compared the results with historical documents. The differences between various narratives could be solved by using historical documents as arbitrators; conflicts between documents or other uncertainties required a search for further narratives and a re-examination of existing ones.

Initial questions aimed at ascertaining whether the villagers remembered the 33 Bullets Incident at all, if yes, how it was remembered, and the role that mem-

<sup>7</sup> A second application was submitted by Van deputy Muzaffer Koçak on November 17, 1948. BYBS TBMM File C1.

<sup>8</sup> Within this research, four social structures that have been the subjects and the objects of the 33 Bullets Incident have been scrutinized. These have been influential around the Hoşap-Kutur-Ağrı and Mahmudiye region, famous in various periods, and integrated into the state and the Republic in different ways: (1) Milan Aşireti, an example of nomadism, which builds the networks of social relations on rebellion, (2) the Küresins, as a tribal structure without an agha, (3) the Birukis as a system of agha (Andrews 1989: 112), (4) the Arvasis, who strengthen their social and political ties through sects and religion. The villages affected by the 33 Bullets Incident: Sırmalı (H(X)arapsorik) and Degirmiköy (Milan-ingiz); Damlacık (Raşık), the village of Küresins; in-depth interviews and visual anthropology techniques are applied in Van in order to gather information on the Arvasis and Birukis, and various texts published by the sects, various historical documents and official documents are examined.

ory played in their attitude to the border. However, as time and the research advanced, the field itself provided the opportunity to discern multi-layered truths. Staying for a while in the villages, turning our interviews into informal talks, sharing at least a part of their daily life, connecting with people and earning the trust of our gatekeepers became integral parts of the research. The stories of the county centers (*kasaba*) and the cities, accusations and judgments, narrative forms used by various social groups were collected using methods of visual anthropology. Hour-long sittings, daily chats and all kinds of everyday interaction were recorded visually and transcribed.

A transcription technique described as ‘proceeding via the codes given by life’ was applied. In the categorization of the codes, priority was given to the meanings derived from the field. The facts were named according to the periods in which they were used and by whom they were used in social memory (such as “once revenge is uttered, its sound of blood remains”). Metaphors signifying these facts were assigned a twofold meaning: as attempts at metaphor by the people, and second, as construing the discourse. This issue is the focus of the discussion in this article.

Methodologically, a categorical-content perspective is used for narrative analysis.<sup>9</sup> This technique invalidates considerably the dichotomous idea often underlying narrative readings, i.e. that there is a contradiction between categorization and contextual analysis. Because, in this technique, categorization does not only derive from theory, there is indeed no need to be confined to the theory, while at the same time the text itself can create its own categories.

Thereupon the same forms of story-telling were assembled periodically. This was most difficult since the telling of stories of enmity or glorification could be different within the same period for each social group; the chronology of objectives and subjects targeted by those in power did not agree with the chronology of the objectives of the groups from the same *aşiret* with lower status.<sup>10</sup>

### *Why We Forget Selectively*

How absolute is the relationship between ideology and what we remember or forget? More importantly, what do we remember, how and why? Who remem-

<sup>9</sup> In this technique, the main titles of the research area are determined, and the text is divided into these categories, classified and grouped (Lieblich and Tuval-Mashiach 1989: 112-115).

<sup>10</sup> The “boldface” terms in the citations below indicate codes; quotation marks ‘...’ indicate the categories of these codes within this text. For example the code “Permitted-Turks” belongs to the category of ‘Pro-us – pro-State’. Similarly the code “My grandfather Mehmet Bey was from Hamidiye Regiments” signals the category ‘We were also under the rule of the same state. We are citizens too’. The code “Our ancestors fought in Çanakkale” is in the category ‘We are one of the founding members of the same Republic too’.

bers what? We also need to focus on the relation between memory and social responsibility. The 33 Bullets Incident is a good example for illustrating not only how Turkish political history, but also how the geography of citizenship has been shaped. It is the ‘intrinsic’ of historical knowledge of events and of the subjects and objects of these events. Furthermore, it should also be an example of academia’s responsibility to change and undo silences, obscurities of interpretation and negligence in the name of ‘objectivity’.

Van Dijk’s classification of social interfaces explicates the dialectics of the relationship between social memory and ideology (Van Dijk 2003: 19-37). In order to deconstruct ideology, Van Dijk examines the construction of the ideology and hence connects shared fields, fields of perception and attitudes and the field of ideologies and values as the largest *socius*<sup>11</sup> as elements of social memory. Van Dijk’s description of what he calls the *socius* resembles Simmel’s analysis of the term in three fields: the fields of the reflection of the social on the individual, on the institution(al) and on the moral (Freund 1997: 157-193). Van Dijk also emphasizes the dialectical relation between ideology and its reflection in social practice. This practice is realized in the production, reproduction and application of ideological knowledge, ideological attitudes and cognitive models. However, according to Van Dijk, all these do not necessarily bring inevitable results.

In this respect Van Dijk diverges from Bell significantly, who regards memory as the inevitable manipulation of social formations. Bell defines all narrative forms of past events and the discursive imagination of history as ‘memory’. On the other hand, unlike memory,

the governing myth thus coexists with and is constantly contested by subaltern myths, which are capable of generating their own traditions and stories, stories as likely to be concerned with past oppression and suffering at the hands of the dominant groups as by tales of national glory. (Bell 2003: 80)

This differentiation underscores the manipulations ensuing from the construction of the collective memory as a national imagination and fortifies endeavors to liberate oneself from the enchantment of common nationalist memory.

