Sub-adult graves in Şanlıurfa-Turkey: on the concept of childhood

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Abstract

Separate adults and children graveyards have been encountered in the modern Turkey as in Şanlıurfa. This study aims to analyze possible reasons of segregation of graves for sub-adults and establishing separate graveyards both for adults and sub-adults. It is proposed that the roots of this difference can be found in the definition of human development. Perceiving infants and children as "incomplete humans" might be the main reason of keeping them apart from the domain of cultural beings. Differences in grave places of infants and adults might be related to their bio-cultural development, their being considered as "person" or "non-person."

Keywords: *Sub-adult graveyards, age symbolism, human development, Islam*

Introduction

The issue of childhood has been neglected not only in other social sciences, but also in anthropology (Kamp, 2001; Hirschfield, 2002). The reason may be that they do not acquire a social role and considered the silent members of the society, and that they do not leave behind many material remains (Kamp, 2001:3) Or it may be because anthropologists associate children, just like women, with the private rather than public sphere, and they approach the issue with prevalent cultural stereotyped judgments or simply because they do not focus on children (Kamp, 2001:1). Whatever the reason is, child graves stand before us as a field in which we will take note as to what they have to tell us about themselves.

Different burial practices due to social status or age symbolism is a subject that various researchers point out (Binford, 1971). Just as the cultural meaning of death may vary from one society to another, it may also vary even within the same society; depending on the age, gender and social status, and whether death is "expected" or "unexpected" etc. In his own words Mc Hugh states that "the patterning of burial remains within a cemetery reflects the symbolic recognition of the age categories within the population, and potentially their importance to the functioning of the living society" (1999:19). Examining local definitions of

childhood and social categories which define social roles and status (age, gender, etc), and concepts of person can be a starting for discussion. In other words, seeing the concept of childhood through a historical and cultural perspective will move us closer to the analysis of the problems.

Burial practices which differentiate between sub-adults and adults have been observed in modern Şanlıurfa city (Turkey). Research findings contain many culture-based questions. For which reasons are sub-adults, especially infants buried in separate graveyards to adults? With what kinds of thoughts and beliefs are they categorized as distinct from adults? In other words, what is the human contemplation which causes infants and children to be treated as separate from adults? We will try to find answers to these questions with data obtained from the ethnographic research that we conducted in Şanlıurfa, since analysis of the beliefs and practices regarding death are possible only by extracting *what is cultural in individuals.*

Child graveyards in Şanlıurfa

With traces of many civilizations and cultures dating late back in history, Şanlıurfa is an ancient settlement. The past settlers of Jews, Syrians, Armenians and Greeks no longer remain as Şanlıurfa communities. Instead, a Muslim society comprised of Kurds, Arabians and Turkmens is observed. Şanlıurfa is regarded as the city of prophets, for it is the birth place of Prophet Abraham. The most prominent characteristic of the city is its strong tie with Islam belief.

Cemeteries in Anatolia are not generally separated and partitioned for adults, females, males or children. In the ethnographical research titled "A Study on the Anthropology of Death in Şanlıurfa," it was also found that adults and children were buried in the same cemetery in the 16 cemeteries examined in Şanlıurfa city centre and its eight districts. Yet, information that adults and children were buried in separate cemeteries or in special areas inside a cemetery in Şanlıurfa city centre, Harran and Viranşehir districts were also obtained. The first example of such cemeteries was found in Harran district, where the Arab population is dense. Harran Cemetery is a place in which only persons over six years old are buried[1]. However, there are also two *child graveyards* in this district where children younger than six are buried and it is preferred even by the villagers from its surrounding areas. One of them is the child cemetery inside the city walls, within the neighbourhood surrounded with briquettes. The other graveyard is formed around the tomb of a person known as Sheikh Mohammed, on the South-Western part of the settlement. The child graves here are the types of simple graves, on which rubble stones are piled over an earth mound, and larger stones placed on the head and foot parts, and names are not written (Fig. 1). It was narrated during the interviews with the key informants regarding the cemetery outside the city walls that, "since Sheikh Mohammed loved children they are buried around him, so that he would be close to them." That the cemetery dates to a date too early to be remembered or narrated, and to have its roots even in the founding of the city of Harran implies that the practice may be considered as a continuation of a more archaic behaviour. In Harran child cemeteries are also used derivatively as family cemeteries, like adult graves.[2] According to the information obtained from the local informants, individuals varying from newborn babies to infants and children up to six years old were buried in such cemeteries.

In Viranşehir district with a dense Kurdish population, it was determined that children were buried in two separate cemeteries, namely Yeni Mezarlık (New Cemetery) and Belediye Mezarlığı (Municipal Cemetery) in separate places within the cemeteries. The eastern part of the New Cemetery, in which graves are elevated by means of various construction elements[3], painted and decorated, is used for adults. On the other hand, child graves in which briquettes are arrayed in just a single line, with additional briquettes placed in an upright

position on the foot and head part, on which no information about the name and gender exists, are located on the western half of the cemetery (Fig. 2). Sub-adult graves, unlike adult graves have a quite simple and plain look. In Viranşehir Municipal Cemetery[4], a section in the southern part of the cemetery is allocated for children. Child graves are simple, and not surrounded by any construction element, as in the New Cemetery.

