

PAMUK'S KARS AND ITS OTHERS:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY ON IDENTIFICATIONS AND BOUNDARIES OF  
ETHNICITY, NATIONALISM AND SECULARISM

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KÜBRA ZEYNEP SARIASLAN

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık

Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. Dr. Ayşe Saktanber

Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sabine Strasser

Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Prof. Dr. Tayfun Atay

(A.Ü., ETH)

\_\_\_\_\_

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sabine Strasser

(METU, SOC)

\_\_\_\_\_

Assist. Prof. Dr. Aykan Erdemir

(METU, SOC)

\_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

Name, Last name : Kübra Zeynep Sariaslan

Signature :

## ABSTRACT

PAMUK'S KARS AND ITS OTHERS:  
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Sariaslan, Kübra Zeynep

M.S., Department of Sociology

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sabine Strasser

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Kars is an ethnically diverse city located at the North East Turkey, neighboring Armenia. In the year 2002, Nobel laureate author Orhan Pamuk published a political-historical novel named *Snow*, the story of which is set in Kars. The book created a public debate on national and global scale about cutting edge questions of Turkey. This thesis aims to address these questions from the perspective of inhabitants of Kars, who had reacted fiercely to the representations in the book *Snow*. By focusing on identification and boundary negotiation processes of people in Kars, this thesis and presents an ethnography of Kars, which was achieved by application of grounded theory method and by discussing local perceptions of ethnicity, nationalism and secularism at the periphery of Turkey.

Keywords: identification, boundaries, ethnicity, nationalism, secularism, ethnography, Kars, novel Snow, Orhan Pamuk, grounded theory.

## ÖZ

### PAMUK'UN KARS'I VE KARS'IN ÖTEKİLERİ: ETNİSİTE, MİLLİYETÇİLİK VE LAİKLİK'İN SINIRLARI VE ÖZDEŞİMLER ÜZERİNE BİR ETNOGRAFI

Sarıaslan, Kübra Zeynep

Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji Bölümü

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Kars, farklı etnik grupların yaşadığı, Türkiye'nin kuzeydoğusunda, Ermenistan'a komşu bir şehirdir. 2002 yılında, Nobel ödüllü yazar Orhan Pamuk, öyküsü Kars şehrinde geçen *Kar* isimli politik ve tarihi bir roman yazdı. Kitap, Türkiye'nin bıçak sırtı sorunları üzerine ulusal ve küresel çapta bir tartışma yarattı. Bu tez, bu sorunları, *Kar*'da temsil edilmiş olmalarına tepki gösteren Kars sakinlerinin gözünden irdelemeyi amaçlar. Karşılıkların özdeşim ve sınırları müzakere süreçlerine odaklanarak, bu tez, Türkiye'nin kıyısında etnisite, milliyetçilik ve laiklik meselelerine dair yerel algıları tartışan ve gömülü kuram metodu uygulayarak gerçekleştirilmiş olan bir Kars etnografisi sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: özdeşim, sınırlar, etnisite, milliyetçilik, laiklik, etnografi, Kars, *Kar* romanı, Orhan Pamuk, gömülü kuram.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Sources of Curiosities

I went to Kars in November 2007 for the first time in my life. As a new graduate student in social anthropology, I was very interested in visual anthropology and accordingly, I was willing to take part in projects which deal with film theory and practice. Therefore, I joined the lecture series called “Let’s Talk about Cinema” organized by *Festival on Wheels*, a film festival travelling from city to city. During the festival, France based European Young Cinema Network *Nisi Masa* organized a workshop in Kars, where young filmmakers from various European countries were going to produce short films with contents inspired by Orhan Pamuk’s novel *Snow* (2002). Although I was not in this particular workshop, I could follow the debates in the evenings. People from different workshops discussed their experiences in the city throughout the day. The participants of the workshop repeatedly complained about the reactions of the inhabitants of the city when they heard Pamuk’s name or the idea of the workshop. Film makers expressed their concerns about this totally ‘unexpected’ obstacle. On the other hand, the reactions were making sense to people from Turkey who are familiar with the debates on the book.

2006 Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk published his “first and last political novel” *Snow*, in which cultural representations are informed by his observations about the Turkish society (Pamuk, interview, January 20, 2002, *Hürriyet Pazar*). *Snow* created a public debate even before its publication. After having appeared in

bookstores in January 2002, it became a bestseller by gaining great attention derived from its provocative content with obvious references to the existing political debates. Consequently, when the book was translated into English, the translator, Maureen Freely, notified the prospective readers in her review that “how you read that tragedy depends very much on what your politics are and how much you know about recent Turkish history” (2002: 27-56).

In his book, Pamuk knits major issues of Turkey like Islamic revival, secular Kemalism, nationalisms and Westernization in Turkey. He explains that he aimed at drawing a picture of Turkish politics without taking sides. Rather, Pamuk outlines, his book is a ‘polyphonic’ novel which aims to represent multiple voices (interview, April 14, 2005, signandsight.com). As agreed by the critiques, Pamuk lets liberals, fundamentalists, seculars and Islamists speak throughout the book (Upkild 2004; Atwood, 2006; Azade, 2006; Kafaoğlu-Büke, 2007). Furthermore, he claims to give voice to muted groups. For him,

a novelist’s politics rises from his imagination, from his ability to imagine himself as someone else. This power makes him not just a person who explores the human realities that have never been voiced before – it makes him the spokesman for those who cannot speak for themselves, whose anger is never heard, and whose words are suppressed (November 5, 2005, The Nation).

In his novel, Pamuk creates a “microcosm” that stands for Turkey by miniaturizing cutting edge issues to a local story set in the fiction city Kars (interview, April 14, 2005, signandsight.com). Correspondence of this imagined town with the actual city Kars, located at the North East Turkey near the Armenian border, made *Snow* even more inflammatory for those who involved into the public debate that it caused.

## **1.2 Rationale for Re-writing a Novel**

I had not read the book when I was in Kars for the first time; so, I did not know

the story narrated in it. However, from an outsider's view, it was still interesting for me to see that people in Kars did not appreciate the book because it attracts great attention to their city from other parts of the country as well as from abroad, which can be exemplified in the cases of many participants of the film festival that I was following. When I talked to a young man from Kars during the festival, he clearly expressed that Pamuk's presence in Kars was not disturbing while he was sitting in the teahouses and appearing on the streets in early 2000s. However, he says, he does not want to see Pamuk in Kars anymore because his book created a countrywide discussion on the city and caused bad reputation.

