

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITIES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: THE CASE OF MARDIN AS A MULTICULTURAL CITY

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Abstract

In this paper, I highlight issues of cultural identity in Mardin, which is a multicultural city having different ethnic groups (Sunni Muslim Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Orthodox and Catholic Syrians, Chaldeans, Armenians) living together for many centuries in southeastern Turkey. The data used here are based on an ethnographic research of interculturality focusing on the questions of how symbolic boundaries related to cultural identity are drawn in daily cultural discourse and the ways in which discursive struggles over these boundaries and cultural meanings are defined. This study suggests that boundaries are drawn by cultural distinctions, which themselves construct cultural identity by including and/or excluding cultural peculiarities. The characteristics that are attributed to cultural identities and intercultural relationships become a matter of political struggle since they are under the influence of power relations. Cultural identity has no essence but is a political construction formed by intercultural interactions

Keywords: cultural identity • interculturality • intercultural communication • symbolic boundaries

KÜLTÜREL KİMLİKLERİN VE SINIRLARIN İNŞASI: ÇOKKÜLTÜRLÜ BİR KENT OLARAK MARDİN ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bu makalede kültürel kimlik, birçok etnik/kültürel topluluğun bir arada yaşadığı çokkültürlü bir kent olarak Mardin’de, kültürlerarasılık ve kültürlerarası iletişim üzerine yapılan etnografik bir araştırmanın verilerine dayanarak incelenmektedir. Derinlemesine görüşmeler ve katılımlı gözlemle oluşturulan niteliksel veri, gündelik kültür söyleminde kimliğe dair simgesel sınırların kültürlerarasında nasıl çizildiğine ve bu sınırlara dair kültürel anlamlara odaklanarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulgu ve sonuçlarına göre, kültürel söylemdeki ayırımlar bir taraftan kimliğin simgesel sınırlarını çizerken bir yandan da içerdiği ya da dışladığı kültürel özelliklerle kültürel kimlikleri inşa eder. Kültürel kimliklere ve kültürlerarası ilişkilere atfedilen nitelikler, iktidar/güç ilişkilerinin etkisi altında olması anlamında politik bir mücadelenin konusudur. Bu anlamda kültürel kimliklerin “öz”lerinden değil, kültürlerarası ilişkilerdeki politik inşalarından söz edebiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültürel kimlik • kültürlerarasılık • kültürlerarası iletişim • simgesel sınır

Introduction

Continuing debates on identity problems in Turkey indicate how effective the political role of culture is in shaping social life. The intensity of these debates, both in public and academic circles on all kinds of collective identity, is not just about the issues on national and local social developments. According to Stuart Hall (1996, p. 1), the discussions on the concept of identity, which became a “discursive explosion”, are also related to the

transitions encouraged by the capitalist globalization that became evident by the increasing reciprocal cultural interaction between the local and the global. David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995, p. 74) point out that these global processes are not only related to economical, but also political and cultural changes. These processes are important in terms of collective organization and emergence of identities. This process is eroding the collective belongings such as national identities, class, and citizenship, which are the most fundamental political associations in capitalist societies.

It is clear that identity problems are related to historical and societal dynamics at local and national levels as much as they are at the global level. In Turkey, within the modernization process, cultural identities are understood from a nationalist model, which is not questioned. According to this understanding, culture is seen as a measure of subordination and belonging (unity) that gradually became a principle of exclusion and inclusion. This, in return, fostered a nationalist ideology operating on the dynamics of subordination as well as inclusion and exclusion (Bayart, 1999, p. 12). Recently, this monist nationalist model suppressing the cultural and identity differences is being questioned in the light of global and local developments. This process requires us to find ethically acceptable and politically applicable solutions to the societal problems on the issues of cultural identities. Therefore, one should think more deeply and comprehensively on the meaning of collective identities and their occurrences.

The cultural identity analysis of Stuart Hall (2003) provides us the theoretical ground to do this. Hall indicates that there are two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first approach is based on the ideas of essence, completeness, and closure. According to this, cultural identity is understood as a shared essence, a type of “one true self”. In this sense, defining and experiencing the cultural identity is a move for searching an essence, a glorification, and providing this essence with privileges, and hence returning to this essence.

The second view on cultural identity is more historical and multi-dimensional. Cultural identity includes various points of similarity in its definition; however there are deep and significant differences within this definition. This second position recognizes these many points of similarity, but also suggests critical points of deep and significant *difference*

constituting “what we really are”, or rather - since history has intervened – “what we have become”. Without accepting these differences and changes, we cannot talk about “one experience, one identity”. In this second approach, cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being” (Hall, 2003, p. 225).

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 2003, p. 225).

According to Hall, in this second approach, cultural identities are variable identification points that emerge within historical and cultural discourses. Cultural identity is not an unchangeable property that is possessed, but it is *positioning*. There is always an identity, i.e., a politics of position and this does not have an absolute assurance within a “transcendental law of origin”. Therefore, the second cultural identity aspect is more problematic: If the identity does not have a fixed origin and an unbroken linear development, then how are we to understand its formation? Hall’s answer is clear: by analyzing the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture, as well as the distinction games in the identity (Hall, 2003, p. 226).

Thus, the most appropriate way of analyzing the formation and meaning of cultural identity is to examine how it is formed with the interactions of these identities enabling each other. In this context, this study analyzes the formation and meaning of cultural identities in Mardin¹, which is a multicultural city, based on the data gathered from an ethnographic

¹ Mardin, as it is explained in more detail below under the heading *People, Culture, and History in Mardin*, is a multicultural city where people of different cultural societies have lived together throughout its history. With this configuration, it is one of the most appropriate cities of Turkey for analyzing how identities are formed by their relationships with each other and by the help of each other within the context of cultural identity theory explained above.

research² focusing on the condition of intercultural relationships and the intercultural communication existing in the city.