Fig. 1: A view of the childhood graveyard (Sheikh Mohammed Cemetery).

Fig. 2: A part of the Yeni Mezarlık (New Cemetery) was separated for young children.

The practice of separating infant graves in a small part of a cemetery is also found in the Harran Kapı Cemetery, located in Şanlıurfa city center. It was found that a small area, which can be defined as a "baby cemetery" consisting of simple pit graveyards existed close to the gateway of the cemetery, outside the family grave(yard)s. The information that newborn or young infants were buried in this area was obtained from the interviews with informants.

In Bediüzzaman Cemetery[5], widely used by the Şanlıurfa townsman, the situation however is completely different. There are no sections allocated for babies and children in this cemetery. Infants are generally buried in the spaces left between other graves and roadsides (Fig. 3), mostly without preparing any gravestones, and generally without bathing the deceased, unlike adults for whom funeral prayer, funeral ceremony led by an imam or condolence ceremony are obligatory. Although it is observed in almost all of the adult graves; the lack of the upper structural elements made of Urfa stone in graves belonging to infants or pre-puberty children causes such graves to disappear. Thus, Bediüzzaman Cemetery has assumed the characteristic of an adult cemetery (Fig. 4). Indeed, 729 randomly

chosen graves were examined to understand the general structure of Bediüzzaman Cemetery. It was determined that, of the 729 graves and 1022 persons buried in these graves, 62 were infants, 25 of which had no names, 21 were male and 16 were female infants. These data show that, 10% of the 621 people whose age groups were determined, and only 6% of the total buried individuals (1022) belonged to infants younger than two years old. The same somehow applies to children. Only 21 of the 621 graves belonged to children aged from two to 12. As is known, infant and child mortality is high in the South-Eastern region of Turkey in general and Şanlıurfa province in particular. In most of the traditional societies, frequency of sub-15 year's mortality is expected to be over 50% (Acsádi and Nemeskéri, 1970; Erdal, 2000). Therefore, we should have found a higher number of infant graves in Bediüzzaman Cemetery; and this suggests that there may be some practice/value differences when the burial practices for the baby and child graves are compared to those for adults.

Fig. 3: An example for infant graves on the roadside in the Bediüzzaman Cemetery.

Fig. 4: A reflection of adult characteristic of the Bediüzzaman Cemetery.

It can be asserted that children, especially infants, were treated differently to adults, in terms of differentiation of grave forms within a cemetery, or even separation of cemeteries in most of the archaeological settlements and modern cemeteries. This demonstrates the existence of a culturally determined selection of children or "discrimination" against the child, especially for infant burials, as is true for various regions of the world. In this study, the phenomenon of separation of infant and child grave(yard)s is handled with the aforementioned ethnographic data, and analysis is attempted from an historical and

anthropological perspective.

Method

In accordance with the aim of the research, graveyard ethnography is established by visiting the Şanlıurfa province many times between the years 2008 and 2010. Although an elegy on the epitaph, a drawing, the features of tombstones or a child grave seem as distinct aspects, they all bear the traces of cultural idea and social memory. Therefore, children graveyards are tackled as a cultural domain in this study. Besides, interviews with relatives of the dead who make graveyard visits, local informants and direct observations have provided with analytical data on classificatory cultural structures such as symbolic age categories.

Historical concepts of childhood

In today's modern societies the concept of childhood is medically oriented; therefore the period of childhood, which includes emotional, cognitive and moral development is defined by biological changes (Kamp, 2001:3).[6] Such that, these periods turn out to be chronometric processes: Age groups are divided on the basis of month, in expressions such as two and a half years, two years and nine months. Thus, "modern" childhood ideology separates children from adults and puts them in a special category (LaRossa and Reitzes, 2001:386). Even though "year" or "month," which is numerical units, is used for biological age, the concept of age and accordingly the periods such as "babyhood," "childhood" and "adolescence" are mainly constructed culturally. Historical and cultural analyses also indicate that different definitions of childhood exist in various cultures. In his famous book titled *Centuries of Childhood*, French historian Philippe Ariés (1962) studies how the concept of childhood was reflected on in art, language, literature, clothes, games and education. In it he claimed that there was no idea of childhood similar to that of today's world in the medieval western societies, and that children were perceived to be young adults. According to Ariés (1962:411-412), age groups of the Neolithic period and *paideia* of the Hellenistic period suggested the assumption that there is a difference and passage between childhood and adulthood; this passage was realized through education or initiation ceremonies. However, medieval societies forgot the *paideia* of the ancient societies and were deprived of this passage concept, since they could not perceive this difference. For example, adolescence and childhood had been intermingled in France, until the 18th century the word *enfant* was used sometimes for both groups, and the word baby (*bébé*) was borrowed from English in the 19th century and was used to refer to children from the first months of life and school age (Ariés, 1962:25-29). Therefore, there was no awareness in the medieval period as such regarding the fact that childhood had its own distinctive features, and when a child managed to live without supervision of his/her mother, s/he joined the adult society (Ariés, 1962:128). However, Shulamith Shahar (1992 cited in İnal, 1999:71-72) objects to Ariés' thesis, stating that most concepts used in relation to childhood (such as innocence) and the concept of dividing childhood into stages (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia*) were created in the Medieval Age. Despite these debates, Ariés led the way for the development of an interdisciplinary research field regarding the social aspect of the concept of childhood, by means of demonstrating that childhood is not only a biological phenomenon but also a cultural one.