In this context, I remembered the duality of scholarly text coming out from the distinctiveness of the addressed community and the community that is studied (Crick, 1982:17). Anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod's experienced the collapse of this duality after her research that she carried out in Egypt on 'poetic' resistances of women against male dominance (1985). In her own words, her work "had entered a local political field" which was limited with academic circles previously. However, she argues, it is not possible to prevent reception of texts and images by the community studied anymore because of the global connections mediated by contemporary communication technology (Abu Lughod, 1991: 160). Since I am very much concerned about cultural representation, it was interesting for me to look how *Snow*, as a political-historical novel set in a city that actually exists, had interfered into local debates in Kars.

In contrast to Abu-Lughod's ethnographic text, *Snow* is a fiction despite its references to reality as the author underlines (interview, January 27, 2002, ntvmsnbc.com, translation is mine). In this aspect, here, I find it noteworthy to mention here Salman Rushdie's surrealist fiction *Satanic Verses* (1988) which was a very well known case that created a similar affair on a global scale. Post-colonial anthropologist Talal Asad paid attention and wrote two articles dealing with Rushdie's novel. He explains his interest in this novel, as I quote here:

First, because it is a textual representation of some of the things anthropologists study: religion, migration, gender and cultural identity. Second, because it is itself a political act, having political consequences far beyond any that ethnography has ever had. And third, because it is generated by the classic encounter between Western modernity – in which anthropology is situated – and a non-Western Other, which anthropologists typically seek to understand, to analyze, to translate, to represent (Asad, 1990: 239).

Similarly, *Snow* deals with many issues which also attract anthropological curiosity including Islam, secularism, gender, nationalism and ethnicity. In addition, the book also had created a great public debate even before it was published. Finally, Pamuk explains that he aimed to understand the position of the ‘other’ within the historical context of Turkey’s westernization process (interview, October 21, 2005, Spiegel Online). Additionally, Pamuk’s reflections on his own text echo the discussion on representation in anthropological writing as he expresses as follows: “I begin to feel in my heart the complicated politics of representation, and the moral dilemmas of speaking in another’s name” (November 5, 2005, The Nation).

Asad analyzes the debate which emerged after Rushdie’s novel on the discursive level. He says that “in reading social texts we inevitably reproduce aspects of ourselves” (Asad, 1990: 240). Therefore, with the aim to understand liberalism and multiculturalism in postcolonial Britain, he works on some readings of *Satanic Verses* done by policy makers and opinion leaders as well as cultural producers which are loudly heard in public debates. In the end of his analysis, Asad urges to reconsider the cultural and historical construction of literature. Referring to the colonialist discourses as well as the discussion on anthropological writing within the discipline, he says that “not experiments in ethnographic representation for their own sake, but modalities of political intervention should be our primary object of concern” (Asad, 1990: 260).

Inspired by Asad’s work, I developed different interests by focusing on social processes of identification and othering. One year later, in 2008, when I went to Kars once more to attend the film festival, I had a slowly growing question in my

mind when I was walking through the streets of the city. Before conducting the fieldwork, I searched for local responses to the debates that are created after Pamuk's novel. It is not because I take the local as a subcategory of the national and global politics but rather because I am aware of the fact that due to the global inequalities and domination, 'the native' has to talk back within the conditions created by the actors in power in the sense that Spivak defines the resistance against Western hegemonic construction of knowledge production (1988: 280-291).

Different from Asad's discourse analysis, I aimed to conduct a fieldwork to look at how people living in Kars, who were represented in the book, read or interpret *Snow*. To put in other words, this thesis can be understood as an attempt to follow Orhan Pamuk's novel and his route in Kars as a point of departure to try to find out local people's responses to the questions raised in this book. In this way, I aimed to understand local perceptions of Pamuk's cutting edge questions on Turkey such as ethnicity, nationalism and secularism. Therefore, I conducted this research in order to better understand how people in Kars, who are represented in *Snow*, actually discuss questions of belonging and identification.

While following Pamuk's route in Kars, I investigated what people think retrospectively concerning these critical problems of Turkey from their own positions and within the spatial and historical context that surrounds them. In the first place, I consider their informative position as twofold. On the one hand, their discursive and practical acts stand for the representation of the represented in *Snow*, a text with historical and political implications. On the other hand, they provide multiple voices from the locality of a specific periphery; Karsians from different ethnic belongings, religious sentiments, genders and classes reflect different points of views regarding ethnicity, nationalism and secularism. Furthermore, the remoteness of the city at the Eastern part of the country and being located at the Armenian border brings additional peculiarities to Kars, especially in terms of self-perceptions regarding the historical construction of East-West dichotomy and construction and maintenance of Turkish national

identity. Subsequently, the way people reflect on urgent questions of Turkey that novel rephrases ponders the present power relations on the local, national and international levels as well as their influence on the interpretation of past and the imagination of future. To put in a different way, perceptions are shaped in relation to economic and political interests of the day. Hence, this study targets to inquire contextually shaped perceptions of Karsians of a novel that is set in their city and touches on matters that occupy their everyday conversations.

### **1.3 Content**

I use main questions that Pamuk raised in his book as my guide for discussing local perceptions of identification and belonging. In the following pages of this thesis, first, I will introduce the theoretical framework of this study. I will introduce anthropological debates and definitions for the main issues that I am going to patch by the ethnographic findings. In this respect, I will map how ethnicity, nationalism and secularism were investigated from an anthropological point of view.

In Chapter 3, I will describe and give the rationale to apply grounded theory as a practice and as a tool of analysis. I will frame within which context I carried on the fieldwork as it led my way to great extends. I will also discuss my position as a researcher and reflect on my involvements.

I'll start to share my findings with Chapter 4, where I outline how ethnicity is understood and experienced in Kars. I will show how people in Kars locate their concerns and thoughts about ethnic identifications within the ways Pamuk's book was discussed in the whole country. Concerning the relation between ethnic belongings and national belongings, I will discuss how and when boundaries are used in different contexts and by different individuals. With the example of history making, I will introduce how common ethnic descent is created in accordance with positioned interest of the present. In order to discuss ethnicity

both vertically and horizontally, I will compare attitudes of two ethnic groups in the case of mayoral elections.

Chapter 5 is including two strands. In the first part, I will discuss how Karsians perceive categorizations in ethnic identifications enforced by the nation state. I'll provide perceptions from both sides to illustrate the fracture in society on the basis of the conflict between plural and homogeneous imaginations of the nation which are peculiar to Kars. In the second part, I will describe the construction of the national other as the people living at the other side of the border. In an atmosphere where the land conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan and international financial interests articulates to present policies on the borderlands and beclouds the history, I will show how people who are living in the area and highly sensitive to miniscule changes in these policies perceive and attempt to interfere into state level stance in foreign policies. With the help of a public debate on a monument, I will put forth how differences in these perceptions rise to the surface.