The complex interpenetration of myth – in both its governing and multifarious subaltern forms – and organic memory (remembrance) can best be framed in the context of (and in relation to) a ‘national mythscape’. Such a mythscape can be conceived of as the discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly. The temporal dimension denotes a historical span, a narrative of the passing of years, and it is a narrative that is most likely to include inter alia a story of the origins of the nation and of subsequent momentous events and heroic figures. (Bell 2003: 81)

A thorough comprehension of this potential is crucial for actors of the critical project. According to Bell, our various thought-worlds and imagination-fields are

<sup>11</sup> Van Dijk uses the concept of *socius* following Arendt (1994).

deliberate and ideological, whether they are areas of social memory packed with a nationalist construction or the field of myth as a sub-field. Immediately after being collected, they may and do actually work as interior and exterior fields to each other. Van Dijk's stance on this state of mutual necessity and the mechanisms of influence is more cautious, and he focuses more on the layers of discourse on its way to becoming ideology.

The social sciences have recently begun to dwell on forms of remembering and forgetting of the social. Over the last fifteen years, populist socio-political discourses have begun to rewrite the narrative of the founding of the Turkish Republic on the basis of totalitarianism. There is no need to repeat here that these narratives draw on micro-historical studies. It has become largely evident in this period that history writing always incorporates a certain ideological bias. Benedict Anderson rejects the idea that nations are the creations of sociological conditions such as race or language or that their shape is uniform. Nations are imagined, and nationalism is part of the universal history of the modern world (Anderson 1991).

Thus, the founding narratives of the Turkish Republic need to be read differently from 'liberal statist' discourses or from the 'rational game of the rationally working unequal power conflicts' narrative. This text is a diachronic reading (the simultaneous effects of power balances/ conflicts and worlds of meaning) of the 33 Bullets Incident. Naturally, a diachronic reading of history can be applied to one event. Such a reading can proceed by way of establishing power balances at the national and international levels. However, as in the case of the 33 Bullets Incident, there is a need to discern how powers consequently reproduce the irrationality of life while they are involved in rational power games. This duality (rational and irrational) shapes and transforms Republican ideology through its various transformations within the history of the Turkish Republic.

In this paper the *socius* of the subject and object of the event in the 33 Bullets Incident will be elaborated on as narratives of interpreted and interpreter. Ali İhsan Bey, the tribal chief of the Milan *Aşiret*, which lost most of its members in the Incident, gives voice to a higher class position within the *aşiret* structure. The Küresins, on the other hand, are marked as the enemies of the new age. The Milan is forcibly made the subject of the action, and the Küresins become its objects.

### *The Ranking of Responsibilities in the Reconstruction of the 'Truth'*

*The Class-based Composition of the Aşiret: the Milan Aşiret's Leader Ali İhsan Bey: My grandfather Mehmet Bey was in a Hamidiye Regiment"*

The names were lost first, the names of places and persons, and were then remembered either in their earlier or modern forms. The 33 Bullets Incident took



place in Özalp district, but according to the villagers, its location was Mahmudiye. The history of Özalp was indeed transformed on August 19, 1930, during the last days of the Ağrı Revolts. The revolt was suppressed as a result of diplomatic cooperation with Iran; the Kutur district was ceded to Iran, and the Mahmudiye district took the name Saray (BYBS TBMM, Record No. 73-84). In 1932, the name of the Saray district changed to Kazımpaşa; but then its name was restored after Kazımpaşa moved to Karahallı village and changed its name to Özalp (BYBS TBMM No. 13422).

A similar confusion exists in the official records. For example, in the Assembly reports, Özalp sometimes is called Kazımpaşa, and the Kotor (Kutur) River becomes the Kokut River. There is even confusion within the narratives: The name of the military surgeon, who hesitated to sign the death report, is Raşit Ersezer in Beşikçi's account and Raşit Tezer in Aslan's. More importantly, the numbers and the names of the dead given by Beşikçi as based on the death report (which is based again on the records of detention in the Assembly minutes) contradict those Aslan collected from the villagers. While Beşikçi refers to 32 men and a woman, and states that the woman was released since she was Mehmedi Misto's daughter, who was employed with the Turkish National Intelligence Organization, Aslan gives the names of 33 men without mentioning a woman (Beşikçi 1992: 141; Aslan 1989: 21).

Interviews conducted in two villages and Özalp revealed that there are differences between these memoirs, accounts of the villagers and Ali İhsan Bey, the leader of the Milans. The common statement is that, before, the state allowed some smuggling, but then retaliated to take revenge for the 1500-2000 sheep stolen from Mehmedi Misto (Beşikçi 1992: 27, 141), the agha of the smuggler village (Belasor); 80 horsemen surrounded the town's (Saray's) cattle; consequently some people in Saray became traitors; the dead belonged to the Milan Aşiret and were executed without a proper hearing; and they were innocent.

Ali İhsan Bey, leader of the Milan *Aşiret*, who organized his official contacts with the state carefully, stressed that 'plundering was first allowed by the soldiers and this paved the way for the emergence of the new tradition of denouncement':

We [Osman Agha, the father of the leader of the Milan Aşiret, Ali İhsan Bey] were in Iran. In Urmiye district [formerly Rizaiye]. Turkish smugglers went [to Urmiye district]; maybe they got permission from the state. There was the village Belasor, the agha Muhammedi Misdo, our relative, from Milan, was there. He was a just man... But they went together, took it as a matter of honor. A decision to retaliate was made. Together with 80 horsemen, there were other *aşirets*. Saray was a town then. They said, "We will take the cattle of the town in place of the sheep". They looked around for a while, but the cattle had gone towards the border zone. So they drove the cattle to Iran. In compensation for the sheep. Mehmedi Misdo was a relative of Ingiz [the village called Milaningiz - Değirmigöl]. The locals, who did not like Muhammedi Misdo, denounced him. Apparently, two villages were denounced. H(X)arapsorik [Sırımlı] and Ingiz



[Değirmigöl]. Two persons from Çaybağı [Rune(x)ksar], 16 persons from H(X)arapsorik [Sıımlı], 15 persons from Milaningiz [Değirmigöl]<sup>12</sup> ...The denouncement was made by those who did not like us, who were not from among us, whose cattle had been stolen, whose homesteads had been ruined. Then they summoned 33 persons by name. They were taken to Van. The court of justice asks in Van ‘what do they have?’ They had nothing. They arrested three persons. They detained someone called Abdülbaki from Sıımlı village and three other persons separately. Later they were acquitted. All of them were respected persons. Even a sergeant came on leave, sergeant Süca. He was one of them.