Intercultural communication is understood as all types of interaction which include the creation, sharing, and negotiation of meanings among those communities or individuals who feel that they belong to those communities and perceive themselves as different cultural groups or ethnicities (Kartari, 2001, p. 12; Sari, 2004). In this direction, as a case or a “context” where intercultural relationships and boundaries could be observed, this research aims at analyzing how culture, cultural identity, and politics are related to each other as well as to the communication and relationships between different cultures in Mardin. Different from traditional behaviorist cultural theory and intercultural studies, this study basically suggests that the characteristics of ethnic communities do not constitute a given ‘culture’ that determine the communicative actions and cultural specificities as well as cultural differences -namely identity. Culture is socially constructed with the interactions of intercultural communication(s) and in the context of daily intercultural practices.

In this direction, firstly, I explain the theoretical approach regarding culture and identity in this paper; later, the societal and cultural configuration of Mardin, where the

² Within the scope of my doctoral dissertation about an ethnographic field research conducted in Mardin, in the summers of 2005 and 2006, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, participatory observation, and documentary coding techniques are utilized for obtaining qualitative data for the research. From my ethnographic field research I conducted in-depth interviews with 48 people (12 women and 36 men) and carried out seven focus groups. In Mardin city centre, three languages are spoken (Local Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish). However, I conducted my ethnographic interviews in Turkish, which could be spoken by all ethnic groups in Mardin city centre. Apart from a few of the informants (respondents), most of them allowed me to use a voice recorder and for certain questions a few requested that I turn it off. These questions were mostly on the politically controversial issues such as the Kurdish issue and the events of 1915, regarding Armenians of Anatolia. Since I could not use the voice recorder, I took detailed notes of these interviews as well as of other informal interviews. For the selection of the informants, I considered the following criteria suggested by Belkis Kümbetoğlu (2005, p. 96) and Lawrence Neuman (1991, p. 369) for the informants: 1) to be totally familiar with the culture and engaged in the routines of that culture 2) to have an idea about the main elements of the research problem 3) to have some experience of the basic components of that research problem and 4) to have some observations related to the various aspect of the research problem. In doing so, I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with the informants of both genders living in Mardin, and coming from different social strata, generations, ethnic, and religious communities. I also conducted semi-structured and participant observations during some celebratory events of a ritualistic nature such as Easter and Bayram celebrations, funerals, and weddings. I noted my observations of these events to my research diary. An effort was made to conduct the in-depth interviews about those subject headings where especially the cultural boundaries were revealed and for which it was possible to analyze ethnic societal relationships. These categorical headings are: definition types of language and community identity; marriage and wedding; quarters, neighborhood and friendship relationships; vocational, professional, and business relationships; festivals, funerals and condolences; nongovernmental organizations; preferences for following the media and publication and broadcasting in native language; political organizations and preferences.

ethnographic field study is conducted, is described. Following these, the elements of cultural identity, its meaning, and culture discourse in Mardin are analyzed, based on the data of the research by focusing on the concept of cultural boundary.

Theoretical Framework and Approach: Interpretive Cultural Theory

In social sciences and humanities³, interpretive culture theory defines the culture with an approach that responds to the ‘meaning’ problem. In Clifford Geertz’s thinking (1973, p. 5) “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” and in this sense he takes “culture to be those webs” according to him “the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” As Anthony P. Cohen had already indicated (1985), this approach has three principles: according to the first principle, culture as the webs of significance is created by people and recreated continuously over and over by people through social interactions, rather than deterministic results such as the superstructure of classical Marxism or Durkheimian body of social fact. According to the second principle, the culture, as a dynamic process, does not have a deterministic power on its own and it is not possible to mention objectively identifiable referents (‘law’) of culture. Thirdly, culture can clearly be observed in people’s ability of perceiving the meaning in social behavior and action and attributing/attaching meaning to those (Cohen, 1985, p. 17). Within this framework, John Tomlinson describes the notion of culture anthropologically. He says that like Raymond Williams (1981, 1989), “culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 18). The culture firstly is “the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation”. With such a definition provided by interpretive approach, Tomlinson indicates that we could make useful differentiations such as:

If a rather dry generalization, it nevertheless allows us to make some useful distinction.
Very broadly, if we are talking about the economic we are concerned with practices by

³ In fact, here the most comprehensive concept including both humanities and social sciences is the German word *Geisteswissenschaften*. This concept is corresponded by psychology and culture sciences in Turkish. In the presentation essay of Hans-George Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (Volume I) translated by Husamettin Arslan and Ismail Yavuzcan, the translators indicate that they prefer translating the *geisteswissenschaften* concept as “semantics”. According to the translators, this preference is “closely related to the ‘human’ apprehension of German tradition... the stress on ‘meaning’ is a very strong intellectual reaction developed by the Anglo-Saxon tradition against human apprehension” (2008, p. XVI).

which humans produce, exchange and consume material goods; if we are discussing the political we mean practices by which power is considered, distributed and deployed in societies; and if we are talking culture, we mean the ways in which people make their lives, individually and collectively, meaningful by communicating [with] each other” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 18).

In fact, production of meaning is valid for several social activities and practices. For example, the culture gives meaning to economic activities as it does in many other areas. Since, in its broad meaning, everything that could be expressed with symbols is meaningful, we can talk about symbolization in the economic area as well. However, here a differentiation could be made in a way as suggested by Tomlinson. Of course, symbolization and production of meaning, which provide communicative shortcuts, may exist in each humanitarian activity area; however, what is meant by culture is building a meaning which has existential significance (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 19; Geertz, 1973). Clearly, construction of existential meaning and producing culture is not a self-developing process. Apprehending culture as construction of meaning which has existential importance provides the culture with a political attribute by leaving it open to challenges upon meaning. Critical social science should not overlook this challenge upon these boundaries and distinctions in cultural areas and should emphasize its emancipatory potential.