In Chapter 6, the final ethnographic section, I will embark upon the question how Islam is perceived and lived or how it is prospected to be lived in Kars in relation to intermingled notions of modernization, secularism and westernization. I will present two different positions that I observed which have a common ground but arguing in a contrasting way regarding the visibility of Islam in Kars. While locating Islam in everyday life, I will use the spatial analogy of 'inside' and 'outside' to highlight the relationship of Kars with its neighbor cities as well as with the 'strangers' in the city. I will discuss the present challenge of secularism with respect to human rights and democracy caused by the headscarf issue in Turkey and I will present the ways women's body is used as a political space for manifestation of contesting ideologies.

After discussing the previous chapters in relation to each other, in the Chapter 7, I will summarize my analysis in relation to my research question. In other words, I will explain how people in Kars feel about and reflect upon the current questions of Turkey by relating their thoughts with *Snow* and their everyday life. I will also

introduce possible questions for further research in the areas that I find necessary and important in respect to my observations throughout the study.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL INQUIRIES, DEBATES AND DEFINITIONS

#### 2.1 The concept of Identification

Identification and belonging on the ethnic, national and religious basis are the main issues that this thesis deals with. In anthropological discourse, identification is regarded in accordance with social relations and organizations constructed within changing social circumstances (Eriksen, 2002: 62-73). The process of identification requires mutual acknowledgement of distinctiveness that takes place through social interaction between individuals and collectivities. Moreover, identification and othering aims to order and organize the social world to make it easily comprehensible for groups and their members. Finally, identification includes historical and spatial references.

The term identification is propounded by Rogers Brubaker, a sociology professor at University of California, and Frederick Cooper, a history professor at University of Michigan specialized in the field of colonization (2000). In their article “Beyond Identity” (2000), Brubaker and Cooper question the conceptual clarity of the term identity, which is used as a category of analysis in social sciences. In the first place, they discuss the usage of the term which are including, (1) the non-instrumental basis of political action opposed to interests, (2) a collective phenomenon designates sameness among group members which is understood either objectively (sameness in itself) or subjectively (sameness perceived), (3) a psychologically defined aspect of selfhood, (4) identity as the product of social action created through the process of interaction which aims a

collective self-understanding, (5) the product of multiple and competing discourses (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 6-9).

The authors also introduce different understandings of identity in the literature as ‘strong’ or ‘hard’ and ‘weak’ or ‘soft’. While strong conceptualization of identity emphasizes that first, all people and groups have identity, with or without having aware of it, and second, there are clear and bounding boundaries between groups; weak identity approach fails to be a theoretical concept since it is defined as something that changes all the time. Furthermore, the latter has traps for anthropologists like what authors call ‘clichéd constructivism’, where the use of qualifiers like ‘multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated’ indicates the theoretical stance of the scholar rather than serving for the explanation of a social phenomena (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 11).

As a result, Brubaker and Cooper offer three clusters of terms instead of ‘surrendering’ to the word identity. The first one is identification and categorization. Different from identity, identification refers to a relational process highlighting the agency that realizes the act of identifying without necessarily implying a sameness and bounding collectivity. Furthermore, identification is situational depending on the context:

One may be called upon to identify oneself - to characterize oneself, to locate oneself vis-a-vis known others, to situate oneself in a narrative, to place oneself in a category - in any number of different contexts, which include innumerable situations of everyday life as well as more formal and official contexts. How one identifies oneself -and how one is identified by others- may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 14).

The authors make a distinction between two modes of identification which are relational and categorical. In the former, relational webs are the basis of the process while in the latter identification realized “by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 9). There is also a differentiation between self-identification and external

identification or the identification and categorization of oneself by others, such as the authoritative institutions like state. Although the authors do not underestimate the role of modern state in the categorization and identification processes, they warn that it is not the only 'identifier' because "identification can be carried more or less anonymously by discourses or public narratives." Besides, identification is not a controlled process of constructing collective self-understanding all the time:

By considering authoritative, institutionalized modes of identification together with alternative modes involved in the practices of everyday life and the projects of social movements, one can emphasize the hard work and long struggles over identification as well as the uncertain outcomes of such struggles (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 16).

Taking the first meaning of identity that they introduced at the beginning of the article as the non-instrumental basis of political action opposed to interests, authors introduce self-understanding as a second alternative term refers to the particularistic and situated understanding of the self. Accordingly, influenced by 'the practical sense' of Bourdieu (1990), social location suggests the subjective understanding of the position of the individual in the social world. Therefore, it emphasizes subjected situatedness and therefore, does not capture objectivity in the strong understanding of identity. Finally, self-understanding implies multiplicity rather than Western conception of homogeneous self (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 17).

Finally, for the emotionally constructed collectivity that identity refers to, the authors introduce a third term called categorical communality, where the individuals share a common attribute: relational connectedness; where members are linked to each other through networks and groupness; and also where they develop a sense of belonging to a distinctive group. While groupness completes the communality and connectedness, connectedness is not always required for groupness (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 19-21).

Providing a structural framework to the study of processes of identification and othering, Andre Gingrich and Gerd Baumann introduce three classificatory

models which they call 'grammars' (2005). Operating as different forms of selfing and othering, these grammars are not necessarily binary but rather ternary where there is a third party excluded from the dialogue.. In addition, the complexity that lies behind the identity/alterity process is their simultaneous operations.

The first grammar is orientalism, which is a double edged process where the self defines itself through attribution of both negative and positive meanings to the other. While attributing positive meanings, the self also defines its own lacks which were lost in the past. While the contrast is drawn through exoticizing, self excludes the other at the same time. The way that the authors use 'orientalism' is developed by literary and cultural critic Edward Said in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1979) to uncover political nature of knowledge which has been produced within hegemonic relations by Western scholars about the Eastern and mostly colonized societies.

In the other grammar, 'segmentation', departing from what Evans Pritchard calls as 'ordered anarchy' for Nuer of Sudan (1968), identification and othering processes are defined as nothing but contextually shaped decisions given simultaneously on different structural levels of conflict. Thus, the society is described as a pyramid, where people establish alliances with their enemies in the presence of the upper level structural conflict. Baumann states that what is left unexplained is: "who is to have the power to define the ultimate apex of the pyramid, and who defines which intervening classificatory levels" (Baumann, 2005: 24).

The third, 'encompassment', developed from Dumont's work on Indian cast system (1980), is where 'selectiveness' works by defining self as the holder of the whole from a higher level of abstraction. Imagining hierarchized inclusion of others, the distinctiveness of the other is ignored by the self.