When we asked Ali İhsan Bey whether there was a woman among them; he says “I don’t know, we didn’t hear”.

They even separated the Kurdish soldiers from among those who were going to shoot, so that only soldiers from the western part of the country doing their military service here would be involved. The soldiers from the west went. The men’s hands were tied, they were lined up close to each other. İbrahim survived with a wound. He escaped across the Iranian border. He pretended to be dead, stood up only after they had gone. After 3-5 years, he died too. (From the interview with Ali İhsan Bey on October 28, 2002).

When we sought to confirm the incident mentioned also in Beşikçi’s work when Muhemmedi Misdo called for İbrahim Özay, who had escaped wounded and was living in Iran as a fugitive, in order to make him kiss the hand of a Turkish army officer:

“There was no hand kissing, no!” he says.

We were in Iran at that time, Osman Agha passed away in 1938. At the time of the incident my elder brother Rıza Bey was the Milan agha. There is 15 years between us. There was a private amnesty. We were of use to the state [Turkey] in Iran. (From the interview with Ali İhsan Bey on October 28, 2002)

Especially three expressions in Ali İhsan Bey’s narrative are conceptualized, and there are three remarks that need further investigation: “We and the Turks-Westerners”, “One of them was a soldier” and “respected persons”.

The expression “We and the Turks-Westerners” discloses the traces of a Turkish-Kurdish conflict of a new era: ‘We’ signifies being situated on the periphery, ‘the Turks-Westerners’ means to be at the center. This cautious wording further underlines that even the executioners were chosen from among the Turks; thus the hands that pulled the trigger were Turkish. Us here represents Osman Agha, Ali İhsan Bey and the leadership of the *aşiret* in the first place, but in an extended sense it also encompasses the whole *aşiret*, all victims and the oppressed, and all Kurds. The words in the first lines referring to the “Turks who had re-

<sup>12</sup> The confusion regarding the number persists. For instance while Aslan states the number of deaths as 33, unlike Ali İhsan Bey, he mentions 25 persons captured from Sıımlıköy; he provides the names of 25 persons from Sıımlı, 2 from Değirmigöl, one from Çaybağı and 5 from Xretel (Kapıköy) (Aslan, 1989).

ceived permission” were used throughout this research as ‘those who were pro-statists and thus could not be counted as Kurds’. The villagers’ and the Milan leader’s formulations “One of them was a soldier” and “respected persons” reinforced their innocence and confirmed their leaders’ statements. A careful examination of these conceptualizations reveals a revolt against the state’s execution of even those who were considered worthy of being conscripted to the national army without an appropriate hearing. Furthermore, it was also a reaction to the arrest of the *aşiret*’s most honored and respected leaders by name.

Ali İhsan Bey’s choice to use the name *Urmiye* is worthy of attention. His preference to use Urmiye instead of Rızaie, can be a reference to Iran’s political processes and the Arian connection. The example represents a case of changing names and the search for an answer to the questions, which of these names have been preserved by social memory and for what reason, provides an interesting clue. Changing the name of the lake during the Khomeini regime from Rızaie, which stressed its association with Shah Rıza, to Urmiye, referring to an older period, and the preference for this name both in Iran and Turkey, prove Ali İhsan Bey’s awareness of the ‘patriotic’ constructions of the ethnic nationalism of the new era.

Ali İhsan Bey defines Milan as follows:

My grandfather Mehmet Bey is from the Hamidiye Regiments, Osman Agha is his son. The Milan consists of four branches, and more than 100,000 families live around Urfa and Suruç. 30-32 villages belong to us. We were in Iran in the winter and in Özalp in the spring and summer. Once when the borders were open, we were spending the summer in Özalp, but they remained there when the border was drawn. He sent two messengers to the agha of Şemsikans, Bashan, and said “Give him our greetings; if possible, we shall stay in the villages of Özalp this winter”. But Bashan said “I will give none of the houses”. So the Şemsikans and the Milans fought each other for three months... The Şemsikans were entrapped in Gazlıgöl village castle... [according to the story of this conflict]. Afterwards they leave the castle and settle in the villages of Karahisar-Keçikayası-Kapıköy-Çakmak-Kepir-Kekikdüzü-Koçbaşı. The Milan’s villages are Örenburç, Çaybağı, Baltepe, Zırava, Çardak, Zincirkıran, Dolutaş, Değirmigöl, Bayaslan-Şerefhane, Sınımlı, Korucan, Yamanyurt, Gazlıgöl, Yeşilalış-Pagan. This happened in 1915. In Mehmet Agha’s time. My grandfather went to Iran. The army advanced towards us with 2000 soldiers, in the 1920s. An important politician [he stated that he cannot give his name] responded to my father. Then Osman Agha said “Soldiers are coming against us”. They had lots of money, 2-3 flocks of sheep, silver, gold. They could not take anything, neither valuables nor food, just nothing. Only a blanket was put on each horse, for the women to ride, that was it... [The story of the escape and arrival to Iran] They passed Koçbaşı ... [Staying in Iran and the myth of all the sons’ gathering there] We stayed in Iran till 1949. We stayed for 20 years. In 1930, we applied for amnesty, a special amnesty was granted. Then we migrated from Iran to Iraq... [The story of this migration] My mother’s brother was a member of the first Assembly, a member of the Legislative Assembly. He, too, escaped. [The story of this escape]. On the second night of my father’s escape to Iran, some soldiers came to the village, and asked “Who is the relative of Osman Agha, who is his imam, who is his clerk?” They killed two persons... [The story of the killings; the deaths were mystified using re-

ligious motifs.] The killings took place near Gözlemmez village, the corpses were thrown into the well. No court hearing was held for these two persons. No one could denounce them out of fear. We were still in Iran... [He justifies why he failed to prevent the deaths as an aşiret leader.] In 1949, our villages were recorded in the ownership registers. I swear to God we could not take them back. When the cadastre came to the village, they asked for witnesses concerning our property rights, and the judges acknowledged us to be right, they said "These are theirs. You usurped (their property) when they went to Iran". But they won the appeal, we could not get anything. We lost most of them. Recently, they handed over [the property] on their own accord. They [the Küresins] came later on, took half of the land, we could not do this [for Sırmılı village]. (From the interview with Ali İhsan Bey on October 28, 2002)