Cultural studies literature, starting from the theoretical heritage of Antonio Gramsci, has shown comprehensively that culture is a political struggle area. In addition to this, postcolonial studies also underline the fact that the culture should have a struggle area by its historicalness, temporariness, and impossibility to set boundaries for it. For example, James Clifford defines the culture concept with an approach like this:

Cultures are not scientific ‘objects’ (assuming such things exist, even in the natural sciences). Culture, and our views of ‘it’, are produced historically, and are actively contested...If ‘culture’ is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meaning that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation – both by insiders and outsiders - is implicated in this emergence” (Clifford, 1986, pp. 18-19).

With a similar approach, Gayatri C. Spivak (1990, p. 123) perceives the culture as a site of struggle: “When we look at the word ‘culture’ we should see it as the site of a struggle, a problem, a discursive production, an effect structure rather than a cause.”

Alain Touraine refers to the 1960s as the period in which culture became an area of political struggle. Discerning the source of today's political themes in 1960s' societal movements, Touraine indicates that, above all, 1968 brought the introduction of cultural problems into political life. For instance, today, identity problems, which are one of the fundamental agendas of political struggle and which have become a "discursive explosion" as mentioned by Stuart Hall (1996, p. 1), are one of the primary platforms where culture is politicized. Moreover, as Anthony Smith (1986, p. 159) has indicated, it is no longer possible to mention any area of culture which does not affect the power relationships and which does not request a political transition.

In fact, since culture is the reference area of an identity, there is a strong and indispensable relation between culture and identity. The approaches, which regard culture as a source of difference, also emphasize that culture has a repertoire of distinctions for identity. The definition of Anthony Pragnell (1985, p. 8) is in line with the understanding of culture as a repertoire of these distinctions: "Culture is to be seen as the amalgam of elements which distinguish communities (of whatever size) one from another" (Schlesinger 1991, p. 142). Similarly, Manuel Castells also emphasizes that identity is built with selected cultural characteristics. According to him, "By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning" (2010, p. 6).

Symbolic Boundaries and Cultural Identity in Mardin

Defining the cultural communities and ethnic groups in a place like Mardin, where different ethnicities have been living together for ages, in fact, means detecting the cultural boundaries because, by definition, cultural boundary marks where a community begins and where it ends. Cohen gives the answer to the question why such a mark is required as follows: "The boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction." Philip Schlesinger also mentions the significance of boundary for analyzing the collective identity formation: "The critical factor for defining the ethnic group therefore becomes the social boundary

which defines the group with respect to other groups of the same order, not the cultural reality within those borders” (1991, p. 153). Halil Nalcaoglu similarly emphasizes that boundary is an important determinant of identity. All distinctions in the culture are only possible with the existence of a boundary. Furthermore, the things that the boundary separates from each other are by definition those things which do not belong to the boundary. Therefore, the boundary cannot be ontologically anchored and it is a concept that could be descriptive as much as it could have characteristics that may disrupt these descriptions. According to Nalcaoglu, “the thing that defines the culture as *culture*, i.e., the thing that separates the culture from others is the boundary in a sense. We can say that the boundary is the phenomenological stop or mode of (cultural) difference (2004, p. 8). In fact, especially in anthropology, in cultural society and ethnicity studies, there is an advanced literature about boundary concept, the foundation of which was laid by Fredrik Barth (2001).

According to the approach of Fredrik Barth, who is referred to as a *transactionalist* in ethnicity⁴ studies, ethnicity is not based on an unchangeable essence and it is a design which emerges in the interaction process of cultural groups with other groups (Kaya, p. 2001). Ethnic groups should be regarded as *units of ascription*, where social boundaries formed in the interaction provide the continuation of the group, rather than objective lines. This is not the closure of cultural content by the boundary. Instead, it is an accentuation of symbolic “boundary keepers” (for example, language, clothes, food, etc.) which maintain the continuity of the community. According to Barth, human element that draws boundaries and lives within these boundaries is always open for change. These boundaries and structures

⁴ Ethnicity concept is first mentioned in Turkish in the sociology studies of Ziya Gökalp (2007). It is a new concept that has become widespread, especially within social science literature. Semra Somersan translates that the word *ethnic* is based on the “ethnos” (nation) concept in Greek. Ethnos does not point out a political existence but common origins. The adjective form of the word is *ethnics* in Latin, and means “foreigners”, “those who are not one of us”, “others”, “unreligious people”, “primitives”, and “those who do not share the same religion with us.” It has these meanings in everyday English use until the midst of the 19th century (2004, p. 22). *Anthropology Dictionary* of Suavi Aydın and Kudret Emiroğlu defines ethnicity as follows: “Ethnicity is a societal/cultural and sometimes political formation which regards itself ‘different’ from others and which is regarded as ‘different’ by others in terms of religious, language, spatial and/or cultural characteristics; which has an integrative identity and domestication specific to itself, which protects its group identity by marrying inside, and which maintains the continuity of this group. One, several, or all of the elements mentioned above may be important in ethnicity phenomenon; this may change in time or depending on the place. In this respect, ethnicity is defined as a situational phenomenon and within the course of history, it is possible to witness the variability of the same group in terms of ethnic identities or it is possible to observe that although an ethnic name remains the same throughout the history, the thing that it refers [to] changes” (2003, p. 276).

generated by human communities are not static but variable (2001, p. 24). Since cultural boundaries are not absolute but dynamic and changeable, they need to be protected, generated, and regenerated.

People Culture and History in Mardin

Mardin, where the ethnographic field research is conducted, is a city located in the southeastern part of Turkey, on the north border of the historical Mesopotamia region, on the slopes of a high hill just in the north of the historical Silk Road. Mardin was founded as a castle city, and the first known settlement in Mardin dates back to 2000 BC.

Mardin is a multi-religious and multi-ethnicity city where people believing in many different religions live together. These people are the Muslims and the Christians with different sects, the Jews, the Yazidis believing in the Angel Peacock, and the Shemsis worshipping the sun. Muslim Arabs, Kurds, and Turks; Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Syrians, Armenians, and Chaldeans; Yazidi Kurds, Chechens immigrants of Caucasia...⁵ Located on the north of Mesopotamia, where the agriculture and settled life had started in the history of humanity, Mardin has been a boundary where the eastern civilization represented by Iranian Persians and Sassanians, and the western civilization represented by Rome-Byzantium had been in contact and struggle for long years. On the historical Silk Road, an important commercial city of the Ottoman Empire, Mardin has been a significant region of Kurdish political movement since the nineteenth century and one of the most important centres of Eastern Christianity.