Moreover, violence as in the case of genocide, takes place when grammars are given up by the agents as a result of the reduction of complexities of grammars

into binaries in language. Therefore, based on the four basic modalities of language which are namely metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, the grammars seem to represent a structurally bound approach. On the other hand, Baumann stresses the constructive power of agency and flexibility of identification strategies within varying contexts:

The grammars provide a repertoire of structures through which to put forward arguments about self and other; but it is crucial to stress that all grammars are always the disposal of all social actors, and it is precisely the constantly shifting invocations and revocations of each grammar that matter in the social processes of selfing and othering as we can observe them empirically (2004: 31).

In his short review, Ralph Grillo argues that there is the risk of recording ethnography through the language of the grammars following the framework that Gingrich and Baumann introduce. Therefore, he argues that observation is not sufficient alone but anthropologists have to ask why people use these grammars is necessary (Grillo, 2006: 262).

In light of this debate on identification, now I'll move to another concept fundamental for my study.

## **2.2 Inquiries of Ethnicity**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, urban sociologist Robert Park was defending that ethnic differences will lose their importance gradually and the members of different groups will be assimilated through 'acculturation' within the larger society (Park, 1967: 40). However, ethnicity has not dissolve as he suggested. Subsequently, two main approaches to ethnicity were developed against Park's 'assimilationist view', which are namely primordialist and instrumentalist understandings of ethnicity (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 47-48).

Clifford Geertz, as the defender of primordialist approach, assumes that ethnicity is a kinship phenomenon. He suggests that ethnicity necessitates an assumption of essential givens of social existence in the distinctions between people like blood,

speech, custom, religion, place and looks (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 48). On the other hand, Max Weber's definition of ethnicity suggests that ethnic attachments lie on the belief of a *Gemeinschaft* (community) or a common descent whether it actually exists or not. Therefore, ethnicity appears as a subjective construction or social product rather than an essentially inherent quality of a group. Moreover, the belief of a common ancestor is justified by referring to shared cultural practices and history as well as by physical appearance of the group members, where memory plays important role (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 17).

In 1969, Fredrick Barth's introduction to edited collection of essays *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was published as the most influential pieces on ethnicity. The essay also introduced the instrumentalist approach. Basically, Barth suggests that anthropological researches on ethnicity should focus on the ways ethnic boundaries are maintained and transcended, rather than focusing on cultural traits. He argues that ethnic groups cannot be defined by reference to shared culture because culture is invented by the group members rather than vice versa. On the other hand, the boundaries remain even if the social organization or peculiar cultural traits of a group changes. These boundaries between ethnic groups emerge only when cultural differences 'make a difference' in interaction. Therefore, ethnicity exists not within groups as their 'properties' but rather between groups as boundaries. As he says, despite the relation across them, ethnic boundaries are maintained (Barth, 1969: 6).

Moreover, ethnicity is reproduced through dichotomization, the mutual demarcation process through the self-conscious ascription of distinctiveness to the self; and complementarization, mutual recognition of the cultural differences between different groups, which coexist within a shared field of interaction and discourse (Eriksen, 2002: 27-28). As products of social conduct, ethnic boundaries are negotiable and ethnic identities are flexible, since they are based on strategic action. Therefore, apart from constant interaction between groups, where information and goods are exchanged, sometimes people are also

exchanged between groups, or to be more precise, individuals cross boundaries of ethnic groups for various benefits in competitive situations. However, Cohen rejects subjective ascription but rather defends objective ascription which underlines structure created by the large scale historical process and power relationships (Eriksen, 2002: 55). As a position in between Barth's cognitive and Cohen's structural based ethnic identification, Okamura introduces 'situational selection' which implies an interrelationship between the choice and constraint (Eriksen, 2002: 55).

Differences between groups are communicated through various strategies including stereotyping and stigmatization. "Used analytically, the concept of stereotyping refers to the creation and consistent application of standardized notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a group" (Eriksen, 2002: 23-24). Stereotypes do not necessarily give consistent information about the members of an ethnic group. Rather, (1) they might serve to divide the social world to kinds of people for individual comprehension; (2) they might function as symbolic revenge of oppressed or weak groups from the powerful ones; and finally, (3) they maintain borders by showing the social distance between groups (Eriksen, 2002: 25). Furthermore, some ethnic identities might work as social stigma (Eidheim, 1969). Implying an asymmetry in power relations, ethnic stigmatization might lead to undercommunication, where ethnic identity becomes less visible however, differentiation between groups remains (Eriksen, 2002: 30).

Ethnic membership is not the only denominator of social hierarchy. Correlations of different criteria for social differentiation suggest that it is necessary to clarify the relation between ethnicity and other forms of identification, like class, religion and gender. Still, Eriksen urges to look at circumstances under which ethnic identity, in the form of categorical belongingness within ethnic classification, becomes an important part of identity and adds that "whether or not ethnic identities become politically relevant depends on the wider context" such as nation states (2002: 60, 175). In the next section, I will describe nationalism where ethnicity plays an important role.

### 2.3 Ethnicity and Nationalism

Ethnicity and nationalism are closely related concepts and they have many similarities. In the first place, both are constructed concepts rather than natural ones. In his book, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner defines nation as socially constructed products that emerged under modern capitalist conditions and was mediated by mass communication technologies and mass education systems. Moreover, Anderson defines nation in his commonly quoted *Imagined Communities* as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (1991: 5-6). He claims that the past is used by modern state’s nationalist elites for their present interests and therefore, it is created or invented by selecting and mixing traditions as the cultural traits of the ethnic group on which nationalism is assumed. In sum, Gellner and Anderson say that nationalism is a construction which aims to link a self-defined cultural group to a state by creating abstract communities which are different from kinship based communities (Eriksen, 2002: 98-101).

Secondly, both ethnicity and nationalism assume distinctive cultural unities within a defined group. In nationalism, cultural symbols are presented by the state and cultural homogenization is realized through mass education, shared language and national labor force. Emphasizing common history and shared language, Gellner postulates that nation is a “new form of social organization that is based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures each protected by its own state” (1983: 46). In addition to ‘social engineering’ run by the state, cultural unity of a nation is also produced and reproduced through daily social practices (Eriksen, 2002: 101). In his book *Banal Nationalism*, Michael Billig discusses how national identity is sustained at the level of everyday life (1995). Beyond uses of flags and other well known national symbols, Billig says that glorified signifiers of nationhood embedded in words and images which indicate “a more banal way of life in the nation-state” (1995: 46).