In his comparative analysis of the 'Hamidiye Regiments' and 'Village Guard System' for the commonalities of the state's colonization, Aytar relates Ibrahim Paşa's above-mentioned escape as follows:

In the period when the Kemalist movement tried to get the *aşiret* leaders and religious leaders in Kurdistan on its side with various promises and to squash those revolting, the Milli Aşiret revolted on June 8, 1920. This revolt was suppressed on June 18. Moved to Syria after the suppression of the revolt, 2-3 thousand members of the Milli Aşiret crossed the border either on horseback and camel, or on foot, and, settling in Etşan village in Viranşehir. They started another revolt, and cut the telegraph lines. In response to the Ottoman officers' summons to surrender, the leaders of the Milan Aşiret demanded amnesty and compensation for their losses by the next evening. When their requirements were not met, the Milli Aşiret's forces invaded Viranşehir on August 26<sup>th</sup>. However, after consecutive attacks by Turkish soldiers they were forced to migrate to Syria again on September 7. (Aytar 1992: 257)

The information in the above paragraph was not mentioned by Ali İhsan Bey. According to him, Milan never revolted but was merely forced to cross the border. There are some important clues in his account: "being from the Hamidiye Regiments and a member of the first Assembly", a sign hinting that the Milan had not fought either against the Republic nor the Ottomans, and indeed they were more on the side of the state overall, rather than at war with it. We notice a similar discourse concerning the first years of the Republic: (TBMM Secret Session Records: 1338) Siverek Deputy Lütfi Bey on July 22, says

... Gentlemen, Kurdish soldiers, who are regarded as revolting defeated the French Army in Urfa, it was done by the Kurdish *aşirets* who are considered revolting. Not by Nihad Pasha's soldiers!

and he continues

Nihad Pasha, confusing origin with history perceived the Milli *aşiret* movement a revolt. I beg your pardon, he is the father of the Milan *aşirets*, even Abdülhamid once called him his son. He revolted one or two years before Independence... The current revolts are his 'sons'. Let us not give it a revolt spirit on account of the rivalry between the *aşirets*. (TBMM Secret Session Records 3, Volume 566)

Similarly, in his research to expose the usefulness and mainly the leadership of the Haydaran tribe at the Ağrı Revolt, Süphandağ refers to the popular historian

Cemal Kutay's television speech in order to prove the leader of the Maku *aşirets* and Ağrı revolvers, Kör Hüseyin Pasha's role:

In a television speech, the famous historian Cemal Kutay was saying "Not Kazım Karabekir Pasha, but indeed Kör Hüseyin Pasha saved East Anatolia from the Russians and the Armenians." (Süphandağ 2001: 246)

Mentioning Urfa and Suruç as the origins of the *aşiret* in Ali İhsan Bey's narrative proves the *aşiret*'s Kurdish identity. With these statements Ali İhsan Bey simultaneously manifests the Kurdish origin of his *aşiret* and its pro-statist stance. The most important signifier of the Kurdish nationalism of the new era has its origin in Bohtan and Suruç. It remains controversial whether the Kurdish origin lies in Ağrı or Bohtan. However, in the new era, it was decided to bring forth Bohtan and Suruç as the origins for the creation of the Kurdish nation. Ali İhsan Bey recognizes and employs this code.

"The war with the Şemsikans" is told to signify the *aşiret*'s migration experience in the past and 'the courage attributed to a good soldier in migrant culture'. The sentence mentioning "a great politician" is significant here as well, the implication being that this great politician could be one of the greatest since he cannot be mentioned by name (such as Atatürk or İsmet İnönü); what is emphasized here is that the Milan can address a great politician because of its own grandeur or because it was normal for it to draw the attention of a great politician. Henceforth, the story relates the *aşiret*'s arrival to Turkey in 1949 after 20 years exile in Iran-Maku-Iraq following a special amnesty, and its subsequent failure to get its usurped lands back (as a result of the court of appeal's persistent rejection of the local court's decision). In brief, it is a story of an exile caused by a conflict with the Republic, which, in spite of the return after 20 years following the special amnesty, remains a story of landlessness. By saying that

'We were of use to the state' and [at the discretion of the Iranian Shah (*evrak-ı halise*)] we were offered possessions, oxen and seedbeds... [the opportunities offered by the Iranian Shah and a story of wealth] ... We rejected that aid as well, and we told ourselves, let us return to our own country, in any case amnesty will be issued. (From the interview with Ali İhsan Bey on October 28, 2002).

Ali İhsan Bey provides clues for the earlier conflicts of the migrant Kurdish *aşirets* with the Republic and then their rapprochement with the DP government.

Nevertheless it is interesting that the Milan do become landowners later on. Categorized as "them", the Küresins are a non-gha *aşiret* settled around the Van region in the wake of the Simko Agha revolt. Even today there are deeply-rooted conflicts between this *aşiret* structure and the Milan. In many villages such as Sırmılı, Değirmigöl, etc. there are dual structures. Ali İhsan Bey simultaneously 'others' the Küresins and reveals how they themselves handed over their lands to the Milan (in the last twenty years).