⁵ Scientific research about religious or ethnic cultural identities in Turkey is very limited. There are research studies about ethnic identities which had been conducted by Western scientists until the 1970s. Andrews (1992, p. 46) refers to the studies of Benedict (1974), Eberhard (1953), Jahn (1970), Magnarella (1973), and Meeker (1973), which are rather sociological, in his book where he tries to build the ethnic map of Turkey. There are rather few studies conducted on specific ethnic groups. There are studies about Yuruks (Bates, 1973; Gungor, 1941) Kurd Alevis (Bayatli, 1944; Gezik, 2004), Turkish Alevis (Gokalp, 1953; Kehl, 1988), Tatars (Klay, 1974), Kurds (Van Bruinessen, 2004; Besikci, 1969, Yalcin-Hekman, 2002), and Turkmens (Ozbas, 1938; Sahin, 1962; Tanyol, 1952). It is not possible to come across many studies conducted on ethnic identities and groups since the 1970s. Refer to Andrews (2002) for an inventory study about geographical distributions of the ethnic groups mentioned in this paper, their languages, religions, and group identities.

Population of Mardin city centre is approximately 100,000 today.⁶ If its ethnical composition needs to be given, half of its population is Kurd and the remaining half is composed of Arabs, Turks, and Christian minorities. In the city centre, the Christian minority is composed of Orthodox Syrians, Armenians, and Chaldeans. A great part of Kurds from Mardin is a population that has migrated to the city center from the rural areas of Mardin, because of ethno-political fights. Syrians are the immemorial public of Mardin. Moreover, Mardin and its neighborhoods are regarded as the sacred lands of Syrians and referred to as the Tur Abdin⁷ region in Syrian culture. Very few Armenians and Chaldeans live in the city, however all Christian congregations including Syrians have been obliged to migrate to Europe and various parts of the world, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, Syrian and Armenian Diaspora from Mardin, live in many cities of Europe, in Syria, and even in Latin America. Christian minorities especially had been forced to migrate from the region within the last period of the Ottoman Empire and throughout the history of the Republic during the periods when the nationalist violence had risen. However, since the 2000s, some part of the population who had migrated from Mardin has started to return and buy houses and land in Mardin.

Today's Kurds from Mardin have migrated from villages to the city because of the ethno-political armed conflicts that have risen starting from the 1980s, and they have established slum districts here. Throughout history, different religious congregations and cultural communities have lived in different districts. Today, as well, Arabs, Christians, and Kurds are concentrated in certain districts in terms of population within the general composition of the city. However, outside the historical part of the city, there is a New City

⁶According to the address-based population count of Turkish Statistical Institute in 2007, total population of Mardin is 745,778 together with the city centre and towns. The population of city centre is 82,130. However, especially because of unemployment, Mardin city centre receives high levels of migration from the rural areas and it loses its population to other developed cities.

⁷ Tur Abdin is an historical name given to a mountainous region of 200 km, which starts from Mardin and extends eastward until Cizre, by including Savur and Hasankeyf in the north, and Nusaybin in the south. This region has been called different names throughout history. In the Assyrian sources it is called 'Kasyari Mountain', in the Roman sources it is called 'Mons Masius', in the Syrian sources it is called 'Izlo Mountain' or 'Beth Gawgal' since the 6th century, and in the Arabic sources it is called 'Cebel-al Izal'. However, after these names started to be used for more specific locations of this wide region, the entire mountainous region including the Mardin ridge and its eastern part is called Tur Abdin. Tur Abdin is formed by the combination of Tur (mountain) and Abdin (prisoners, slaves, servants) words in the Syrian language and it means 'mountain of servants' (Goyunc, 1991; Aydin, et al. 2000; Akyuz, 1998).

location composed of apartments. This section, which is growing fast, demonstrates a relatively modern settlement and here, a mixed Turkish, Arab, and Kurd population is living together within the apartment community.

In fact, all this illustrative information is a description of an external observer, an etic⁸ point of view and if it is necessary to put it in a self-reflexive way as required by an interpretive-critical approach, it is not objective. Identity should be defined in parallel with the comprehension of the cultural community regarding itself as much as it should be defined both in an etic and an emic way, i.e., as much as possible with an external view. In that case, how do the abovementioned cultural communities define the identity and their identity? What are the building blocks of cultural identity in terms of cultural communities in Mardin? In the next section, answers to these questions are sought.

The Elements of Cultural Identity in Mardin

First of all, cultural identity in Mardin is based on a complex variation of factors such as religion, language, political preferences, common posterity, or consanguinity (such as family, clan, etc.), residential area, residential area of the ancestors, and profession and the cultural boundaries drawn by these elements change dynamically.

Above all, personal history and the history of ethnic community are the determinative characteristics of the identity. For Syrians of Mardin, history has importance since the region is historical-sacred land. Moreover, history of forced migration is also an important element of the identity⁹. The successes of Arab ancestors make the historical

⁸ Etic and emic terms are basically derived from linguistic concepts (phonemic-phonetic). In cultural studies, analysis of a certain culture from outside, based on previously set categories and attributes is called etic; and the vice versa of this, i.e., analysis of a culture from inside, in alignment with its own categories and characteristics is called emic approach (Kartari, 200: p. 37).

