

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: TUR23650
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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

- 1. What are the attitudes of Kurds in Turkey towards women who marry non-Kurds and non-Alevis?**
- 2. Are there any issues in relation to women who marry people of Orthodox Christian faith?**
- 3. Does the attitude and treatment vary between the general community and members of a strictly religious Kurdish Alevi family?**
- 4. What protection is offered by the Turkish authorities to women who may be subject to harm from their family for entering into such marriages?**

RESPONSE

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The hypothesis that the attitudes of the Alevi Kurds differ from that of the non-Kurds and non-Alevis about the social issues such as the Alevi Kurd women marrying outsiders has been continuously eroded since Turkey began its move towards secularism and modernity. While the difference between them has been blurred, variables such as education level, rural/urban background and age play a more important role in explaining different attitudes of members of the groups.

“Alevism historically united Alevi Turks and Kurds in one Anatolian community. But the Alevi Kurds today face an identity problem” (Zeidan, David 1999, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1999 <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/zeidan.pdf> - Accessed 21 July 2005 – Attachment 1). The efficacy of the Alevi religion as an instrument of social control is growing less while the Alevi religion as a culture, as a collection of interlocking ideals and symbols which people may

use to assert their identity, survives with greater ease (Shankland, David 2003, *The Alevis in Turkey*, RoutledgeCurzon, p 153 – Attachment 2).

Unlike Sunnism and mainline Shi'ism, Alevism does not possess a tradition of authoritative religious scholarship and official carriers of formal learning. To prevent penetration by hostile outsiders, the Alevis insisted on strict endogamy, which eventually made them into a quasi-ethnic group. Alevi taboos limited interaction with the dominant Sunni political-religious centre. Excommunication was the ultimate punishment threatening those who married outsiders (Zeidan, David 1999, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, Middle East Review of International Affairs Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1999 <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/zeidan.pdf> - Accessed 21 July 2005 – Attachment 1).

However, Karin Vorhoff explained in 1995 that as the community opened up to the outside world, the Alevis became increasingly secular and left-leaning, neglecting their traditional institutions. Solidarity loosened, ritual and ceremony lost some of their meaning, and the spiritual leadership gradually lost its authority. This change in Alevi internal structures was accelerated by massive migration to large cities, at a higher rate than Sunni Turks, leading to some intermarriage and a new generation not familiar with the Alevi “Way” (*yol*). (Vorhoff, Karin 1995. *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart*, p. 58. See also Shankland, David “Social Change and Culture: Responses to Modernization in an Alevi Village in Anatolia”, in C.N. Hann, ed., 1994. *When History Accelerates: Essays on Rapid Social Change, Complexity, and Creativity*, London: Athlone Press, pp. 240-242. See also Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi. 1988. *Die Kizilbash/Aleviten*, pp. 68-70 – Quote from Zeidan, David 1999, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, Middle East Review of International Affairs Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1999 <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/zeidan.pdf> - Accessed 21 July 2005 – Attachment 1).

Given the Alevis close historical association with the modernizing force of Turkey under Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkey, as a collective protection measure, it is not difficult to understand that respecting secularism is a basic tenet for the Alevis in Turkey (‘Alevis: “the modern face of Islam” in Turkey’ 2004, *Agence France Presse*, 14 December – Attachment 3; and Zeidan, David 1999, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, Middle East Review of International Affairs Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1999 <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/zeidan.pdf> - Accessed 21 July 2005 – Attachment 1).

In an in-depth sociological study of a remote Turkish Alevi village of Sarylar, it becomes also evident that the traditional Alevi religious influence is weakening although some old way is still observed. Marriage is within the clan if possible. Men resident in the city may marry Sunni women, but no Alevi girls from Sarylar are given to Sunni men (McElwain, Thomas (undated), *Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village* <http://www.sahkulu.org/alevi/xritual.htm> - Accessed 2 August 1999 – Attachment 4).

Women advocacy groups reported that there were dozens of “honour killings” of women suspected of being unchaste every year, mainly in conservative Kurdish families in the southeast or among migrants from the southeast living in large cities (US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report: Turkey*, 15 September – Attachment 5). Yet no report has been sighted of the Kurdish or Alevi women killed, harmed, or discriminated for marrying non-Kurds, non-Alevis or Orthodox Christians, in a search through the sources consulted.

4. What protection is offered by the Turkish authorities to women who may be subject to harm from their family for entering into such marriages?

As clear above, no report has been located that Alevi Kurdish women were harmed or ostracised by their families for marrying non-Kurds, non-Alevis or Orthodox Christians. Nor was there any report sighted of the Turkish government offering protection for such women.

The US Department of State comments that in September 2004, the Turkish Parliament adopted a law under which murders committed with a motive related to "moral killing" are considered aggravated homicides, requiring a life sentence. The law is designed to discourage the practice of issuing reduced sentences in honour killing cases; however, some human rights advocates argued that the wording of the law is not explicit enough to prevent judges from viewing the honour killing tradition as a mitigating factor for sentencing (US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report: Turkey*, 15 September – Attachment 5).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources: AltaVista, Google, Vivisimo & Copernic 2001 Personal Agent

Wikipedia website http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Tribes_in_Iraq

al Bawaba <http://www.albawaba.com/en/countries/Iraq/>

al Mendhar <http://www.almendhar.com/almendharen/>

Radio Free Europe <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarchive/country/iraq.html>

BBC News website <http://www.bbc.co.uk>

The Guardian website <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

CNN website <http://www.cnn.com/>

<u>Databases:</u>		
Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty Internal, Human Rights Watch, U.S. Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i>
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue
DIMIA	<i>BASICS</i>	Country Information
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)

List of Attachments

1. Zeidan, David 1999, *The Alevi of Anatolia*, Middle East Review of International Affairs Vol. 3, No. 4, December 1999. (<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/zeidan.pdf> - Accessed 21 July 2005)
2. Shankland, David 2003, *The Alevi in Turkey*, RoutledgeCurzon, p 153. (MRT-RRT Library)
3. 'Alevi: "the modern face of Islam" in Turkey' 2004, *Agence France Presse*, 14 December. (FACTIVA)

4. McElwain, Thomas (undated), *Ritual Change in a Trukish Alevi Village*. (<http://www.sahkulu.org/alevi/xritual.htm> - Accessed 2 August 1999)
5. US Department of State 2004, *International Religious Freedom Report: Turkey*, 15 September.