It will not be wrong to say that the first known sources regarding the concept of childhood belonged to Ancient Mesopotamia. Ancient Mesopotamia has a noteworthy status in world history, and is the first society to have developed a writing system and also education institutions, in parallel with centralization of economic life. The school where the writing system was taught is thought to have first appeared in the late 4th Millennium BC (Erkanal, 1997:57-63). According to what we have learnt from various tablets, sons of the well-off families went to school when they were 6-7 years old, and continued their education

until they were 17-18 years old. In this system, where daughters were excluded, male children were trained to become clerks or "scientists" (studying botany, zoology, geography, linguistics etc.) within strict disciplinary rules (Kramer, 2002:303-328).

We do not know whether there existed special words to name childhood and its stages in Ancient Mesopotamia. Yet, it may be inferred from examples such as the fact that well-off families hired wet nurses for their children, and produced toys for their children out of ceramic or wood (Erkanal, 1997:62) that there was a distinction between babyhood and childhood, and that this childhood period was partitioned (such as playing age, education age) as a cultural description in Ancient Mesopotamia.

In the Ancient Greek or Roman societies on the other hand, data related to the concept of childhood comes especially from the fields of philosophy, medicine and law. In Aristotelian philosophy (Aristotle, 2008:VII/17), childhood is divided into five stages in terms of physical and psychological development. Babyhood stage, starting from birth is characterized by sucking milk. The next stage lasts until the baby is five years old and reading stories and fairy tales are suggested as a preparation for school. Again in this stage, the child becomes somewhat independent from its mother or nurse and is physically more active (playing games, etc.). Children aged 5-7 start learning things via observation and the games they play consist of imitation or rehearsal of what they will do in the future. They start school when they are six to seven years old and the other stages are divided as; seven years old-puberty and puberty-adolescence. As in Ancient Mesopotamian societies, this partition which centralizes education activity is also male oriented and girls are excluded in the schooling process. This separation of genders is based on the understanding of a supposed fundamental difference between men and women. In his book *Politika* [*Politicus*] (2008), in which he discusses the relationship between the governors and the governed, Aristotle finds the qualities of a governor only in men. Because, to him the "thinking ability of soul (…) exists in women but it does not work" (Aristotle, 2008:I/13). In other words, women are not only emotional, but also have an inadequate and unstable judgment facility (Berktay, 2000:87).

On the other hand, there are examples showing that the period of childhood is divided into three parts in Latin medical sources from the Medieval Age. *Infantia* refers to the period from birth to seven years of age, *pueritia* from seven to 12 for girls and seven to 14 for boys, and *adolescentia* from 12 or 14 to 21 (Heywood, 2003:21). However, such classifications must be considered with the "childhood" perception of the culture in question. As Prout and James (1997 cited in Heywood, 2003:10) skillfully summarized that children are not immature is a biological fact, however, perception and interpretation of this immaturity is a cultural phenomenon. For example, behind the separation of adulthood from childhood by Aristotle, lies the attempt to prove that middle age is superior in terms of morality. While positive values are attributed to the (male) individual, who attained maturity in terms of experience and knowledge, a child is defined as an "incompetent" being, because according to Aristotle (2008: I/13), the faculty of thinking has not developed in a child yet. He thought that a child who is "incompetent," "immature," "deprived of ability to judge" had to go through training and education processes in order to become a mature, sensible "person" (that is, a "good citizen"). Therefore, according to Aristotelian philosophy, what is important is not who the child (generally male child is meant) is, but who the child will become (Heywood, 2003: 9).

Acceptance in society: from biological being to social persona

Not only educational processes but also the rites of passage play a dominant role for the individual to obtain social identity and belonging. Van Gennep's *rites of passage* model, which suggests that an individual's "social" birth is dependent on rites accepted by society, is based

on the proposition that all rituals involve a passage from one state to another within a tripartite structure (*separation-threshold-aggregation*) (Hungtington and Metcalf, 1981:8). The similarities between such different phenomena as puberty, marriage and death that mark an individual's transitional phases in his/her societal position is not coincidental according to Van Gennep, as these are the parts of a single general phenomenon. In his model, the same system occurred in all the nations of the world: The difference is only in shapes, details and symbols; not in internal framework or structure (Van Gennep, 1960:2-4). This general structure which is the basis of various rituals is related to its function of incorporating the individual into society within a culturally defined role and status system (Hungtington and Metcalf, 1981:9).

