Araştırma Makalesi ● *Research Article*

The Interaction and Conflict Between Personal and Social Identities in Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*

Robert Bolt'un Her Devrin Adamı Adlı Eserinde Kişisel ve Toplumsal Kimlikler Arasındaki Etkileşim ve Çatışma

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MAKALE BİLGİSİ	ÖZ
	Her Devrin Adamı (1960), ahlaki ve dini ilkelerine bağlı kalmaya ve ideolojileri doğrultusunda kendisine başka bir kimlik oluşturma teşebbüsünde bulunan sosyal ve politik otoritelere karşı kişisel kimliğini korumaya çalışan Sir Thomas More'un hikayesini anlatan bir oyundur. Kişisel benliğine sadık kalmayı tercih eden bir Katolik olarak More, VIII. Henry'nin Aragonlu Catherine'den boşanmasının ve kralın İngiltere Kilisesi'nin başı olarak atanmasının geçerliliğini kabul etmeyi reddeder. Ancak, sosyo-politik otoriteler olarak görünen kral ve maiyetindekileri, More'u kişisel ilkelerini görmezden gelmeye ve önceliği İngiliz monarşisinin hegemonyasını desteklemek olan sadık, vatansever bir İngiliz siyasi adamı rolünü içeren toplumsal kimliğini kabul etmeye zorlarlar. Bu doğrultuda oyun, sosyo-politik ideolojilerin bireysel kimliğin oluşumundaki rolünü inceler. İnsanların cinsiyetinin, sosyo-kültürel geçmişlerinin ve milliyetlerinin bireyselliklerinin oluşumunda etkili olduğunu gösterir. Dolayısıyla oyun, kahramanın kendi ideolojilerini zihnine ve karakterine işleyerek kişisel kimliğini yeniden şekillendirmeye çalışan sosyo-politik otoritelere karşı direnme girişimlerinin sonuçsuz kalmasını gözler önüne serer. Bu çalışma, kimlikle ilgili tartışmaları göz önünde bulundurarak *Her Devrin Adamı* adlı eserin kimliğin sadece kişisel değil, aynı zamanda sosyo-politik ve kültürel bir boyutu olduğunu ortaya koymak için kimlik konusunu cinsiyet, din, hukuk gibi toplumsal kurumların ideolojileri bağlamında ele aldığını göstermeyi amaçlar.
ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	A Man for All Seasons (1960) is a play about Sir Thomas More, who tries to remain faithful to his moral and religious principles and protect his personal identity against social and political authorities that attempt to form another identity for him according to their own ideologies. As a Catholic man, who prefers to remain true to his personal self, More refuses to accept the validity of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon and the king's appointment as the head of the Church of England. However, the king and his men, who appear as socio-political authorities, force More to ignore his personal principles and assume his social identity as a devoted, patriotic English political man, whose priority is to support the hegemony of the English monarchy. Accordingly, the play examines the role of socio-political ideologies on the formation of personal identity. It demonstrates that people's gender, their socio-cultural background, and nationality all have an influence on the formation of their individuality. Hence, the play displays the futility of the protagonist's attempts to resist the socio-political authorities that try to reshape his personal identity by embedding their ideologies in his mind and character. Considering the arguments about identity, this study aims to show that *A Man for All Seasons* handles the issue of identity in terms of the ideologies of social institutions, like gender, religion, and law, to reveal that identity does not only have a personal but also a socio-political and cultural aspect.