From the first years of the Republic onwards, the Milan *aşiret* is stigmatized by the state as follows:

They joined the revolt. One cannot trust their devotedness to our country. The Agha system prevails in the *aşiret*. They are semi-nomads. (*Aşirets Report 1998: 349*)

Kazım Karabekir Pasha describes the *aşirets* around Van-Bitlis-Ağrı and Muş as ‘mutineers, ill-tempered, plunderers, ... calm’ in his reports; entitled ‘Three *Aşirets* in the Fırka District’, the K8 report classifies the Milan in the same sub-tribe system with Celâl, Şivili, Takavi, etc. *Aşirets*. In his analysis of the Dersim revolts, Karabekir Pasha others these Kurds as such:

The relationships between the *aşirets* are not auspicious. How can they be, generally among the Kurds family sentiments come after their interests. A brother shoots his brother to replace him in the leadership... In Muş women are exchanged for goods. (Karabekir 1995: 76)

The Milan *aşiret*’s main trouble with the Republic started with the Ağrı Revolt. It is the same revolt which is mentioned in the book published by Kaynak Publishing House and claimed to belong to the General Staff. In 1925, because some of the feudal aghas and *aşiret* leaders wanted to be exiled together with the Milan, the *aşirets* revolted against the Republic (Kalman 1996: 77); this period ended with a general revolt and their eventual banishment by the Republic. Even though somewhat later a special amnesty was issued for some groups, the Milan remained in exile till 1949.

How can we analyze this narrative that conflates the meta-discourse of being ‘a devout subject of the state’ and the sub-discourse of being ‘Kurdish and against’? The Milan describe themselves first as ‘rebellious, traditional (fighting with other *aşirets*) in the past but pro-statist in fact’, and later as ‘a disillusioned society which came about as a result of unfulfilled promises’. Zizek defines this as ‘a new situation built upon collective guilt’ (Zizek 1989). However, including Zizek, those who produce politics based on the collective construction discourse do so as a way to explicate the predominance of the meta-power spaces on the sub-spaces. In other words, this way is only a one-way construction of the subaltern; it is called power oppression to which the subaltern is subjected. However, in addition to the *socius*’s constant reconstruction of itself and its story, the reactions of all micro-units as well as that of the state should be taken into consideration. Hence it can be assumed that the Milan attempted to create a story on ‘double guiltiness’: Even though they declared their loyalty to the Republic (first guilt: betrayal of the Kurds), they were sent into exile and thus revolted (second guilt: betrayal of the Republic); utilizing the bargaining mechanisms (third guilt: betrayal of the Iranian Shah); returning to the country (fourth guilt: bargaining to take the lands back using the ones executed) and the revolt triggered by their inability to regain their lands. In response to the question: ‘Why did the Milan not revolt after the 33 Bullets Incident? If it was that big, rooted and strong, why

did it not deal with this issue within the traditional structures?’ Ali İhsan Bey answers ‘We were in Iran, the state was very strong, and a hundred people more would have died’. However, in another interview he stated “The Milan has left the call to account for a later date”. For the new period, that is for the early PKK period, the Küresins explain that “The issue of calling to account did not turn into bloodshed, but the problem increased. An atmosphere of ‘you are not from us’ was emerging. Having heard this, the Küresins were drawing near the soldiers.”

This statement clarifies ‘the handover of the Milan’s lands voluntarily, in the recent period’.

Zizek interprets the sharp shock caused by the confrontation of the collective feeling of guilt with reality as ‘a point of reality, at the heart of the subject, non-symbolized, produced as a waste, as a leftover of every kind of processes of giving meaning’ (Zizek 1989: 195). Naming this point the ‘*point de capiton*’ (nodal point<sup>13</sup>), Zizek states ‘The signifier does not correspond entirely to the set of signified, the signifier always free-floats’.

In other words, what is crucial in any analysis of ideology is to detect, behind the apparently transcendental meaning of the element holding it together, this tautological, performative, fundamentally self-referential operation, in which it is not so much some pre-existing meaning that things refer to as an empty signifier that is retrospectively seen as what is being referred to. This ideological *point de capiton* or master-signifier is not some underlying unity but only the difference between elements, only what its various mentions have in common: the signifier itself as pure difference. (Zizek 1989: 249)

Ali İhsan Bey’s discourse defines the Milan’s present situation anew for the new situation within the framework of past patterns (feelings of guilt, interpreting the encounter with the researcher as a meeting with a more social dimension of the state, the excuses for the betrayal, the rebellion against injustices and against being betrayed). At this *point de capiton* the past is reconstructed, the legacy of the past (the tradition to fight; the invasion of the lands of the Şemsikan, the revolt against the Republic; the escape to Iran at the outset of the Ağrı Revolt; the exile and the bargaining) is reformulated in terms of betrayal, guilt and excuses which come to form the basis of the ideological discourse of the Milan’s role in recent history.

Simmel says ‘There are two kinds of lie’: It is the most superficial and dissociate lie, which directs the words away from the thoughts: This lie looks as if it did not belong to the person; it merely arises on the boundary between him and the outside world. The real lie is the one in which the words are compatible with the thoughts, but the thought contradicts the reality situated deeper inside us; when our soul is dichotomous in itself (Simmel 2000: 34). Due to its characteristic which is said to the outside world but which we know is also directed to our-

<sup>13</sup> Literally an “upholstery button,” though it has also been translated as “anchoring point”.

selves, it is this kind of lie which directs *socius* to defy its entire life and to reconstruct it; thus, the Milan and the Turkish Republic reconstruct themselves and each other: hence the discourse of constructive guiltiness in the Milan is constructed upon collective guilt.

*The Legitimization of the Denouncement Tradition:  
“The Küresins have betrayed us”*

One of the most evident results of the study was “the approval of the denouncement tradition”. Even the villagers asked immediately, “Find the denouncer for us. You must know his name, you are the scholar, give us his name”. As the forms of legitimization, complaints and results of the ‘denouncement tradition’ gradually emerged in the course of the research, a new core question started to take shape: “Why and how was the denunciation process operated and who won in the end?”