Such practices as rubbing the palate of a newborn with sweet foods like dates etc. before the mother's milk; reciting azan into the newborn's ear; sacrificing an animal like a sheep on the seventh day after birth or within the following days with the wish for the child to live healthily; piercing the earlobe of girls and circumcising the boys are some examples of rites of passage beginning with the birth in many Muslim societies (Canan, 1980:84). The child has not been accepted by the society and family he or she belongs to even if he or she has a corporal existence until the "social" birth takes place (Lewis-Simpson, 2008:10). As Eliade (1991:161) states; the rites which are performed immediately after the birth give the newborn the status of "living being," and that is the only way the newborn can integrate with the community of living creatures. Thus the rites of passage turn a newborn biological being into a cultural one. However the status of social persona is not a static process, but it is dynamic. The status of an individual to become a social persona is re-defined by passage rites performed in the various stages of life (for example graduation, marriage, military service, death etc.).

In short the concept of childhood has always obtained a quality peculiar to the economic, religious and intellectual environment of societies (Postman, 1995:71). Furthermore attributing positive ("future" of the family and society) or negative values ("immature," "incompetent") to children is a phenomenon which has been in use since antiquity. Such evaluations separating babies and infants from the sphere of adults may indicate how they are defined as a "person". For example in Ecuador, which has a modern society, there are a few cultural aspects for the babies to attain social persona. According to Morgan (1998:63), persons, in the first place, are the members of a community which is made of anointed souls of God. Secondly, infants cannot be considered separately from other individuals in their social spheres especially from their mothers who are responsible for providing baptism and "serving as a cultural medium between life and death." Thirdly, infants are considered fragile as the words *trenitos* (raw, immature children) and *criaturas* (little creatures) indicate.

The "incomplete" human emphasis attributed to children is also reflected in the local communities in Şanlıurfa.[7] The basis of this local concept can be found in Islam, as religion and belief systems are the fundamental institutions which affect social thinking and shape formal discourse (Lovell, 1997:43). In the basic source of Islamic religion, the Koran, social equality is supported with the "ummah" ideal. However when it is observed how men, women and children are positioned in this society model, a hierarchical structure comes into view (see Table 1).

As can be inferred from the diagram above, according to Islam the category of living beings has a triple structure: human, incomplete human and non-human beings. Accordingly, males who are the establisher of the social order, head of the family, religious leader are included in "whole/superior" category, whereas women, children, mentally retarded (crazy, possessed, senile) and old people in need of care, the needy, who are considered incapable of fulfilling these roles come under the "incomplete human" category.[8] The local idiomatic expression of this situation for women is "*eksik etek*." It implies that

women are not "whole" humans, in other words "incomplete men" (without a penis and the ability to create). This concept which puts women in a secondary position makes them publicly "unable," "incompetent." In the eyes of locals "women cannot go out alone, are too weak to do men's work, and will be sexually harassed if they do" etc.

Table 1: Categorization of human and non-human in Islam (adapted from Berktay 2000)

Human	Incomplete Human	Non-human
Men	Women	Animals
	Children (age 0-7)	
	Needy (age 80 -)	
	Mentally retarded (crazy, possessed, senile)	

The seed and soil metaphor in Koran is another symbol which contains the codes of such understanding.[9] According to both Islam and local patriarchal notions, although fertility (motherhood) is a positive quality for women, this ability is limited to feeding, considering the concepts of *field: women.* On the other hand, the efficient role is attributed to men in reproduction, as the seed (sperm) is believed to carry the human soul. So that it can be concluded that the primordial nature of men is equipped with the power to create and a metaphorical similarity between men and God occurs. And a woman who is deprived of the power to create/give life symbolically is world-related (temporary and material) (Berktay, 2000:62-155). Thus her social persona is associated with birth, domestic works and looking after babies and infants. In other words women and children are considered under the same category. At this point it may be beneficial to look up the age groups of Islam, a teaching which forms the basis of the local cultural knowledge system.