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Introduction

A Man for All Seasons is based on the life of Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), the one-time Chancellor of England, who refused to accept the validity of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and who was executed as he did not swear an oath on the legacy of the Act of Supremacy (1534), which declared King Henry VIII as the head of the Church of England. This study examines the personal and socio-political and cultural aspects of identity in the play, thus it is useful to give some information about More's private and public lives, which have impacts on his identity. Sir Thomas More, the son of a wealthy lawyer, studied laws at Oxford and worked as Under-Sheriff of London and later as Lord Chancellor (Kincaid, 2018, p. 6). He was also a prominent English humanist, scholar, and author of his age, who wrote about both religious and governmental affairs (Kincaid, 2018, p. 6). As a conservative Catholic, More expressed his hatred for religious outcasts, and wrote a book entitled *Utopia*, in which he discussed for "a perfectly organised civil society" (Tweg, 2006, pp. 5, 7). The milestone in his life, on the other hand, is his being appointed by Henry VIII as Lord Chancellor. The king expected him to adopt his social identity as an advisor in legal matters and clear his conscience about his decision to divorce Queen Catherine and to break with the Catholic Church of Rome, which had a negative opinion about the divorce. At this point, More faced a dilemma: to be loyal either to the king or to his conscience, or personal self. Robert Bolt shows in his play how More tries to overcome this dilemma: "[More was] a man with adamantine sense of his own self. He knew where he began and left off, what area of himself he could yield to the encroachments of those he loved" (as cited in Lee, 2000, p. 308). Bolt says that More tried to continue his existence without abandoning his personal beliefs through making a compromise to reconcile his conscience with the wishes of social and political authorities. Likewise, Robert Whittington, a contemporary of More, describes him as "a man for all seasons" since More was a person who was able to adapt his personal self to the spirit of time through his unique identity comprising of "gentleness," "lowliness," "affability," "mirth" and "gravity" (as cited in Miller, 2005, p. 1). Erasmus also believes that More tried to negotiate between his personal and social identities, thus he regards More as a "supple," "sweet," and "felicitous" man having the flexibility to be involved in various socio-political and cultural circles without damaging his self-respect (as cited in Miller, 2005, p. 1).

As Bolt mainly handles More's exclusive identity in *A Man for All Seasons*, it is important to explain the notion of identity and the factors influencing identity formation. Ken Browne argues that "[i]dentity is about how individuals or groups see and define themselves and how other individuals or groups see and define them" (2008, p. 38). Browne claims that identity is something which is constructed by such social institutions as "the family, the education system and the mass media" (2008, p. 38). Citrin, Wong, and Duff, on the other hand, define identity as a concept that asserts "both sameness and difference" and extend their definition by arguing that "one is the same as others and different from everyone else" (2001, p. 73). Browne says that an individual needs to have an identity to be able to "fit" into a group or society whose members define themselves with certain ethnic, class or gender codes (2008, p. 39). In the process of identification, individuals are not completely free to choose with which group or society they will identify themselves because "factors like their social class, their ethnic group and their sex are likely to influence how others see them" (Browne, 2008, p. 39). Therefore, identity has both social and personal aspects.

Since identity has both social and personal dimensions, it can be classified into two main groups: social identity and personal identity. Social identity refers to "a social category, a group of people designated by a label (or labels) that is commonly used either by the people designated, others, or both" (Fearon, 1999, p. 10). Such social categories as "American," "Muslim," "father," "homosexual," "worker," or "citizen" are formed to create a certain social

identity (Fearon, 1999, pp. 10-11). As such, social identity is a broad term that has several subcategories, like gender, racial, national, religious, linguistic, and territorial identities (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001, p. 71). According to Tajfel, a founder of social identity theory, social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value or emotional significance attached to that membership" (as cited in Jussim, Ashmore, & Wilder, 2001, p. 6). Thus, social identity is based on two basic notions: "belief that one belongs to a group" and "the importance of that group membership to one's self" (Jussim, Ashmore, & Wilder, 2001, p. 6). Social identity theory asserts that individuals tend to classify people into two basic groups: in-groups and out-groups. In-groups are formed by people that "share a common characteristic or social experience," and their social identities are formed through "a process of identification with, or assimilation to, others who share the common group membership" (Brewer, 2001, p. 117). While in-groups are differentiated by "the ideal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors," out-groups are formed by people to whom all negative qualities are attributed (Goethals, 2007, p. 16). This dualistic manner, in turn, leads to "in-group favouritism," a term which refers to "behaviors designed to benefit the in-group and/or harm the out-group" (Goethals, 2007, p. 16). Moreover, group identity theories claim that individuals might have multiple group-based identities that can be managed within different social contexts (Brewer, 2001, p. 121). Since group identities are separated from individual selves and they are "shared," it is difficult for an individual to "redefine or adjust one social identity to better fit with other identities that connect him or her to a different set of persons" (Brewer, 2001, p. 121). Nonetheless, there are strategies to manage multiple, conflicting group identities:

> One possibility is to commit to one dominant group identification and subordinate all other affiliations to this one identity … A second strategy is to segregate different group identities to different domains so that multiple identities are not activated at the same time … However, when multiple groups make competing demands or imply different agendas, managing combined identities becomes more problematic and effortful. When combined identities are each strong, the individual is likely to exert efforts toward compromise and reconciliation–efforts that have the effect of reducing conflict and increasing tolerance. (Brewer, 2001, p. 122-123)

Personal identity, on the other hand, means "a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways" (Fearon, 1999, p. 11). Locke (1632–1704) underlines the relationship between personal identity and consciousness. He defines human being as "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (1836, p. 225). He argues that rational beings retain their sameness and assert their personal identities through consciousness that "always accompanies thinking" and "makes everyone [*sic*] to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things" (Locke, 1836, pp. 226, 225). According to Locke personal identity does not change although body is exposed to change as it is founded on consciousness that is responsible for the sameness of a person's past, present and future thoughts and actions. He extends his arguments by arguing that although a man might lose some parts of his body, he will still be the same person:

> Cut off a hand, and thereby separate it from that consciousness he had of its heat, cold, and other affections, and it is then no longer a part of that which is himself, any more than the remotest part of matter. Thus we see the substance, whereof personal self consisted at one time, may be varied at another, without the change of personal identity; there being no question about the same person, though the limbs which but now were a part of it, be cut off. (Locke, 1836, pp. 227)

As such, Locke (1836) concludes that personal identity "depends on consciousness," not on substance and human beings continue to preserve their unique, same identities as long as the present consciousness "can extend to actions past or to come" (pp. 230, 226-227). On the other hand, more recent studies have focused on the relationship between personal identity and

external factors, like society. For instance, James D. Fearon (1999) claims that society is an important element in the formation of the identity of an individual as personal identity is what distinguishes a person from other members of the society and "people understand their personal identity in terms of membership in a particular social category" (1999, p. 22). Since personal identity is a basic, distinguishing quality of a person, people may feel at a lose if they lose their personal principles, or they cannot change them even if they desire to do (Fearon, 1999, p. 11). However, individuals can assert different identities on different conditions to ensure their place among the other members of society. Browne (2008) argues that a person may regard "herself primarily as a Muslim in her family or community, as a manager at her work, as a lesbian in her sexual life, or as a designer-drug-user in her peer group" (p. 39). People may also want to adopt a different identity from the one constituted for themselves by their society or group, but they are likely to be exposed to social disapproval (Browne, 2008, p. 39). In the light of the arguments about identity, the following chapter examines Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* to demonstrate that in the play identity is viewed as a personal and social process, which is based on the interaction and conflicts between individuals and social institutions, such as gender, law, and religion.

Thomas More: A 'Man' Trying to Remain True to His Self

As group identity theory suggests, people might have different, conflicting identities. In *A Man for All Seasons*, More's group-based identity also shows variety as he is both a man, a husband, a father, an Englishman, a conservative Catholic and the Lord Chancellor. In terms of personal identity, on the other hand, he can be defined as a person who does not give up his principles even if he knows that he should abandon them for his own benefit. Most of the time More finds it hard to reconcile his personal identity with his social, or group-based identity. As a statesman More is supposed to take side with the king on the divorce matter, but as a Catholic he cannot be convinced on the validity of the divorce. The fact that More puts his personal principles before his social duties frustrates Wolsey, an English politician, and he wants More not to confuse his conscience, a part of his personal identity, with his statesmanship, a position belonging to his social identity. Wolsey argues that "[More's] conscience is [his] own affair," thus he should adopt his social identity as "a statesman" working for the king and approve Henry's decision to divorce his wife, which is a public and political affair (Bolt, 1961, pp. 34-35). When the king, who represents socio-political power, conceives that More is reluctant to act as the Chancellor on "the divorce business," he explicitly reveals his dissatisfaction with him and reminds him that he will not accept any disapproval on his decision (Bolt, 1961, p. 54). The king also thinks that More should make a distinction between his personal and political identities while making a judgement on his marital affair:

> HENRY. Yes, yes. [*He turns, his face set.*] Touching this other business [the divorce business], mark you, Thomas, I'll have no opposition.
>
> MORE [*sadly*]. Your Grace?
>
> HENRY. No opposition, I say! No opposition! Your conscience is your own affair; but you are my Chancellor! There, you have my word-I'll leave you out of it. But I don't take it kindly, Thomas, and I'll have no opposition! … Lie low if you will, but I'll brook no opposition-no words, no signs, no letters, no pamphlets- mind that, Thomas-no writings against me! (Bolt, 1961, pp. 54-55)

Henry makes it clear that More is his Chancellor and his social inferior, thus he has no right to oppose the head of monarchy. He, like Wolsey, says that More's conscience is a part of his personal identity, so he should act on the divorce matter by asserting his social identity as a statesman. King Henry adds that if More acts according to what his social identity requires him to do, he will reward him with a higher position. At this point More feels tormented as he is not able to find a middle-way to please both himself and the king. He experiences the same distress when he cannot please his wife Alice on the divorce matter. His wife wants him to conduct the

divorce matter by assuming his social identity as a Chancellor. She recommends him either controlling the king or himself. However, he rejects the former recommend on the grounds that it will be against his moral principles to "rule [his] King" and refuses the latter by claiming that he cannot be unfaithful towards his principles by yielding to the king's desire (Bolt, 1961, p. 56). Hence, More suffers from the conflict between his personal and social identities.

According to social identity theory, people can manage their different, conflicting identities through the strategy of displaying different social identities in different spaces and under different conditions (Brewer, 2001, p. 122-123). In *A Man for All Seasons* More uses this strategy to cope with his various identities. For instance, he assumes different identities under different climates, but he pays attention not to confuse them with one another. More behaves as a gentle and caring husband who restrains himself from offending his wife when he deals with domestic affairs. However, when he tells his wife that he has resigned as the Lord Chancellor he behaves like a traditional, authoritarian man:

> ALICE. So there's an end of you. What will you do now-sit by the fire and make goslings in the ash?
>
> MORE. Not at all, Alice, I expect I'll write a bit. [*He woos them with unhappy cheerfulness*] I'll write, I'll read, I'll think. I think I'll learn to fish! …
>
> …
>
> ALICE. … Poor silly man, d'you think they'll leave you here to learn to fish?
>
> MORE [*straight at her*]. If we govern our tongues they will! … .
>
> (Bolt, 1961, pp. 75-76)

Adopting the traditional gender ideology that describes men as public figures, Alice expects More to be an ordinary man who is active in social sphere instead of in the domestic sphere, and she wants him to work like conventional husbands to support his family. Therefore, she teases him for his decision to relinquish his political power and stay at home like a woman who has hardly any presence in the outer world. At first, More responds to her criticism humorously, but when he sees that Alice does not want to be entertained and she is quite serious, he speaks in an aggressive and a patronising tone, which best suits a typical oppressive husband. The change in More's tone from a humorous to a serious and commanding one is in parallel with the change in his identity: he changes from a gentle husband to a domineering husband under the pressure of Alice, who tries to force him to adopt the identity of a conventional man associated with power and the public world. In another instance, More has to assert his identity as a man of law. Richard Rich, an ambitious and selfish officer, is assumed to be spying on More, so Lady Alice, her daughter Margaret, and Roper, Margaret's lover, want More to arrest him when he visits the Mores, but More prefers to act according to laws:

> ROPER. Arrest him.
>
> ALICE. Yes!
>
> …
>
> MARGARET. Father, that man's bad.
>
> MORE. There is no law against that.
>
> ROPER. There is! God's law!
>
> MORE. Then God can arrest him.
>
> ROPER. Sophistication upon sophistication!
>
> MORE. No, sheer simplicity. The law, Roper, the law. I know what's legal not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal. (Bolt, 1961, pp. 59-60)

More does not attempt to arrest Rich because arresting a person is a matter of law and as there is no legal evidence against him, he thinks it would be wrong to charge him with spying. As this occasion demands More to act according to laws, he feels the necessity to act as a statesman. However, in divorce matter there is no legal obligation, and it is solely the king's own wish that makes the issue a political problem. Therefore, More does not feel the necessity to conduct the matter as a politician. More thinks that Henry VIII's Act of Succession has also been regulated according to the king's desire, so he tells his daughter that he will be a hypocrite if he swears on this act, which has not been conducted according to the laws of man or laws of religion:

> MORE. You want me to swear to the Act of Succession?
>
> MARGARET. 'God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth' or so you've always told me.
>
> MORE. Yes.
>
> MARGARET. Then say the words of the oath and in your heart think otherwise.
>
> MORE. What is an oath then but words we say to God? (Bolt, 1961, pp. 100-101)

Margaret uses a religious discourse to appeal to the religious identity of her father. She also wants to convince his father to say what he believes to be wrong because it is better to survive as "a live rat" rather than "a dead lion," but More refuses to be a hypocrite because as a man of law and as a man of religion, he does not believe that the act has a religious or legal aspect (Bolt, 1961, p. 93).

The fact that More struggles to preserve his personal values against people who try to impose on him their own values does not mean that "he regards himself as a pure individualist in opposition to society." (Casey, 2008, p. 47) What More tries to do is not to challenge social norms or the social institutions, but he tries to prevent any attack on his principles. As long as no body touches on them, he remains at peace with the society and the authorities ruling it. Considering this fact, his conduct in the divorce matter or in giving an oath to the Act of Supremacy cannot be interpreted as a protest against the king or his men, but what he protests is that Henry, Wolsey and Cromwell want to make him believe what he thinks to be false. Therefore, when More resigns as the Lord Chancellor, he tells his wife that he does not care about the king's future conducts in the divorce matter or in the Act of Supremacy as he got rid of the obligation to express his ideas on Henry's affairs: "I have made no statement. I've resigned, that's all. On the King's Supremacy, the King's divorce which he'll now grant himself, the marriage he'll then make–have you heard me make a statement?" (Bolt, 1961, p. 76). He is also glad that nobody can disturb his silence on the king's conducts anymore: "[W]hen they find I'm silent they'll ask nothing better than to leave me silent; you'll see" (Bolt, 1961, p. 76). That More is not against society can also be proved by the fact that he tells Roper that he trusts laws, which are socially constructed, "for [his] own safety's sake" (Bolt, 1961, p. 60). More counts on laws so much that he tells his wife if he continues to remain silent about Henry's affairs, "[his] safety under the law" will be granted (Bolt, 1961, p. 76). Since he is confident about the fact that laws will protect both him and his beliefs, it cannot be assumed that More challenges the legal ideology of his country.

More also remains loyal to his countrymen, who belong to the in-group, even if they accuse him of treachery, thus he does not support Chapuys, the Spanish diplomat, who belongs to the out-group, in fighting against Henry, who wants to divorce Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of the Spanish monarch. The antagonism between More and Chapuys is in parallel with the social identity theory, which argues there is a conflict between in-groups, who share the same socio-cultural values, and out-groups, who adopt different socio-cultural principles from those of in-groups (Brewer, 2001). In *A Man for All Seasons* the clash of interest between England and Spain occurs when Henry VIII decides to divorce Catherine. The conflict between

the two countries is what forces More, a member of the in-group, to assert his English identity and to consider Spain as an out-group, which poses a threat to his country's unity. Therefore, although he does not approve Henry's divorce from Catherine or his succession to the head of the Church of England, he looks after his country's benefits and rejects to take part with Charles, the king of Spain:

> CHAPUYS. … I have a personal letter for you.
>
> MORE. From whom?
>
> CHAPUYS. From King Charles!
>
> [MORE *puts his hands behind his back*.]
>
> You will take it?
>
> MORE. I will not lay a finger on it.
>
> CHAPUYS. It is in no way an affair of State. It expresses my master's admiration for the stand which you and Bishop Fisher of Rochester have taken over the so-called divorce of Queen Catherine.
>
> MORE. I have taken no stand!
>
> CHAPUYS. But your views, Sir Thomas, are well known-
>
> …
>
> MORE. - Are well known you say. It seems my loyalty to my King is less so! (Bolt, 1961, p. 83)

As accepting King Charles's letter would mean supporting Spanish politics, More refuses to take it although Chapuys claims that its content is personal. He displays the same sensitiveness about his country's benefit when he betrays Chapuys, who reports that there are protests in Yorkshire and Northumberland against the king's desire to divorce Queen Catherine and to establish the Church of England. More gives Norfolk the information he got from the Spanish diplomat about the threat of a riot in the areas where the Catholic Church is strong to prevent a possible civil war, which will lead the country to a chaotic atmosphere. Norfolk, in turn, says that Cromwell has already taken measures in these areas, but he thanks More, who acts as an in-group member, for still having "some vestige of patriotism" (Bolt, 1961, p. 75).

Klandermans (2000) argues that identities are inflicted on individuals by social environment. Therefore, although More acts as an in-group member, who considers the benefit of his country, he is punished for failing to adopt the identity chosen for him by socio-political authorities. How society imposes identities on people is well illustrated in the final scene which portrays More's punishment. The Common Man, who is appointed to kill More, is a character that does not have his own personal identity but has several imposed identities. When he appears for the first time on the stage, he is nobody but just a common man, however he feels the necessity to choose "a costume" from the property basket to adopt a distinct identity (Bolt, 1961, p. 25). As both costumes and identities are man-made, Common Man draws a parallel between wearing a costume and adopting an identity. In fact, each costume imposes new identities on Common Man: respectively he becomes the steward, the boatman, the publican, the jailer, the jury foreman, and the headsman. The Common Man cannot find anything in his basket to wear when he is assigned to be a headsman to decapitate More, but Cromwell gives him "a small black mask" and he becomes "the traditional headsman" (Bolt, 1961, p. 114). This act of turning the Common Man into a headsman shows that individuals are forced to fit themselves into the identities established for them by their social superiors. On the other hand, the decapitation of More, who resists the king and his men to preserve his personal identity, shows the overwhelming power of socio-political groups, which punish people who do not accept to adopt their imposed social identities.

Conclusion

Focusing on the theme of identity, *A Man for All Seasons* reveals the struggles of Thomas More to find a compromise to reconcile his personal and social identities. More, whose personal identity has been shaped by Christian teachings and morals, ignores his social identity as a male English politician, who is supposed to obey the decrees of King Henry. He refuses to accept the validity of the king's divorce from his Catholic wife and his appointment as the head of the Church, which are against his conscience and self. As he prefers to be loyal to his personal self, socio-political authorities try to make him act according to the status of his social identity, namely an English man of politics who has to work actively in the public sphere to defend the king. More, in turn, resigns as the Lord Chancellor, a social status which is a part of his social identity, in order to remain silent about the king's divorce and his appointment rather than being unfaithful to his self. Moreover, he shows his loyalty to British monarchy by acting as an in-group member who refuses to support the Spanish, the out-group, against King Henry. In this way, More tries to mediate between his personal and social identities, but he fails to escape from punishment for offending the king and challenging his supremacy. Accordingly, the play shows that it is hardly possible both to remain true to one's own principles and not to offend the public opinion through More's case. Moreover, it underlines the fact that an individual can continue to exist in a society without offending socio-political groups only through doing what his/her social identity requires him/her to do. As such, the play shows that since people's identities are shaped by the ideologies and politics of such social institutions as gender, religion, and law, identity is a notion that has both personal and social aspects.

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