⁹ Within the scope of the field research, this part is taken from an interview conducted with a Syrian (August, 2006): "I was born in 1939, in city centre. I am former sportsman; I was a professional football player. Later I overtook the old profession, jewelry. It is the profession that we have been dealing with since I was very little; I have learned it from my uncle... I have been the chairperson of Deyruzzafaran Foundation for 40 years. I am the head of churches and monasteries... Our ancestors are also from Mardin. We have not been engaged with genealogical trees. We could not go much back in time. Migrations happened; there are migrations to Beirut, Syria, Egypt, New York, Brazil, and Argentina. We keep in touch, communicate from time to time. However we keep in contact with each other in our imagination. I have received a postcard. From the sons of my uncle... back then, my real uncle... my father was self-employed. What I call self-employment is back then there was weaving here. Back then one of the most famous professions here was weaving. It was popular all over Turkey.

information a part of their identity with the stories of migration from Arab geography, which took place centuries ago.¹⁰ The successes of Arab ancestors make the historical information a part of their identity with the tales of migration from Arab geography that took place centuries ago. Kurds, on the other hand, again use tales of migration, however this time they use an obligation, a shared collective difficulty from the recent history together with historical elements. Moreover, it could be said that struggles of attachment in urban society are also historical inputs of the identity.

Besides historical content, the identity has a geographical or territorial content as well. For example, while sacredness and religious importance of the land is emphasized for Syrian and Christian communities, the Arabs in Mardin highlight their role in the conquest of that land and the process of Islamizing that land. However, it could not be said that territorial connection is strong for the Kurds. Nevertheless, this cultural emptiness is fulfilled

Besides jewelry, all professions were controlled by Syrians. All professions... In other words, from jewelry to leather trade, to ironworks... There were Armenians as well, but in fact Armenians were before us. There were not many Armenians at the time of our childhood. There were several families but most of them had left. There were Chaldeans. There were Jews, we did not see. Jewish district, Jewish fountain... In the past, there were Shemsis here, those who worship the Sun. Their district is Shemsi district as well. Finally, there were only few families in Nusaybin. Then they migrated too. Now Jews are in Antakya, in Antep. However here, Jews, Syrians, Chaldeans, Yezidis worshipping the Satan used to live all together. And this was a real solidarity. Four religions and four languages used to live together and they had lived together for ages. There are not any Shemsis remaining in the city center of Mardin. We gave them a chance. They were gathered together and given a right. There is Christianity, there is Islam, and there is Judaism. They were to choose from these three religions... I cannot recall the exact time of this. According to what is being told, perhaps a pasha came from either Damascus or Aleppo. They came and were told to select one of the three religions and they selected Christianity back then. There is even a place in our Deyruzzafaran that we call Shemsi place. They are gathering at the best place although they are Christians. It is the ignorance back then; they were called Shemsi and replaced to some place... I am married for 42 years; I have 7 children. My mother tongue is Arabic. Mother tongue of the Syrians in Mardin is Arabic; Midyat and the neighborhoods speak Syrian language. I know Syrian language but either Arabic or Turkish is spoken in the house. My children also know Syrian, both speaking and writing. We use three languages during the ritual. Syrian, Arabic, and Turkish... Because we do not have 'it should be this way, it should be that way, according to the Bible, etc.' You use the language that you know the best. But for example, the rituals are performed only in Syrian in Midyat. Villages, too, does know neither Turkish nor Arabic. They only speak Syrian. However we here know Turkish and Arabic."

¹⁰ During the field research, this part is taken from an interview conducted with an interviewee of Arabic origin (August, 2006): "I am retired. I was born in 1947 in Mardin. I graduated from high school... We are from Mardin for 1400 years. Back then, at the Islamic Conquest... We are here since the Islamic Conquest of Mardin. In the Islamic Conquest thousands from our family had become martyrs here... Our Prophet, his highness, wrote a letter to the rulers of the country, he invited them to Islam. At that time, a brother of our ancestors brought the invitation to the Byzantine sovereign. Byzantine sovereign made him a martyr here... We are of Arabic origin. My wife is also of Arabic origin... My mother tongue is Arabic (...). I also know Kurdish."

symbolically within the culture discourse, for example, although current living conditions are better than those in the villages, by using the village and earth nostalgia.

The fact that birth place and residential location are the fundamental elements of culture could be explained by its being a composition of history and territory. Being from Mardin, the fact that the ancestors were also from Mardin is a cultural identity discourse shaping the cultural ghettos, which in fact formed through migration. This element of the identity can be interpreted as a part of the request for privilege in the process of sharing urban resources. Moreover, based on the ethnographic data that was collected, the emphasis on religion, mother tongue, profession, and ancestry could be mentioned as other elements of the identity.

First of all, if we are to mention religion as a component of an identity, then we need to indicate that it is important for Syrians, Armenians, and Chaldeans to say that they are Christian. Especially during the interviews, the fact that being Christian is mentioned before telling about ethnic belonging, indeed, appears to be a religious tolerance request. It could be said that this involves a longing for the nation system in the Ottoman Empire, which was based on religious tolerance. Because, Christian minorities were being subjected to obligatory migration and pressures had started with the rise of nationalism in Anatolia, this is an important part of collective memories of Christian congregations and their identity construction.

If we talk about the mother tongue issue, which is another important element with respect to the components of cultural identity, in many cases, we can say that it means the declaration of cultural identity. If being Christian implicates a religious tolerance request of the cultural community, then mother tongue, also, is a request for cultural tolerance. In addition to this, it should be emphasized that these requests imply an expectation intended for the governmental authorities, i.e., a political expectation. While the mother tongue becomes a cultural identity declaration for Kurds, many interviewees who told that their mother tongue was Arabic, in fact said, “my mother tongue is Arabic but I am Turkish.”

Another important element for cultural identity is the profession and the job being performed. These elements too, are valid for especially Christians and indicate that they regard themselves as a functional part of urban society, an important factor of the city’s

economy. Finally, it should be mentioned that the emphasis on ancestry is highlighted in the identity construction especially for Arabs. Especially many Arab families from Mardin highlight that they come from the Prophet's ancestry, i.e., they are "Seyyit" with its Arabic expression. Description of the identity with the family and the ancestors is particularly important for those who regard themselves as the natives of the city.