The 33 Bullets Incident is entirely based on an invisible denouncement process and sub-models of discontent analysis. İsmail Beşikçi conveys the incident as in Dr. Captain Raşit Ersezer’s statement that was supported by the TBMM Session Reports and Minutes Journals. According to these documents, the real causes of the incident originated from a disagreement over livestock smuggling between the Milan and the Memikan tribes, and as a result of denunciation reached this point. The chieftain of the Milan tribe Muhemmedi Misdo ‘betrayed’ his fellow- villagers; in fact he is a spy of the Turks, a traitor (Beşikçi 1992: 27, 40, 31; Göktaş 1991b: 63-67). According to Aslan, the ones who started the incident, tolerated, encouraged and were personally involved in border smuggling were the battalions and the soldiers at the border. Aslan infers this remark from the trial records:

All of the property smuggling incidents to Iran and similar practices and behavior were realized under the initiative of the 226 Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Border Battalion”. (Aslan 1989: 20)

The common point in the two writers’ statements is significant: the 33 Bullets Incident can be read in different ways according to each period and situation; hence the ‘fiction of the real’ can be re-constructed.

In fact, it is possible to modify the social readings politically without the entirety of reality; in the nomadic past there were periodic disagreements between the Milan and the Memikan *Aşirets*. Ali İhsan Bey himself confirms the presence of the denouncers within the Milan: “There were denouncers among us and among the others, there were the faithless”. Even the response to the question ‘Who is the friend and who is the foe of the Milan?’ can be “It depends on the period”. However when asked about the dates one by one, the Şemsikan, Takuri, Pinyanişi, Mikuri, Memikan and the Küresin *aşirets* were designated as the social



groups the Milan had disputes with from time to time, both in the past and in the present. The disputes with the Şemsikan date back to the nomadic past; those with the Takuri, Pinyanişi and Mikuri to the time of the Ağrı Revolts; the disputes with the Memikan go back to the 1940s in Republican times; and those with the Küresins to both the former historical periods and to the more recent ones, 1950 and after. Here it is significant who in each period was used by the villagers in constructing their ‘other’ and how they reconstruct their fiction of the state. Important are the traces this fiction leaves in villagers’ minds. Two of the most important political strategies of the Ottoman leadership and state tradition which aimed at co-opting various groups included ‘sowing the seeds of discord’ and ‘the perpetuation of denouncement mechanisms’. The research has revealed that taking sides is a central political strategy, and as a consequence the idea that ‘the denouncer is approved and wins in every period’ has left its mark in the minds and *socius* of the villagers.

The targets set by the villagers and by the Milan leader in the past and the present can be differentiated in spite of this reconstruction. This reconstruction is articulated in sentences like “We do not let the refugees pass, the Şemsikans do” or “The drug trade is the most humiliating way of earning money for us, but for them [people in Yüksekova/ Başkale] it is an accepted way to earn a living” or “We earn our money from oil, not hashish or gun”. These in turn shape the social ‘othering’ and their choice of those elements, which they wish to foreground in this process. Subsequently, the sub-discourse of the real unease unfolds as follows:

Wherever there is a dishonest person, he makes denunciations. There are some also in our village, they are engaged in both smuggling and denouncement”, “... took from ... village. [The accused of this incident was a village belonging to the Küresin tribe.] He said ‘we are taking it to Van’. He got 27,000 dollars. As soon as he took the money, he made accusations against a group of the PKK. They searched for the men with a helicopter. Nine people died. Afterwards a woman takes off her scarf and waves it. They look down and see that these are women, children, not terrorists” “Our people did it again; they denounced others.” “They slandered each other”; “Here! Smugglers. All were rich, respected names... They took them by name... Certainly there are not many honest people around.

(From interviews in Sırmılı and Değirmigöl conducted in September 2002.)

These passages suggest the belief concerning the presence and operation of the denouncement tradition. The expressions “There was no enmity; the problem was the cattle... Look, the district governor was an Armenian...” and “The denouncers acted faithlessly as infidels” stress the words ‘Armenian’ and ‘infidel.’

Despite the differences in the villagers’ statements about who made the denouncements, these statements clearly pinpoint the period which the accusations refer to: For instance, whereas the elderly who rarely leave the village name the enemy of the olden days as the denouncer (“There is the Şemsikan Aşiret, see, they are filthy”); those who have more authority within the *aşiret* and are familiar

with the political dynamism of the new era and are therefore closer to the claims of central power (leaders) identify the ‘other’ of the new era as the denouncers: “The Küresins denounced us!”

Who are the Küresins? The Küresins are described by the Kurds as a Turkish-Sunni tribe without an agha comprising 50-60 villages in Iran and the same number of settlements on the Turkish side. According to some articles published by the Kaynak Publishing House, which are said to have been authored by the General Staff, the Küresins are a tribe with a population of 4700, and they speak Kurdish (Kurmanci) and Turkish:

Denomination: Shafi’i, Chieftains: 1) Yemen (Emin) the son of Maksut, Erçek Subdistrict, Arıtoprak village; 2) Hüseyin İsa, Ermişler village, ... Opinions: They did not participate in the revolt. They are loyal to our country. They recognize Erdoğan Agha from Iran as their chieftain. (Tribes Report 1998: 347-8)

During his commandership at the 7<sup>th</sup> Tribe Cavalry Division in Ağrı between 1921 and 1926, Süleyman Sabri Pasha wrote in his ‘Van History’:

Nowadays the Şikaks call the Haremiens (called by European historians the Horzum Turks during the Crusades) Küresins as Korasmen... The Küresins say that they originate from the Samsun region. They live within the Iranian border region. (Süleyman Sabri Pasha 1982: 45),

and elsewhere, “There is a Turkish tribe which started to change five-six year ago”. By saying that

They inhabit the vicinity of the city of Dilman in Azerbaijan; they joined the Şikak Tribe because they had been threatened by them; they put aside their papak and büzmeli and started wearing the külah and felt waistcoat (Thus they adjusted their clothes to their new identity, status and nationality) and they assumed the name ‘Küresin tribe’. Naturally, they do not know Kurdish. (Süleyman Sabri Pasha 1982: 69),

the author of this quote, in fact, tries to prove that the Küresin and many other tribes in the region are indeed Turkish.