Notion of human development in Islam and local knowledge

According to Islam and its local interpretations, the most fundamental human characteristic is to have biological and mental *developmental* quality. From birth to death human life is separated into specific stages and the most important one for Islam is the sub-adulthood stage, because these stages should be completed successfully in order for the child to become a good Muslim. Childhood stages according to some resources such as the Holy Koran and hadiths are as follows:

1- "Milk stage," age 0-2 when the child is fed with the mother's (or wet nurses) milk (Canan, 1980:72).
2- "Intervention stage" when the child slowly begins to understand what is told and becomes more or less able to express his thoughts and thus receives his first disciplinary education from his family (Canan, 1980:72). One of the characteristics that differentiate this stage which includes the age 2-7 from the following stages is that the child is "helpless" (*Qur'an*, 4:9). Another characteristic is that the child is unable to understand everything or differentiate between good or bad, and understand the cause and effect connection. As the child is thought not to be aware of his actions, Mohammed the Prophet advised "being kind to children under seven" (Fernea, 1995:7).
3- "Differentiation stage" includes the age 7-10. The child is now able to understand what he is told and give answers correctly and begins to discern good from bad and also he can eat, drink and dress by himself (Canan, 2010:179), for his judgment ability, language capacity and motor skills are developed (Canan, 1980:71). The age of seven is also accepted as the age to start basic education. Thus the child faces social roles that are expected of him.
4- "Adolescence" is the stage when childhood ends. Although there are different opinions in Islamic resources concerning the beginning of this stage, generally a child at the age of

10-15 is presumed to be in puberty (Canan, 1980:107).

In light of the position of these childhood stages in the "notion of human development" we notice that babies and infants are positioned in the natural domain (see Table 2). In other words, as for some developmental characteristics such as sucking milk, teething, learning to walk and talk, it is emphasized that babies and infants are at a different "biological" stage than adults (Tan, 2008:4). Similarly it can be said that the LoDagaa (Ghana) base their notion of human on the distinction between the biological and cultural definitions of being. The LoDagaa make a differentiation between suckling and weaned individuals. The ones who are not weaned are not considered social individuals and they are not buried in earth; but the earth is piled onto them as they are thought to be a danger for agricultural products and the fertility of women (Goody 1962 cited in Mc Hugh, 1999:19).

Table 2: Notion of human development in Islam and local knowledge

Natural Being		Cultural Being					Natural Being
Incomplete Human		Developing Human		Complete Human			Incomplete Human
Infancy	Early Childhood	Childhood	Adolescence	Youth/Early Adulthood	Maturity	Elderliness	Senility
0-2 yrs	2-7 years	7-10 years	10-15 years	15-30 years	30-50 years	50-80 years	80- years
Milk Stage	Intervention stage	Differentiation stage	Childhood's end	Marriage, military service, etc.	Active member of community	Active member of community	Extra-community

Another characteristic of the notion of human development which takes its roots from Islamic teaching is the belief that the mother should be responsible for the babies or infants until the age of seven which is presumed to be the age of reason/perception. Therefore referring to Van Gennep's (1960) separation and preliminal concepts, they are expected to be included in their mother's sphere of women until they can be included in their father's sphere of men. The characteristic which is also reflected in Islamic law is that children under seven are exempt from the penal responsibility as they lack the comprehension of reason until that age. Curiously enough, Roman law deemed children under seven incompetent and that they could not be punished for their actions (Nicholas, 1991:33).

The age of seven should be further discussed here. Since the times of ancient Mesopotamia, where the idea of school originated, the seven-year-olds emerged as the ones who can receive education on literacy, trading, law, religion etc. It was the earliest age in which a person started working as an apprentice (15th century England), a shepherd (14th century America), or a knitter at the underwear industry (19th century England) (Heywood, 2003). The presumed reason why a child at this age could start his education or any other work was the understanding that he could understand and comprehend what he is told and express himself correctly. And also he was thought to have reached a phase where he was able to discern right from wrong (Postman, 1995:26). Right and wrong addressed moral values, and situations of conscience. The expression in Islamic culture for a child around seven who can understand the difference between good and bad or right and wrong is "be[ing] able to understand" (mental age). In the basis of this culture, the Holy Koran, the word reason *(akl)* contains the meanings of "mind and heart, thought and conscience, reason and warning" and is mostly used for differentiating good and bad (Câbirî, 2001:37). Taking the relation between the word reason and the age category as a starting point, in Islamic societies when a child is deemed to be "able to understand" his religious education (differentiation stage) should begin. Therefore the age of seven represents a change in the

social status of an individual. This can also explain why children under seven who are thought not to have reached an intellectual, mental and ethical maturity in the sense of understanding, comprehending and power of thinking are considered to be out of public domain.

According to Islamic teaching, 7-15 year-old-children enter a new phase in which they step into a community. It is believed in a sexist approach that children should be brought up with the ethic and manners of their own sexes. Fathers are responsible for sons' knowledge, morality and manners specific to men while mothers are responsible for their daughters'. However, following the age of puberty, family discipline ends because the individual is not a child anymore according to the religious system (Canan, 2010:91). Thus the interval of 7-15 is a preparatory phase for the child to become accepted as a "person" by the society. In other words, he is in the liminal position in which he shall be educated in line with the "adult person model" of the society about both biological (mental, emotional and sexual) development and cultural training (discipline, knowledge, experience).