Another dimension about the description of cultural identity that needs attention gives us an idea about the relationship between formation of cultural identities and politicization of the culture. Each cultural identity discourse carries the political burden of cultural identity. Cultural identity discourse could either be built so as to mean opposition to the predominant identity policies of the government (mostly in Kurds), or to include the emphasis that it is not a threat for the current political regime. The opponent concretizes the cultural boundaries and intensifies the distinctions. For example, the identity discourse that is willing to eliminate the possibility of being a threat for hegemonic culture policy highlights the cultural commonalities. However, the themes that intensify the cultural distinctions and boundaries emerge over the language policies. For example, the fact that it was told Kurdish was the mother tongue and Turkish was the foreign language involves a critical attitude regarding the official education where being Turkish is emphasized. On the other hand, the commonalities mitigating the cultural boundaries are highlighted by elements of the shared symbolic repertoire such as intercultural marriages, genealogical trees mixed into each other, food culture, and commonalities in rituals and ceremonies. It should be indicated that political views and conception of the world are also used in the description of identity, although they are used very rarely.

Sections from the Discourse of Culture and Distinctions Constituting Cultural Differences

Zygmunt Bauman (1997, p. 159) asserts that distinctions such as "us-them", "here-there", "inside-outside", "native-foreign" are the most important differences that are constructed and sustained by the cultures:

With these distinctions, they draw the boundary of the territory they claim for their own undivided rule and intend to guard against all competition. Cultures tend to be tolerant

towards other cultures only at a distance – that is, only on condition of barring all exchange or limiting it to a strictly controlled field and ritualized form...The other way of describing this tendency of cultural activity is to say that cultures aim, as a rule, at hegemony – at the monopoly of the norms and values on which their own peculiar orders are erected. Cultures aim at uniformity in the realm subjected to their hegemony, while at the same time sharply differentiating between this realm and the rest of the human world. They are, therefore, inherently against the equality of the forms of life, promoting as they do one choice over all others. Culture is, by and large, a *proselytizing* (missionary) activity. It aims at *conversion*, at inducing its objects to abandon their old habits and beliefs and embrace others instead” (1997, pp. 159-160).

First of all, it could be said that one of the fundamental cultural distinctions in Mardin is religious belonging. Peaceful coexistence of religious variety is accepted as the historical cultural identity of Mardin city. It could be indicated that the terms for fundamental cultural distinctions are “Muslim-Syrian” in the discourse, and this includes a simplifying attitude erasing the ethnical variety within Muslims.

Bauman’s (1997) emphasis on the fact that cultures have an orientation such as establishing hegemony and giving privileges to some options is important in terms of demonstrating the interactive and reciprocal characteristic of cultures loaded with oppositions. Within the context of the culture’s orientation towards building hegemony, the question for our subject that may reveal the cultural struggle is this: Which culture’s city is Mardin? Which culture’s cultural referent is Mardin? Some *claim* that Mardin is a city of Arabs; some *claim* that it is a city of Arab-Islam culture; some others *claim* that it is a Turkish city; some *claim* that it is a Turkish-Islamic city; and some *imply* that it is a Syrian city. The fact that cultural distinction is built with Christian-Muslim difference has a projection over the hegemony fight in the culture area. Those who regard this struggle in the cultural area as based on religious grounds rather than on ethnic grounds make the culture discursive with a Muslim-Christian distinction and an attitude in favor of Islam. This distinction builds the cultural difference and belonging not on ethnic but on religious grounds. This could be interpreted as an indicator of a competition between religion and ethnicity regarding the sources of political legitimacy.

In addition to this, are Arabs who join the cultural hegemony struggle within the context of ethnicity, i.e., those who are included in the ‘sequestration of the culture castle’ in Mardin. In their discourse, when the Kurds, who have come to Mardin later, are excluded

from the city's culture (and this usually happens this way), the cultural distinction is regarded as Arab-Syrian. Similar to the fact that the distinctions establishing the cultural difference are basic characteristics of boundary operations intended for identity, it could be said that a hegemonic operation is in action in this distinction as well. As a response to Syrians' wish for demonstrating Mardin as a Syrian city, examples of dominance of Arab culture in Mardin and in general, a struggle about recognition of Arab identity in Turkey could be mentioned. However it is necessary to indicate that this discourse as well, is built with opposition, around a contentious relationship. Syrians are on the display windows of tourism, which is rising in Mardin and during this process, Syrian culture is being restored with its churches, monasteries, and houses. This gesture intended for Syrian and Christian culture is found disquieting in some Muslim and Arab parts of the city. In this sense, restoration of the culture becomes the restoration of the cultural boundaries as well. It is possible to observe that this tourism-based competition on the cultural platform has become a struggle over the ownership of the Mardin city culture especially at the level of elites of the city. The expression explaining this struggle in the best possible way is the metaphor of an interviewee: "Everyone pulls the quilt to himself."

In addition to this, the solution for today's ethnic and cultural problems is the identity discourse of "being from Mardin" which is suggested for the societal and political coexistence of multi-ethnicity. However, "being from Mardin" has also a scope, and generally it becomes a distinction which builds the cultural difference, hence a symbolic boundary. And while there are Muslims and Christians from the city within this boundary, there are Kurds who have come through migration on the other side (outside) of the boundary.

It is important to have come to the city through migration, because the migration poses a threat on the order provided by the culture and the culture gives its most difficult struggle against the uncertainty. Migration from the outside towards the inside erodes the boundaries; however migration from the inside towards the outside weakens the hegemonic power of the culture. What does culture do to control the movement from the outside towards the inside that erodes the boundaries? According to the "being from Mardin" concept that sets the boundaries, "those who come are peasants". If those who are inside are the 'natives' of Mardin, then those who come from the outside are the 'foreigners'. If a

geographical boundary is crossed and eroded, then a symbolical boundary is built. However, it is necessary to draw attention on a condition that is elaborated of being highlighted in the discourse. Those are Kurds who have migrated from the villages and settled around Mardin, however the distinction of 'being from Mardin - not being from Mardin' or 'civic - peasant' is not a completely ethnic distinction because, there are Syrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Arabs, and Kurds among those who are from Mardin.