The Küresins define themselves as follows:

We have relatives in Çaldıran and Başkale. The Küresin Sunnis live in Turkey, the Küresin Shiis in Iran. We also have relatives from the Urmiye region, but they are too far away in the south of the border. Damlacık [Raşık-Akspi], Aşağı Tulgalı [Ahrok Jer], Yukarı Tulgalı [Ahrok Jor], Aşağı Sağmallı [Noşar], Koçkiran, Oymaklı, Bakışık [Azverk], the half of Roşar, Sırmılı, Velican, Başkale, Teyseren, 10-15 villages around Çaldıran. They are all ours. There is no tribal system. About 40-50 years ago, Hüseyin Bey from Aşağı Tulgalı was the agha. We have relatives in Yukarı Tulgalı. Previously this village was in Çaldıran. In Yukarı Sağmallı. My grandfather took this village, they settled here. It was given to them by the state. His father was village headman, then he handed over his position to my uncle, after his death it received this name. (From interviews in Damlacık (Raşık-Reşko-Akspi) village, September 2002)

It was a hamlet of Yukarı Tulgalı in 1952. They moved there [to this village] in 1959... Simko Agha oppressed those [the Küresins] immensely, so they sided with Iran. Some of them escaped to this side... Kur-hessinen, means Hessinnin-from Küresin, son of

Hasan... We are Sunni, Kurdish, but Sunni. Not Shafii... We arrived here in the 1920s. They came to the Dileman [Şapur] Kotur region. They moved and settled down here after Iran had instigated war between them and the Persians. Previously this village had been empty. The state made them settle here. A part of the Küresins remained within the Milan. We are from the Küresin Kurds. The Persian Kurds are in Şapur. (From an interview with the Küresin in Damlacak village, September 2002.)

However, these stories of escape and return are not verified by the Kurds outside the Milan Aşiret.

Some of them are a random assemblage; the others are Acem [Azerbaijanis from Iran]. Our nation does not like the Acem [Azerbaijani] at all... They were forced to pay homage to Simko Agha, and then when Simko Agha was defeated, the state gathered them and granted them a few houses... They always support the stronger side. Those from Özalp, especially by the people from Başkale, are known as the spies of the entire Van area. (From the interviews with Kurds in Özalp district, September 2002.)

In the narratives of the Küresins, siding with the state and being rewarded for this appear as the main themes: A special emphasis on being Sunni is a manifestation of the aforementioned ambition ‘to be Muslim’. An even more striking statement is: “We are Sunnis, Kurdish but still Sunnis. We are not Shafis”.

Shafism is a sub-branch of Sunnism, and the Küresins’ statement may be seen as a lack of information or misinformation. In fact, the statement implies something else: being ‘Kurmanci speakers, Shafii and coming from Bohtan have become the main signifiers of Kurdish nationalism in the recent period. Hence, by emphasizing their non-Shafii identity, the Küresins state their Kurdishness and simultaneously distance themselves from Kurdish nationalists.

These codes demand attention as forms of ‘othering’, “This village was empty when we arrived”, “The state settled us here” or “Some of the Küresins remained within the Milan”. The Milan tell the story the other way round: “The Küresins occupied the villages which they found empty.” As far as the question “whether they had cooperated with Simko Agha or not” is concerned, the answers reveal the real reason behind the Küresins’ real or alleged loyalty to the state: “The Persians have always been much closer to the state” [Interview in Sırmılı village].

Ali İhsan Bey says,

The Küresins were h(x)ulam [i.e. farmhands or slaves]. But the Küresin nationality is devoted to their denomination, regardless of the language they speak, their imams are also Sunni. (Interview with Ali İhsan Bey.)

Göktaş’s narratives on the Iranian Azerbaijani-Kurd conflict represent an important part of recent Kurdish nationalist constructions. Göktaş constructs the Persians as ‘the other’ within the story of the establishment of the Mehabad Kurdish Republic.

The Azeris never wanted to recognize the Kurds’ will to draw the borders of their own country. Therefore, Azeris started to occupy one by one the regions and the cities which

are also claimed by Kurds. Hence they seized the cities Hoy, Rizaiye and Meyanduwab. The Kurds had been claiming their right to sovereignty over certain parts of these three cities, if not all of them. (Göktaş 1991b: 38.)

As for Türkdoğan, he calls the Küresins the Kasımoğlu community. According to him the Küresins are a Sunni Azeri group and

Kür in Persian means ‘much, many’. Indeed, they had migrated here from Iran en masse. This separation was mostly a reaction to Iran’s desire to convert this Sunni group to Shiism. The Kasımoğlu Küresins are a group around the Van region with strong national sentiments who are proud of being Turkish. According to their statements, there is not one single person among the Küresins who has joined the PKK and the terror. Şamil Efendi declares this with pride: ‘We are Turks and proud of being Turkish. We are against the PKK and Kurdish tendencies down to the end.’ (Türkdoğan 1998: 43.)

This statement of the Küresins given to Türkdoğan in 1994 can be taken as an indication of their way of dealing with being ‘othered’ at that period.

The current narrative of the Küresin leaders is as follows:

Many Küresins have migrated. They have left. They can be called statist. Upon their arrival, the Kurds continue to settle in Saray. This migration still goes on. Every month 3-4 families [of the Küresins] leave Saray. And Van as well... They had arrived in Iran from Azerbaijan. They settled in Hoy and its surroundings. From there, they had to come here because of the conflicts between the Kurds and the Persians. My uncle was a soldier of Simko Agha. In the years 1928-9. They arrived here in 1932. Escaping from Simko... The Armenians were here when they came. But they escaped. While escaping, a family moved in with my parents – they stayed for 5-6 months. All the fountains belong to the Armenians; the name Saray derives from Serav, which means ‘a place with abundant water, *subaşı*’ [fountain]. There are around 40 *kebriz* [cistern and channels]. All of them belong to the Armenians. The Küresins were used by the state. That is to say, when the Küresins arrived, the state was in opposition to the aghas... Thus they do not like the Küresins... Their relations with Kurds can only be explained with their knowledge of Kurdish. The group with my father arrived in the village of Hındıgan... There are Küresin-only villages. The ones inhabited by the Şahmeyer have also remained pure. There are people among them who do not speak Kurdish at all. The Küresins’ residence is situated in the interior. There is no need for protection. In the past the aghas could not exert much influence here. Nothing could be done to Sahveret Aslan. He died a natural death. (From interviews with the Küresin leaders in Özalp district, September 2002.)