Despite their similarities, nationalism and ethnicity refers to different levels of social organization and categorization. While ethnicity remains in communities on the local level, nationalism operates on the state level. Gellner states that nationalism is a particular link between the ethnic group and the state. Therefore, nationalism is an ethnic ideology that actualizes its domination through the power of state (Eriksen, 2002: 98). However, not all nationalisms are fundamentally ethno-cultural in character. Nationalism might also be a supra-ethnic or polyethnic ideology based on rights derived from citizenship and common territory. However, most nation states assume to be an ethnically homogenized nation and ignore interests of the other ethnic groups. Gellner argues that each nation state has these groups and he calls them as 'non-meltable ethnic groups' who refuse assimilation (Eriksen, 2002: 98). In respect to this, in her book *Whose Democracy?* on national conflicts in former Yugoslavia, political scientist Sabrina Ramet states that nation state comprise an inherent tension between collective rights of a national group and individual rights such as the right to obtain education in one's native language, the right to develop and pursue one's own culture together with fellow members of that culture, and the right to practice (or not practice) one's religion (1997: 7). Moreover, in the context of immigration,

[...] the drive to homogenization also creates stigmatized others; the external boundaries towards foreigners become frozen, and 'unmeltable' minorities within the country [...] are made to stand out through their 'Otherness' and thereby confirm the integrity of the nation through dichotomization. In a period such as the present, when claims to cultural rights challenge hegemonies, this means trouble (Eriksen, 2002: 103).

When it comes to Turkey, the tension within the nation state is felt in the confrontations of the state and Kurdish, Alevi and non-Muslim minorities and Kars provides a peculiar context for observation. Territorially being at the frontier of the nation state brings additional curiosities for the ways nationalism is experienced in the city and I will briefly touch upon the relation between nationalism and borderland in the following section.

## **2.4 Border and Nation**

Although they are more visible than social and cultural ones, state boundaries have also symbolic traits. They limit sovereignty by force or by the threat of force. However, relations that they encompass have a lot to contribute to political anthropology. Recent anthropological studies on border address the relationship between local dynamics and central power in the sense of the impacts of developments in the border localities on the national centers of hegemony (Donnan & Wilson, 1999: 34).

Aiming to create an unified category of people who are sharing the same culture, nationalism stresses solidarity between people at the center and at the periphery - in both territorial and broader sense - of nation state (Eriksen, 2002: 101). In his historical study on the social building of national territorial border between Spain and France, Peter Sahlins states that national identity appeared in the periphery of nation state - again in both territorial and broader sense - before values and boundaries are imposed by the nation state in a top down process. He argues that it was a dialectical process between local and national interests (Sahlins, 1989: 9). Furthermore, Sahlins claims that similar to ethnic identity, national identity is constructed in a process of boundary maintenance on the basis of subjective experience of difference: "Imagining oneself a member of a community or a nation meant perceiving a significant difference between oneself and the other across the boundary" (Sahlins, 1989:270).

## **2.5 Neo-Nationalism and Nationalist Discourses in Turkey**

Studies of nationalism often create methodological problems within anthropology, because of the wide scope of the relations within nation state as a unit of analysis (Eriksen, 2002: 97). It is mostly studied in the milieu of 1980s atmosphere, when nation-states faced the globalization.

According to Gingrich, neo-nationalism is a peculiar form of nationalism that appears in postcolonial and post-Cold War period. Based on the ethnographic

findings from Europe, he argues that it is not limited with illegal militant extremist groups such as Neo-Nazis as a variant of 'new right' but it intersects with ethno-nationalism, regionalism or secessionism. Still, neo-nationalisms are not always out for separation from the state but rather target to exist within constitutional legitimacy. Applying 'populist liberalism',

[...] they strive to exploit, manipulate and transform constitutional democracy for their own purposes. Their quest for power is usually staged in the form of dramatic populist campaigns and charismatic media performances aimed at a newly reconfigured fortress Europe, one that they claim just be rebuilt around solidly reinvigorated national states that cooperate defensively against consequences of globalization that are perceived as evil and dangerous (Gingrich, 2006: 200).

Supporters of neo-nationalist movements represent the difference from previous forms of nationalism. He says that, employed urban middle-classes are those who employ essentialized versions of 'belonging' (Gingrich, 2006: 200). On the other hand, neo-nationalisms have some continuities with early forms of nationalisms as they are also linked to capitalism and they operate through constructed inclusion and exclusion on the ground where rigidly defined cultural unities of 'us' is distinct from stigmatized 'them' (Gingrich, 2006: 200). Gingrich explains that this construct operates in a ternary way where the nation is 'sandwiched' by two different others ranked in terms of status. While 'them above' stands for the EU authorities and their associates, 'them below' is perceived as potential and actual local immigrants and other groups within the state. This perception of the constant treat, Gingrich says, requires continuous reproduction of borders between self and others at the upper and lower levels (Gingrich, 2006: 212). Therefore, in the case of Turkey, I will refer to the construction of the external and internal threats by the state nationalism as well as everyday nationalism in Kars in the following chapters.

In order to analyze different types of nationalisms that appear in the public life of Turkey, political scientist Tamil Bora offers a taxonomy composed of four/five main nationalist discourses which operate in between two major nationalist

movements, which are namely reactionary nationalistic movement and pro-Western nationalistic movement (2003).

The first discourse of nationalism is what Bora calls official nationalism or 'Atatürk's nationalism'. Coming from Kemalism and assuming to be based on citizenship, official nationalism has also potential to be an 'ethnicist' and essentialist language and therefore, it can be said that it is ambiguous in ideology. The core of this nationalist language is the army, which represents the symbol of the nationalism "as the crystallized evidence of the existence, power, and manifestations of the nation-state" (2003: 437). Furthermore, the official nationalism is highly exhibitionist in character. In her article "Miniaturizing Atatürk", political anthropologist Esra Özyürek provides ethnographic accounts of the internalized state control through symbolism in everyday life such as the use of small Atatürk pins or flags intensively by seculars as a reaction against the rising political Islam in the second half of 90s (2004). Political scientist Seçil Deren argues that as a part of modernization project, official nationalism was developed through an official history based on the *Fundamentals of Turkism* written by Ziya Gökalp (1990 [1923]), which brings forward the idea that, similar to Europeans, Turks had a fundamental culture, forgotten by the of Islam. Position of women in the ancient societies of Central Asia and polyphonic harmony of folk music in indigenous of Anatolia were used as examples to support this thesis called *Türk tarih tezi* (Turkish history thesis) on shared culture and descent. It can be interpreted as a nationalist articulation to westernization was a strategy in order to prevent the confusion between imperialism and the West civilization. Therefore, "westernization against the west" is a feature of the process (Deren, 2001: 384-385).