The position of the individual who completes the processes of military service, marriage and having children is heightened in society and he begins to integrate into the society by becoming a member of it. The climax of the "complete" human phase is, as in the philosophy of Aristotle, the stage of "maturity". The individuals who reach this stage are presumed to be at a higher level of wisdom (empirical knowledge) and knowing/cognition (theoretical knowledge, acquired by reading) than the other individuals of their age classification (Canan, 2007:108). Senility is the stage at which the individual is exempt from all adulthood responsibilities and returns to the "biological" level as he depends on the other members of the family.

Definitions of the concept of childhood of the local informants whom we interviewed in the framework of this research virtually correspond to the Islamic discourse. They discern the milk stage from other stages; and believe that children at the age of 0-7 do not have penal responsibilities, and that mothers are responsible for the care of those children. However, they define 0-4 age as a kind of unconscious state. Children aged 4-7 begin to understand everything around them, but they do not know what is good or bad. According to an informant, "if a child at this age steals, he won't be responsible as we won't be responsible for the events we see in our dreams." Thus they stated that those children are "sinless"[10] they would go to heaven when they die, and also babies who die at milk stage would become "angels".[11] Its reflection on the burial practices is that the rites performed for adults are performed for children either partially or not at all. There will be neither funeral prayer, washing before burial, preaching when they are placed into the grave, nor chanting the *Mevlit*[12] for the children at this stage; and if this is an infant, there will be no visits for condolence. Similar examples could be found in other cultures. For example; in Roman Britain infants younger than 18 months were generally disposed of casually. They are regarded as social persona after this age and buried like adults (McHugh, 1999:19). In the works of Japanese folklorists, it is stated that infants and children under seven are disposed of casually without funeral ceremonies (Inoguchi 1977 cited in Picone, 1998:38). Thus the conception that 0-2 year-old-infants and 2-7 year-old-children are biological/natural beings (incomplete humans), puts them under a different category than adults (complete humans). The sayings of South African women explain the distinction between children and adults: "A baby is not a real person" (…) because babies "cannot speak and thus you have to think on their behalf" (Lerer, 1998:235).

The status of children in human definition explains why not enough importance is attributed to their deaths. However, with such practices as breastfeeding for two years and the sacrifice of an animal for their health, their parents express their wish for the infants' survival. Furthermore, the informants emphasize that the care and diligence shown to sick children and the holding of a condolence house for them when they die can be a subject of

disapproval. Similar findings can be obtained from the ethnographical data of Örnek (1979:18): Such statements as "it is a disgrace to cry for a child" or "the parents should not cry after their children's death; if they do they won't be able to see their children on the Day of Judgment and their children shall be covered in water" are very interesting. Such expressions imply that in a region where child deaths are common, parents should not become too attached to their children who are at the biological phase and have a high risk of death. High rate of infant deaths which is a characteristic of traditional societies was also very common in European history. Some European historians as Lawrence Stone and Philippe Ariés state that parents were reluctant to be attached to their ephemeral children whom they see as a "goner" (Heywood, 2003:72). For example the fact that children were not mentioned in the letters testamentary was because they did not know for how long the children would live (Postman, 1995:31). Similarly, the death of an infant or a child is not a subject to mourn over for the locals of Şanlıurfa. While women loudly wail for the death of an adolescent or an adult, they are expected to confront the death of babies or infants in silence and hide their sorrow. In the light of Chesson's (2001:4) conceptual distinction, while deceased individuals under seven are considered "biologically dead", those older than seven are "socially dead." This is also reflected on epitaphs. In Şanlıurfa, elegiac poetry reflecting sorrow for the death of an adolescent or an adult cannot be seen on the gravestones of babies or infants. In regards to the quantitative demographical data on gravestones, it is striking that among 1022 individuals buried in 729 graves, only 6% contains infants[13]. The reason why infant graves easily disappear is that they are buried among adult graves and the common gravestone practice is not performed for infants. This situation points out that not as much importance is attributed to infants as to the adults, elders and especially to men and that infants do not have social values.

On the other hand children are very important for the local people. A newly married couple feels the pressure to prove that they both are capable of biological reproduction. Families without any children are despised and called "unburned hearth"; and as a solution for the woman's alleged infertility, the man performs polyandry. However, as Canan (2007:43) puts it, Islam encourages having children by saying "marry and multiply". While children have a great value for the family and society, not much interest is attributed to their health and funeral. The reason may be the fact that the perception of childhood is "ambivalent": a child is valueless as a being which has not completed its human phase, but at the same time the child is valuable as a future cultural being.

Similarly, French (1991:20-22) mentions that the perception of childhood has both positive and negative dimensions in antiquity. According to the positive aspect of the child concept, children are the future of their families and societies. As the Greeks and Romans believed that if the children are educated properly, their societies would endure; many philosophers put forth various views concerning the methods of child rearing. The most obvious indicator of negative perspective is child infanticide. Negligence, physical violence, abandonment and sexual abuse can be added to this. The negative child perception continued in the western societies until the 20th century when infanticide and abuse became criminal offense and children's rights were put under legal protection (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998:7-10). Some historical data indicate that this fact is widespread in the world: In the 1720s Breton town of Ren, some workers found more than eighty infant skeletons while digging a channel. Another example is the Frisian law of the Anglo-Saxons which permitted mothers to leave their babies for death, if they had not breastfed them yet (Heywood, 2003: 88). It can be said that girls are in a more disadvantageous position than boys. French's citations of the letters of a soldier to his wife are also very interesting: "if [the newborn] is a boy, let him live, if it is a girl, let her die" (1991: 21).