This statement first and foremost demonstrates to what degree the ‘othered’ tries to project itself closer to the center. “*Küresins against the aghas*” and “*taking sides with the state*” are underlined frequently. A similar statement can be found in Türkdoğan’s quotations, such as “being Turk or/ and Azeri” and “opposing the PKK”.

“*Arrival after escaping from Simko*” is underlined especially. Therefore does being disobedient to Simko Agha mean being *reyet* (the plural of *reaya*)? (Bruinessen 1998: 131; 152). Nikitin mentions the letter the subjects and the nomads of the Nahcevan Khanate presented to Kerim Han Zend in 1768, in which they re-

quested ‘to be protected from xolam [golâm, i.e. household slave] enslavement’. “The golâm either inherited this status from his father or was bought for money or came from among the foreigners. But the Nahcevan villagers are reyets, and nomads should not be made golâm”. Hence the Küresins are reyets. Minorsky agrees that the aghas are conquerors and the reyets are another race. It is impossible for these two groups to mix (Nikitin 1991: 224). Remembered as those ‘disobedient to Simko Agha’, the Küresins carry the hardly visible traces of the *reaya* period. Once we project this to earlier historical periods, we realize that the Küresins intend to remind us of an earlier past when they had played a useful role: “In order to attain sovereignty, the Ottoman used Kurdish tribes, including even Idris Bitlisi, against the Anatolian Turkmens in 1514” (İnalçık 1999: 68).

The interviews show that what the two groups share is the anxiety, which may be called the “traditionalization of denouncement”:

The Milan state that: “Pastoral nomadism is difficult, the border is a prohibited zone, and there is no permission. But now, if we decide to go with you, even if we were to go to Iran with 20 people, the gendarme would not know about it. But again there will be denouncers among us.”

The Küresins complain about the same problem: “Our real problem is denouncement, we can do anything but for the traitors among us; if only there were no denouncements! The border villages do not let us go in [in order to smuggle fuel].”

The Milans have the tendency to impute the guilt to the denouncer:

“You denounce, and he is a soldier! The bullet does not know whether the person coming is clean or a smuggler.”

### Who is speaking?

*Who* is speaking? Once we become conscious of being the wretched of the earth, that is, of opposing colonialism with an oppressed mind, we comprehend that this injured consciousness (Shayegan 1997) cannot ever be transformed into a collective outburst of awareness. Spivak herself gave a negative answer to the question “Can the subaltern really speak?” (Spivak 2000). Many writers have shown that the oppressed mind could only speak through a scream, which may be understood only after long sessions of listening. However we need to ask: *Who* is speaking? The answers to this question traveled from Laclau to Spivak, from Connerton to Hall, and then to Adorno. Today forms of settling accounts with the past are evaluated from various directions, ranging from classical liberalism to right-wing laicism, from the liberal left and from the new Ottomans to the new left.

*Who* is speaking when the Milan speaks? Those families in Sırmılı and Degirmigöl which have suffered losses? The pain of these losses and the narratives of the survivors and the narratives of the *Aşiret*’s leader are of a very different na-

ture. The *Aşiret*'s members' attempts to survive and lead a quiet life only cannot be evaluated on the same level as the survival attempts of the chieftains who have enjoyed the support of various right-wing parties. Stuart Hall underscores the necessity to observe the narrators' life worlds and class-based power dynamics. In the Milan's aspiration to investigate its memories and to avoid being the 'other', it is possible to discover the wish to revitalize an older memory as well. All the previous references of the Milan's chieftain such as 'Not being one of the rebels, Hamidiye Regiments, loyalty towards Abdülhamit and the Republic, degrading the *Türkmen-Azeris*' tend to construct a *point de capiton* along with an earlier past. On the other hand the chieftain pinpoints another *point de capiton*: Statements concerning "Kurdish nationalism nourished by masculine elements" and "the rooted-ness of the Milan lineage" imply the immediate possibility of re-constructing new balances and the awareness that these balances will be based upon power and authority as has hitherto been the case.<sup>14</sup>

Who is speaking when the *Küresins* speak? The *reyet*, who have an understanding of the past and the present and who in the past were always left outside of the *aşiret* or *agha* structures, are partly conscious of the fact that their ties with the Republic have brought them no power. The reason behind the overemphasis of the Simko Agha period and their later activities against the PKK initiative lie precisely in their attempts for rapprochement and reminding. To put it more correctly, they call attention to the impossibility of the existence of the lower forms of landlessness within the Republic, even though they were outside the tribe and agha system, and to the unchanging lower status of the *reyet* throughout the Republic. Recently, the *reyet* intends to re-construct its old *capitons* using traditional methods.

If the analysis so far reads like a spy story or has confirmed the view that "what needs to happen, will happen", we need to take a breath and re-think social responsibility: the relations of power and self-interest surrounding the social structure cannot be adequately examined within the framework of "rational calculations". One can observe their rational consequences, influences on identity constructions and traces left in social memory. Therefore neither the micro/chronological explanations nor the macro/achronic ones can show us the unity of the social structure. These two grounds need to be considered in a relational and diachronic manner; and it should be examined how the rational (power and self-interest calculations) and the irrational (identity and memory) mutually modify each other.

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<sup>14</sup> Zizek points out the "back to the future of consciousness" (Zizek 2002).

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