The second nationalist language is Kemalist nationalism, (neo-Kemalism, *ulusçuluk* or *ulusalcılık*) as a dialect of official language from left wing. This language has roots in the anti-imperialist world view of leftist movements of 1960s. This world view has transformed into secularism and anti-globalism in 1990s. Kemalist leftist movement was distant from bodies of the state and the

army because of the oppressions experienced after 1980 military intervention. However, developed as a reaction against neo-right-wing hegemony, and especially as a secular one against rising political Islam, *ulusalcılık* seeks alliances with both bodies against the internal threat of Sharia law (Bora, 2003: 440). On the other hand, Kemalist nationalism still advocates modernization. Bora explains that the modern word *ulusalcılık* is preferred to *milliyetçilik* where the latter has connotation to Ottoman millet system based on religious groups (2003: 440).

Liberal nationalism, or neo-nationalism, is the third nationalist discourse. As a language highly resembles the one that Gingrich introduces for the European cases, its emphasis is on liberal democracy and the perception of immigrants. This is the language of pro-Western nationalism advocating ‘civilizationism’. Again, neo-nationalism defines nation on the basis of ability to reach the level of the West. As an offspring of the liberalization process, the liberal nationalistic discourse stresses the progressivist-developmental aspect of the process of modernization. This discourse finds its place in Turkish political arena in late 1980s. Bora states that neoliberal chauvinism of prosperity is a version of neo-nationalism where the social solidarity melts down because of the unwillingness of rich to share the prosperity that they create with the lower classes:

The stance that sees ‘parasites’ gnawing at economic prosperity, as personified by the Kurdish immigrants who come to the Western regions for work and as refugees from the war, can easily ally the chauvinism of prosperity with nationalistic radicalism (2003: 442).

Finally, Bora introduces the language of the racist-ethicist, neo-pan-Turkism or idealist movement, which imagines the whole territory inhabited by people of Turkic descend as its homeland, including the new independent states which have emerged in Central Asia and Caucasus after the collapse of Soviet Union. It is at the same time the language that is used against the Kurdish national movement. This language is developed by Turkish intelligentsia as a fascist ideology. It brings Atatürk nationalism at its extremes and assumes cultural and historical essentialism. In 1960s, the main issue for Turkish radical nationalism was

communism; however, the Kurdish secessionism codified as terror has become the focus of nationalist political arena in 1990s. The political representative of the radical nationalist movement as a political party is the *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Movement Party or MHP) since 1960s. Besides, the foundation called the *Ülkü Ocakları* (Hearth of the Ideal Foundation of Education and Culture) was founded as the youth organization of the MHP. Even though today it has officially not related to any party, the *Ülkücüler* are informally under control of and therefore closely associated with the MHP.

Arguing that popular culture provides the ground for hybridization of these different types of nationalism, Bora projects a new dialect within this language family called Islamism, which envisages Turkey as the potential leader of the Islamic world and Islamic union by standing on the Ottoman imperial past (Bora, 2003: 437). Moreover, the liberal nationalistic discourse of pro-Islamic parties indicates the closeness of the Muslim technocratic elite and the new Muslim bourgeoisie to modernist neo-nationalism. The *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party or AKP) can be regarded as a representative of this Muslim technocratic elites and this new Muslim bourgeoisie including Islamic world and union and Ottoman Empire past within the residues of their political discourse. I will sketch the place of Islam in the state led nationalist modernization project in Turkey in the next section.

## **2.6 Debates on Secularism in the Context of Nationalist Modernization**

Similar to nationalism, secularism can be understood within the framework of modernization process in Turkey. Since founder elites of the Republic project the modernization on the principles of Western Enlightenment, secularization was a prominent ideology in Turkey. Therefore, modernization of the country necessitated the diminish of Islamic values which were codified as ‘backward’, whereas secular identity was promoted and codified as ‘civilized’ (Lewis, 2002). Consequently, Turkey always sensed the gaze of Europe in its relations, which inherit a territorial and political dichotomy where the former is located at the

periphery of the latter at the center as the holder of the power to exclude and include (Keyder, 2006: 73).

The idea of radical secularization was not limited by the separation of the state and religion through the abolition of the Caliphate but rather it expanded to the all segments of daily social life. In order to create a secular, modern and enlightened Turkish nation, the public life was regulated by the state as well as the self-identification of the Turkish people in line with the Western way of life that distances itself from the past by excluding Islam (Mardin, 1990).

In the second part of the 1990s, secularism caused a response to the rise of political Islam with the coalition government with the leadership of pro-Islamic the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party or RP). However, this government was ended and the RP was closed following the decisions of the *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council or MGK) held on February 28, 1998. This indirect military intervention what Çandar calls the ‘postmodern coup’ (2003: 130) brought a new era in politics in Turkey called the ‘February 28 process’ (Cizre & Çınar, 2003: 310). On the one hand, military confirmed its autonomy once more. On the other hand, the growing conflicts within political Islam came to the surface and the *Milli Görüş Hareketi* (The Milli Outlook Movement)<sup>1</sup> experienced a divide. In 2000, after the closure of the *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party or SP), the successor of the RP, two new parties emerged. In contrast to the traditionalist the *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party or FP) which followed the same line with the previous parties of the movement, the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party or AKP) with pro-EU and pluralist discourses, established by the reformists and came to power with a remarkable support from the majority of the society in November 2002 (Insel, 2002). However, AKP also received military

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<sup>1</sup> It is a movement led by political figure Erbakan since 1970s, embracing a set of references to the Ottoman past and stands against ‘cosmopolitanism’ as opposed to the milli, a word correspond to ‘national’ but contains broader meanings. Necmettin Erbakan, *Milli Görüş*. 1973. İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları.

intervention in the form of ‘cyber coup’, where the *Genel Kurmay Başkanlığı* (the General Staff) released a public statement against the presidency of the AKP’s candidate in April 27, 2007.

In conjunction with these interventions, political scientist Ahmet Kuru defines the secularism adopted by the Republic as ‘assertive’ where Kemalism controls the religion to great extent by defining Islam officially through the institution of the *Diyamet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Directorate of Religious Affairs), instead of removing it totally. Kuru states an extreme version of assertive secularism is exemplified with the decision of Turkey’s Constitutional Court on the case of closing the RP, where the court indicates to the separation of the religion from many ‘cells’ of society including political sphere, economic sphere, family, education and dressing codes (2009:173).

Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues that Islam, located outside of the nation, was marginalized as the negative other of and a threat against the civilized self. Therefore, she states that:

the main social, political and cultural conflict between the secularists and the Islamists is rooted in the exclusion of Islamic culture, ways of life and codes from the public domain as legitimate markers of Turkish identity. Current demands for more public visibility of Islamic identity, aesthetics and ways of life should be seen in the light of this historically rooted split (Yeğenoğlu, 2007, online source).