However, in the culture discourse, there are those who are from Mardin or Mardin natives on one side, and Kurds on the other side; i.e., there are natives on one side and foreigners on the other side. The fact that cultural distinction is built as Arabs-Kurds, those who are from Mardin-who are not, and civics-peasants in fact, points out the same cultural boundary. That is why it is possible to switch to alternative terms of distinction. It is just a shift in the map of the culture in question. These changes, even 'deviations' in the identity terms are important in terms of revealing the boundaries because if there is an asymmetry in the distinctions that are built, i.e., if one is defining his side as being from Mardin and the other side as the Kurds, then in fact an incoherency is perceived. Here, this incoherency shows the rigidity and intransitive nature of the cultural boundary. This is a definition that does not associate the state of being Kurd with being civic, and here an exclusionist attitude aimed at protection of the boundary is present.

If the hierarchy is included by the cultural distinctions that are made, i.e., if the exclusion and inclusion discourse is evident, then it is possible to anticipate the possibility of disagreement that may arise from this because the region has an historical experience on the issue of disagreement of cultures. At this point, an inclusion gesture follows the emphasis on exclusionist distinctions. For example, the exclusionist distinctions made in politics with the concepts used for Kurdish politics such as "racist", "head hunter", "blind stubbornness", "separatist", "blood politics", "Kurd supporter" are followed by an inclusion operation to the culture through fellowship, friendship, or propinquity. Those who have migrated are outside of being from Mardin and/or Arab identity, that is "civilized" as they are "foreigner", "peasant", "feudal", "inharmonious", and "they lack aesthetics and ethics"; however, immediately afterwards, they are inside as our "fellow townsman", "citizens", or even "brothers".

Outlines of the distinctions that establish the cultural difference and the boundaries of identity are drawn politically. Among ethnic identities, the distinctions are considerably clear in terms of both meanings attached to the politics and the political practices. From the point of view of many Kurds, the distinctions established in politics are important elements of cultural identity. Here, it is important to highlight that cultural identity is not designed solely based on politics and the boundaries of the culture are not drawn by just the political distinctions. The clearest resort where the boundary lines established in culture, in intercultural relationships, i.e., the boundary which separates a culture from another culture is politics because politics is the field where the exclusion and inclusion practices are the most visible. Politics contain the boundaries that build the ethnic identity in terms of both power struggle in the distribution of societal resources (Poggi, 2001, pp. 2-5), and the establishment and protection of the society's boundaries and it (i.e., the politics) operates the inclusion/exclusion mechanisms.

Characteristics of Intercultural Relations and the Discourse of Tolerance

How the cultural characteristics attributed to the ethnic identity are established in intercultural relationships and get into circulation are important with respect to the establishment of cultural identity because what makes these characteristics important, building blocks of a culture, and what draws the boundaries of the culture is the confrontation of cultures, i.e., interculturality. Analysis of intercultural relationships provides explanations of the politicization of the culture and the identity.

The most important theme where intercultural relationships become discursive is 'tolerance'. Michael Walzer (1998, p. 10) indicates that tolerance makes cultural differentiation possible, where differentiation necessitates the existence of tolerance. Tolerance argument does not need to be a difference argument. By analyzing the tolerance for the fact that other cultures are not equal participants in case there are cultural, religious, and lifestyle differences, Walzer mentions four tolerance formats: 1) tolerating the differences for the sake of peace, 2) being passive against cultural differences, 3) accepting others' rights even if it is unpleasant, 4) being open to the other and having curiosity and respect for and listening to the other (1998, pp. 25-26). In Mardin, tolerance discourse may

be analyzed under the four formats here. Walzer says that tolerance is more complicated than being a principle of inequality; however, he assesses the political burden of this relationship on the tolerance-intolerance axis. Nevertheless, what should be emphasized here is the fact that tolerance is also a political relationship. Tolerance discourse intended for the Syrians or religious tolerance discourse could both be analyzed under the first three formats of tolerance relationship proposed by Walzer. However living with tolerance and fraternally with the Kurds could be recognized within the first tolerance regime. Some Arabs indicated that they tolerated the Syrians both as an obligation and in terms of economical benefits.

It could be said that the relationship between the civic Arabs and the Kurds is a power/strength relationship within the context of civic-peasant, native-foreign tension rather than tolerance. The difference of Kurds is not expressed by tolerance terms but political terms. From the point of view of the civic Arabs, this, in turn, becomes tolerating the differences for the sake of peace. Then, intercultural relationships have evolved to a power balance from a power struggle. The distinctions and the power relationships corresponding to competition have translated into a tolerant coexistence form with the code of "brotherhood".

At this point, the political nature of cultural tolerance should be highlighted because tolerance is a definition provided from the point of view of the dominant. Like the brotherhood discourse, tolerance as well is a symptom of the problems regarding cultural difference. Tolerance tries to be an answer for the coexistence problem of different religions, where brotherhood discourse tries to be the answer for the coexistence problem of ethnic identities. Both are also political efforts for overcoming the cultural difference problems. Both of these discourses take the cultural difference problems to a level where they will not cause any changes in the current power relations. Tolerance discourse is based on measure, which is not intended for power, which is religious belonging. Brotherhood, on the other hand, shifts the political problem of cultural rights to a psychological and ethical ground.

This tolerance is especially a religious tolerance intended for the Syrians and it is related to the effort about Mardin's being a tourism brand. Syrians are both on the display

window of tourism and they are represented in the city's public (for example, in city council and city protocol). However, although the relations of Arabs and Syrians seem to be close and tolerant within the context of tourism and in public relations, it could be said that this relation is in fact distant. Some Arabs explain this distance with Syrians' strong feelings for unjust treatment and prejudices of the Syrians. In addition to this, it should be highlighted that from the perspectives of some Arabs and Syrians, these prejudices have been overcome by intercultural interaction. There are also others who interpret the relationship between the Arabs and the Syrians as endurance rather than tolerance. Some Syrians also emphasized the distance with conservative Arabs and mentioned that they have the same distance with the Kurds as well as with the Arabs.