Historically it is widely known that infanticide was practiced for various reasons in non-western societies. For example according to some predictions, in the17th and 18th centuries,

seventy thousand to eighty thousand children were killed or aborted per year in Japan. While it was practiced as a birth control method especially during famine times, some cultural values also caused such actions. For instance one of the liveborn twins was usually killed, as multiple births were regarded as "animal-like" and shameful (Picone, 1998: 38). Another reason for infanticides i.e. *mabiki* was that the ideal number of children was two or three. The meaning of this term was "to thin the rice seedling lines". In other words, families, like farmers, would root out the thin seedlings. However, those infants were believed to be reborn and were buried under their houses in order to determine where they would reincarnate (Picone, 1998:38).[14]

Infanticide and abandonment phenomena in the pre-Islamic Arab societies were generally directed to girls. Families preferred boys regarding the ideal cultural discourse which valorized men; and if the newborn was a girl, it was a great "sorrow" and "shame" for the family (Canan, 2010:67-68). While some verses of the Holy Koran prohibit infanticide (*Qur'an* 6:151, 17:31, 61:12), the sexist approach of parents is still the case and very widespread in the Muslim societies. The words of an Arab woman from Iraq prove that it has been internalized by women: "Boys are the best; they can take care of their mothers when they get old. What good are girls?" (Fernea, 2004:327). Similarly, the statement of an educated woman in Şanlıurfa as "they do not treat girls like human beings" reflects the local sexist point of view.

As a general assessment, it can be deduced that the hierarchical structure of human notion feeds the negative child ("incompetent," "unable") notion. Another reason is the distinction between the concepts of person and non-person. As for the cultural conceptions, 0-7 aged infants and children are accepted as "non-person". This idea creates the basis for the different treatment of infants from adults concerning burial practices. Furthermore, the subordination of girls makes the invisibility of the cemeteries understandable. Briefly, the age and gender based hierarchical structure of society is horizontally re-constructed in cemeteries.

Conclusion

While there are different patterns of raising children in many societies, the common purpose of each society is to make a human offspring who is mentally and physically competent; a member of the society. The individual becomes a "person" especially via the rites of development. The research conducted on traditional societies show that the stages at the end of which a person becomes a social persona differs from society to society (McHugh, 1999:19). And also the formal similarities of the rites of passage which have a symbolical function for the development stages of an individual pave the way for constructing analogies among societies (Van Gennep, 1960). In other words, every rite of passage carries, openly or implicitly, the traces of social definition of human development, and thus, the traces of age categories ("infancy," "childhood," "adolescence," etc.).

The reasons behind different burial practices due to age categorization that have been identified in Şanlıurfa can be found in local human contemplation. With its roots in Islam belief, this contemplation embodies separation criteria of encultured human individual from other living beings. Considering 0-2 aged infants and 2-7 aged children as "incomplete humans" is the main reason of keeping them apart from the domain of cultural being, especially from the sphere of men. At the same time, this understanding is the ground for their burial in separate places than adults. In other words, the data of this study refers to the fact that infants and children are assessed according not to their chronological age but to their bio-cultural development, and to their being considered as "person" or "non-person."

Notes

1. In Harran district, outside of the historical city wall, there is the Harran Cemetery spreading over a very large area on the west part of the city. Most of the graves in this cemetery are of large sizes (2x3.5m) and they are covered with various natural slab stones, and larger stones were placed on the head and foot part. Stones placed on the head part tend to be larger in size. There are also monumental graves in the cemetery, made of Urfa stone. Besides, there are also graves which have head stones in the form of a figurative human being or smaller but stylized human shaped sculpted head stones.

2. Burials are performed in these graves in 5-7 year intervals. In other words, they are family graves in the form of "multiple" use graves, which may be used secondarily.

3. Graves in the Viranşehir New Cemetery are mostly in simple form. Their surroundings, head and foot stones are made of briquette. Yet, there are also some adult graves made of concrete, marble and Urfa Stone.

4. There are a great number of adult graves in the Municipal Cemetery, the upper structure elements of which are made of marble and concrete. These graves are decorated with a large number of plastic flowers in various colours, and the gravestones are painted colourfully.

5. Bediüzzaman Cemetery, surrounded by houses, streets and avenues in the Şanlıurfa city center, is a cemetery in which some funerary steles up to 4m high were erected, upper structure elements of which are mostly made of Urfa stone. Epitaphs, drawings, pictures and decorations are common on the gravestones. Almost all colours were used on the names, drawings and pictures on the stones, and throughout the whole stones. Graves were placed in a way that some walkways and narrow passages are left between them. While adults are buried into 1x2m sized graves, babies are buried into the spaces between those graves or by the roads between these graves.