In her book *Faces of the State*, Yael Navaro-Yashin gives an anthropological account of this tension in the public life by questioning the assumption of a dichotomy between the centralized state and the local or the people. Keeping in mind that both Islamism and secularism can wear faces of the state and enjoy the power of interrupting public life, Navaro-Yashin states that secularism is the hegemonic public discourse in society. However, she argues, agency plays a significant role within this hegemonic relationship where individuals act by being aware of the suppressive nature of secular democratic ideology of the state (Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 152-154). She describes public life which she defines as a category to observe the political, in its multiple and changing forms. She argues

that identity formation and everyday practice are relational with reference to a negatively defined other. Departing from her observations of the public debate on women's dresses and the regulations of the public life in accordance with the 'local culture' in Istanbul after the mayoral election took place in 1994, she claims that there is a mutual creation process of actualizing the self and the other between the Islamists and the secularists (2002: 36-43).

This assignment goes hand in hand with the argument that woman's body is also a space on which either Islamist or secular ideologies are represented (Kandiyoti, 1991). Ayşe Saktanber uses the term 'resemblance' to define the shared problems that both covered and uncovered women experienced in the male dominant political sphere (2006: 25). She argues that while secularism aimed to equate the position of women with men in public realm, it excluded women with religious symbols at the same time. Those Islamist men, in return, did not show the expected act against headscarf bans to open an equal representation right for Islamist women against the secular and sometimes Islamophobic resistance. Therefore, she says, headscarf issue represents a political deadlock in terms of democratic rights of women in Turkey (Saktanber, 2006: 28).

Last but not least, the networks of civil society organizations are an important dimension of the debates on Islam and secularism in Turkey. Kim Shively's work as the most recent study on religious organizations, studies the position of religiously conservative women in the space between the policies of Islamist political parties as well as the large religious organizations called *cemaat* and smaller units of Koran courses where the "religion and authority are understood in less widely established and more personal terms" (Shively, 2009: 75). Based on an ethnographic research conducted in Ankara, Shively indicates how class shapes the ability of women to create their own space under the remotely functioned male authority within established religious organizations.

In conclusion, I introduced the anthropological insights of some of the issues that are presented in *Snow* as the main questions of Turkey. These are at the same time the issues that participants of the research had pointed out mostly throughout the fieldwork. Identification processes, whether or not on the ethnic, national and secular bases, operate through grammars which are not in a dichotomous way but rather they are ternary. Consequently, self is constructed on a dialogical way with others where a third party is excluded. In the case of ethnicity, the other is defined by the boundaries constructed through constant communication where ascription takes place. Nationalism and ethnicity are closely tied because nationalism has historically appeared as an ethnic ideology. However, it is conceptualized as an imagination of a collectivity in the minds of the members of a group of people who ascribe themselves the label of nation. The body of the state constitutes the basic difference between ethnicity and nationalism, whereas boundaries, as state frontiers are also important in the construction of nation. In the case of Turkey, nationalism walked hand in hand with modernization which can also be understood as Westernization and secularism is an important component of it. However, the understanding of modernization was changed in Europe and Turkey has difficulties this. Concerning the negotiations for accession of Turkey to the EU has to adopt a new understanding of modernity which is on the basis of democracy and human rights, especially concerning the issue of headscarf. On the other hand, there is a new nationalist wave developing in the cover of global capitalism, imageries of which can be seen both in Europe and in Turkey. What different examples of neo-nationalist discourses share are the perception of immigrants and the conflict between different groups, who claim to have a distinctive culture and therefore, bring the question of ethnicity again? In this complexity, I aim to contribute to the understandings of ethnicity, nationalism and secularism at the local level, at the periphery of Turkey, a country itself locates at the periphery of Europe.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### 3.1 Applying the Grounded Theory

The grounded theory was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss from University of California in 1967. Their work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* is a groundbreaking one because it redefines the relation between the theory and research. Kathy Charmaz states that grounded theory is a method of inquiry and a product of inquiry at the same time; however, she argues that it is mostly a mode of analysis (2005: 507). Unlike descriptive methods, grounded theory aims to reach a hypothesis from the data. This attitude reverses the traditional methodological approaches where a research is conducted to test an existing hypothesis (Suddaby, 2006: 634).

The name grounded theory puts an emphasis on “the practice of generating theory from research which is ‘grounded’ in data” (Babchuk, 1996). The basic premise of this methodological approach is that data collection and analysis goes hand in hand through ‘constant comparison’ and ‘theoretical sampling’, meaning simultaneous description, conceptualization and interpretation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 109). However, there are variations applied by different researchers. The main divide is between objectivists, who perceive data as the external reality standing to be discovered by unbiased observer; and constructivists, who appraise the multiplicity of realities of participants and understand data as the result of mutual meaning construction process between the researcher and the participant. Following Charmaz, I stand on the second position (Charmaz, 2003: 313-314).

The strength of the grounded theory lies in its inductive approach. When the research questions are shaped in accordance with the emerging concepts and categories through coding procedure, accompanying data collection process, it is possible to reveal middle-ranged theories. These theories depart from individual histories and they are tied to the general social processes. Since these theories are based on data, or rather embedded in the data, they are not easily refuted.

On the other hand, the complicated terminological language of the book of Glasser and Strauss is criticized by many scholars. For instance, in his introductory book on theory and method of social anthropology, Barrett highlights the sharp distinction between sociological and anthropological perspectives. He argues that grounded theory has many similarities with anthropological method developed by Bronislaw Malinowski except for its distinct vocabulary and lack of emphasis on long term fieldwork. And so, he argues that “anthropologists have always been doing grounded theory” (Barrett, 1996: 215).

Furthermore, the drawback of grounded theory is that it might leave inexperienced researchers unequipped in the field. In their article, Backman and Kyngäs discuss grounded theory as a challenge for novice researchers (1999). First, there is the problem of handling with research process which mixes data collection and analysis. Second, researchers feel the need to be informed about previously done work on the topic that they study in order to formulate questions. However, this has a risk of failing in balancing ‘theoretical sensitivity’. Third, sampling might be another problem. Theoretical sampling allows researchers to move in accordance with the field. However, it is easy to lose the path to follow for the research question. Fourth, the data analysis might be quite chaotic for novice researchers because they might feel insecure with the analysis being done during the fieldwork. Uncertainty of connections might be hard to tackle with. Below, I will present the context of the research and show how I solved difficulties while applying grounded theory in my research as a novice researcher in anthropological inquiry.

### **3.1.1 The context of the fieldwork**

I conducted my fieldwork in Kars for three months, between October 2009 and January 2010. In her short report, Kutlu outlines that there was a conflict between the municipality and the university-governorship front in the time of the previous mayor (Kutlu, 2004:5). After the mayoral elections that took place in March 2009, the new mayor and his policies were topics of everyday conversations. However, besides the redefinition of power relations after the elections, there were two major issues that Karsians were also dealing with, namely, Armenian and Kurdish questions. They surely contributed to the fieldwork process by surrounding, smoothening and/or complicating my path.