It could be said that the determinant of the relationship between the Arabs and the Kurds is the tension of civic-peasant and native-foreigner and the position of Mardin's Arabs against the Kurdish political movement. All these factors intertwine, determining the relationships. However it is possible to say that this relationship increases the identity consciousness of the Kurds.

In fact, it could be said that intercultural relationships play an important role on the formation of identity consciousness not only within the ethnicity context but also in all contexts. Especially if intercultural relationships include the power struggle and potency applications, then it becomes easier for this interaction format to create the identity consciousness. However, in addition to this, it should be indicated that intercultural relationships include conciliations and tolerance as much as they include the power-potency relationships. The identity is both about intensification of the cultural distinctions and mitigation of these distinctions.

Conclusion

In this paper, an effort was made to analyze how cultural boundaries and identity are established within the culture discourse by focusing on the intercultural communication and relationships in Mardin, which is a multicultural city. The qualitative data, on which the study is based, are gathered through an ethnographic field research and in this paper. The results of this ethnography are described and discussed conceptually. In Turkey, empirical research

on cultural identity is limited. Thinking that the best area to observe the boundaries of culture and identity is intercultural communication and relationships, this study is aimed at providing a contribution in this direction.

Symbolic boundaries are revealed where cultures and identities meet each other or where they stand side by side and hence, they provide us with the opportunity to detect the culture and the identity. This, at the same time, means that cultures and identities are (re)constructed in communication. Assmann's (2001, p. 28) assertion that communication is what establishes the cultural community refers to this point.

As has been depicted in this analysis, since culture is the construction of existential meaning, then it is clear that there are different cultures of different worlds of meaning and each intercultural communication practice puts these meanings into circulation and designs what is cultural. The distinctions establishing the cultural difference, hence the irreducible differences in worlds of meaning have a critical importance in the construction of ethnic identity. This proves that we need to address not "Culture" but "cultures" by means of differences in meanings besides observable objective differences such as, for example, mother tongue or religious practices. The culture is not only an issue of collective name, but also the difference in the meanings and these differences are established in the intercultural communication. In addition to this, interculturality is not only the construction of symbolic and objective differences, but also it establishes identities and commonalities because cultural boundary is both a closure and an opportunity for disclosure. The fact that discourses about culture include opposite interpretations and judgments is an ambivalence caused by the interculturality.

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ÖZET

Türkiye’de kimlik sorunları etrafındaki süre giden tartışmalar, kültürün toplumsal yaşamı biçimlendirmedeki politik rolünün ne denli güçlü olduğunu göstermektedir. Kimlik sorunlarının küresel olduğu kadar yerel ve ulusal düzeydeki tarihsel ve toplumsal dinamiklerle de ilişki olduğu açıktır. Bu makalede kültürel kimlik, birçok etnik/kültürel topluluğun bir arada yaşadığı çokkültürlü bir kent olarak Mardin’de, kültürlerarasılık ve kültürlerarası iletişim üzerine yapılan etnografik bir araştırmanın verilerine dayanarak incelenmektedir.

Stuart Hall’ün belirttiği gibi kültürel kimlik üzerine iki farklı düşünme biçiminden söz edilebilir: Birinci yaklaşım, bir öz, tamamlanmışlık ve kapalılık fikrine dayanır. Buna göre kültürel kimlik paylaşılan bir öz, bir tür “tek gerçek benlik” olarak kavranır. İkinci kültürel kimlik görüşü, daha tarihsel ve çok boyutludur. Kimlikler ve farklılıklar, “gerçekten ne olduğumuzu” ve tarih için içine girdiği için, zaman içinde “bize ne olduğunu” belirler. Bu ikinci yaklaşımda kültürel kimlik, bir “(var) olma” sorunu olduğu kadar, “oluşma” sorunudur ve kültürel kimlikler, sahip olunan değişmez özellikler değil konumlanmalar, tarih ve kültür söylemleri içinde oluşan değişken özdeşleşme noktalarıdır.

Bu çerçevede kimliklerin birbirleriyle ilişkileri içinde ve birbirleri sayesinde nasıl oluştuğuna bakmak, kültürel kimliğin oluşumunu ve anlamını incelemenin en uygun yollarından biridir ve etnik topluluklar arası kültürlerarası iletişimi araştırmak böyle bir incelemeye olanak sağlar. Kültürlerarası iletişim, kendilerini farklı kültürel gruplar/etnisiteler algılayan topluluklar ya da bu topluluklara aidiyet hisseden bireyler arasında, anlamın yaratımını, paylaşımını ve müzakeresini içeren her türlü etkileşim olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu doğrultuda makale, kültürlerarası ilişkilerin ve sınırların gözlenebileceği bir örnek ya da “bağlam” olarak Mardin’de kültür, kültürel kimlik ve politik olanın birbiriyle nasıl ilişkilendiğini, farklı kültürler arasındaki iletişim ve ilişkileri inceleyerek kavramaya çalışıyor. Makalede öncelikle kültür ve kimliğe dair kuramsal yaklaşım ortaya konulmakta, sonrasında etnografik alan araştırmasının yapıldığı Mardin’in toplumsal ve kültürel yapısı betimlenmektedir. Bunların ardından da araştırmanın verilerine dayanarak, Mardin’de kültürel kimliğin unsurları, anlamı ve kültür söylemi, kültürel sınır kavramına odaklanılarak çözümleniyor.

Çalışmada temel olarak, Mardin'deki çokkültürlü/çoketnili toplumsal ilişkilerin analizinden hareketle, geleneksel davranışçı kültür ve kültürlerarasılık çalışmalarından farklı olarak, etnik topluluklara ait özelliklerin iletişimi belirleyen verili bir 'kültür' olmadığı, kültürel özgüllüklerin ve farkların, dolayısıyla kimliğin, kültürlerarası iletişim(ler)de ve gündelik kültürlerarası pratiklerde toplumsal olarak inşa edildiği iddiası geliştiriliyor.