6. It will not be wrong to say that modern sciences such as psychology and pedagogy see the child through medical lenses. Childhood theories developed in subjects such as cognitive, psychosexual, psychosocial, social-emotional, moral which devoted themselves to childhood problems within the framework of modern education concept (Ariés, 1962:411).

7. It can be said that Ancient Greek and Roman civilization affected East Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies profoundly. Gutas (2003:9) notes that the civilization which was spread by the East Mediterranean and Near East conquests of Alexander the Great and which then was settled in East and West Roman Empire until Late Antiquity and the emergence of Islam, was shaped by the help of the whole nations in that region. As put forward by Gutas (2003) in *Greek Thought Arabic Culture,* not only the conquests but also the translations of Greek writings (primarily of Aristotle's) into Arabic (A.D. 8-10th century) especially in Arab Abbasid Dynasty had played a significant role in multicultural interactions. For instance, it is known that the Greek notions, beliefs and practices were kept alive until 10th century in Harran (Gutas, 2003: 26).

    Subordination of women and children that originates from patriarchal tradition is also a characteristic of the same geography. Berktay states: "Mesopotamia and the later Iran, Hellene, Christian and lastly Islamic cultures played roles to different extents and nuance in shaping the patriarchal tradition whose effects are perceived even today" (2000: 85). One of the fields in which the patriarchal tradition is apparent is burial customs. Berktay (2000: 88) indicates that the newborn girls were left to death in Athens even in the New Testament Period. Accordingly, it is not surprising that there are some similarities between Ancient Greece and Roman notions and Islamic thoughts concerning the concept of childhood.

8. It would be misleading to say that only Islam attributes the definition of "incomplete" to women. The traces of the belief in which the women are considered incomplete and inferior can be found in Ancient Greek philosophy and other monotheistic religions (Judaism and Christianity) (Berktay, 2000).

9. Holy Koran Surah al-Baqarah 223. verse: "Women are your fields, go to your field however you wish."

10. According to a hadith of Mohammed the Prophet, "Every child is born with primordial nature (*fitrat*) and this state continues until he begins talking. Then they become Jew or Christian with the influence of their parents." This saying claims that children have some inborn characteristics (Canan, 1980:48). The most important ones are to be Muslim and sinless (Tan, 2008:4). There are two different historical views in Western conception regarding the inborn characteristics. During

the Middle Age these two different views which claim children "innocent" or "sinner" existed together (Heywood, 2003:22-23). On the other hand the childhood conception which started to develop in 17th and 18th centuries was included in the philosophies of Locke and Rousseau. According to them children are neither innately good nor bad. While Locke emphasized the importance of experience by using the term *tabula rasa* (blank slate), Rousseau suggested that children had a specific way of seeing, hearing and thinking (İnal, 1999:73). In this framework, there is a parallelism between the "child primordial nature (*fitrat*)," an Islamic childhood conception which claims that children are neither good nor bad and Rousseau's childhood concept.

11. As Gil'adi states (1989:141) the hadiths of Mohammed the Prophet assures the parents whose children are dead that they shall go to heaven and shall be protected against the fires of hell. Also there is a belief among local people that the parents whose children are dead shall go to heaven and the mother who dies during labor shall become a "martyr." Therefore a "sinless" child who goes to heaven without questioning is believed to be a mediator for his parents between heaven and hell (Heywood, 2003:2). The logic of this conception is that it implies that the death of at least one child is a good thing (Delaney, 2001:90).

12. *Mevlit* is a poem celebrating the birth of Mohammed the Prophet. In Islamic funeral ceremonies, the chanting of the *Mevlit* for the memory of a dead person is performed by the imam.

13. The infant mortality rate of Turkey in 2011 is 2.66% (TÜİK, 2011). As per the TÜİK data of 2000, infant mortality rate of the underdeveloped regions including Şanlıurfa is 4.83% and Şanlıurfa ranks 65th among the Turkish cities with the rate of 3.7%. Therefore it should be considered that the number of infant and child burial dispositions should have been more than what has been found. (http://www.dpt.gov.tr/bgyu/ipg/guneydogu/ŞanlıurfaPER.pdf).

14. The tradition of burying children under their houses is a phenomenon observed in other societies. The natives of Andaman Island believe that the spirit of the child will enter into his body as the mother cooks and thus the child will reincarnate; therefore they bury their children under the hearth in home. In Northern India, the practice of burials under the threshold of houses relates to this reincarnation belief. Children are not burned on the pyre like adults, but they are buried under the threshold of the house as it is believed that the spirit of the child would enter into a woman's body that passes the threshold and would reincarnate as another child. And in Java, the deceased nameless children are buried at the back of the family hut (Colón, 2001:13).

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