I arrived in Kars one week before the protocols between Turkey and Armenia were going to be signed for normalization of diplomatic relations. This process of rapprochement was specifically interesting for the global forces like EU, NATO and UN that have political and economic interests in the area. Stability in the South Caucasus is desired, as it is the border for the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, with Turkey acting in the role of mediator, the area offers Europe alternative energy routes and sources to Russian and Iranian monopolies (Görgülü, 2009: 24). As a result, there were foreigner journalists in the city to investigate the way the process is perceived by Karsians. My involvement into their journey as a translator facilitated my access to many people including the General Consulate of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, people were very much willing to express their feelings concerning political and economic effects of closed border, genocide and citizens of Armenia.

Besides economic and political struggles over the contested lands of South Caucasus, the local histories of ordinary people living in the borderland is an integral part of the story. There are many families in Kars who are originally from villages in Armenia and there are many families in the neighbor city at the

Armenian side, Gyumri, who left Kars during the events of 1915<sup>2</sup>. It was my luck to meet one of the grandchildren of the latter as well as documentary makers from Armenia who visit Kars with the hope of reopening of the border after the protocols.

Another important event on the agenda was ‘the democratic opening process’, or *Milli Birlik ve Beraberlik Projesi* (National Unity and Fellowship Project), which was presented as a new governmental policy<sup>3</sup>. It was the time that ‘road maps’ were discussed to find a solution to the long standing Kurdish question. In a broader sense, it was a project to introduce the idea of multiculturalism to Turkey, where “one language one nation” was the idea persisted since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, problems and demands of Alevis and Roma people were discussed as well. Since both Alevis and Kurdish people live in Kars, it was possible for me to follow how national level discussions influence the local talks.

Two major events took place concerning Kurdish population in Turkey during my fieldwork. The first one is that refugees from the UN Mahmur Camp and members of the armed Kurdish organization that struggles against the Turkish state, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Worker’s Party or PKK), from Kandil camps came to Turkey on October 19, 2009 in order to discuss ‘the opening process’ with the pro-Kurdish party the Democratic Society Party (or the DTP)<sup>4</sup>. However, the enthusiasm shown during their official entrance into Turkey got reaction from nationalist front and created a public debate on the pros and

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<sup>2</sup> Known as Armenian Holocaust, or Medz Yeghern in Armenian, events of 1915 are acknowledged as systematic destruction, or genocide, in modern sense of the term, against Ottoman citizens with Armenian ethnic belonging as a result of the decision given by Ottoman authorities. See Akçam, Taner. 2006. A Shameful Act. New York : Metropolitan Books

<sup>3</sup> [www.demokratikacilimkitabi.com/](http://www.demokratikacilimkitabi.com/)

<sup>4</sup> ““Peace Groups” Come to Turkey”, October 19, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.bianet.org/english/minorities/117700-peace-groups-come-to-turkey>, accessed August 2, 2010.

cons of ‘the opening process’ regarding the unitary structure of Turkey. Then, in December 2009, the DTP was closed down. The Constitutional Court decided that the party is “becoming a focal point of activities against the indivisible unity of the state, the country and the nation”<sup>5</sup>. After this event, accompanying the disappointment of some groups, rumors started to circulate in the city saying that Kars will be a state of emergency region, where military expends its area of responsibility. However, this did not take place.

Due to this intense political agenda of the fieldwork period, I sometimes experienced difficulties to talk about Pamuk’s book. On the other hand, his involvement into all of these issues in the past with his public speeches had doubling impact on the provocative nature of the research. For instance, I was unable to talk about nothing but genocide during the first two weeks of the field. In time, I came to realize that protocols reinforced the nationalists’ way to welcome a stranger who visits their city and make a research about it. It is important to keep in mind that the sensitivity of conducting a research in Kars should be understood in relation to historical context including violent acts against Ottoman Armenians during World War I and ‘low intensity conflict’ going on during last three decades. However, a comprehensive presentation of the history goes far beyond the limits of this research.

### **3.1.2 Sampling, Data Collection and Data Analysis**

In accordance with the grounded theory approach, I followed theoretical sampling method where researcher defines participants as a result of the findings. According to the initial research design, representatives of the city were going to be the sample including five main categories, which are namely teachers, journalists, NGO members, artists and academics. I aimed to talk to people who define themselves as Karsians and feel attachment to Kars even if they were not

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<sup>5</sup> “Turkish top court bans pro-Kurdish party”, December 11, 2009. Electronic document, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8408903.stm>, accessed August 2, 2010.

born in the city. I also talked to few people who only study or work in Kars but whose perception is important as in the case of the university students and the NGO representatives. The point is to hear people who are concerned about the way Kars is represented as they themselves represent Kars so that they are interested in discussing the issue in a more informative way.

The relations that I established in my previous visits of Kars and especially those people that I met during the film festivals that I attended in 2007 and 2008 facilitated my entrance to the field. Since I worked as the coordinator in my second visit, I had a chance to meet and work together with people from municipality and from the art center during the organization. Accordingly, there were two people that I slightly know in the first day of the field. One of them is Anıl<sup>6</sup>, an active volunteer in cultural life of Kars. During the field, he helped me to meet the people that I wanted to meet and he facilitated my entrance to the field to a great extend, especially regarding the fields of art and civil society. The other person was İshak, a representative of an INGO and the consultant of the previous mayor. He helped me to reach journalists, teachers and various people that I was even not expecting to meet with. After the first week, I was able to reach almost all the people without their assistance. Meanwhile, my sample expanded to lawyers, traders and religious leaders.

Not everybody that I talked to had read the book. In fact, the common tendency shows that *Snow* was not read in Kars. However, the book created an ‘affair’ as I discussed in the introduction chapter. Therefore, everybody had an opinion, usually being informed by media. In addition, they were highly motivated to stand behind their opinions even if it contradicts with the actual content of the book. For instance, when I asked a high school student whether there is any book on Kars, he replied that Orhan Pamuk wrote a book to illustrate the geography and history of Kars from ancient times. Even though this is partially true, it is obvious that

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<sup>6</sup> I used pseudonyms throughout the thesis in order to preserve anonymity.

*Snow* is not a history or geography book. Still, thanks to the sampling preference and my position as a Turkish speaking researcher rather than a European filmmaker with a camera in his or her hand, people that I talked to were willing to express their ideas about the book. This was very helpful, because meanings produced on the book were important concerning the research interest.

I targeted to construct a gender balanced sampling. However, there is the visibility problem of women in Kars. In the administrative bodies, either in municipality or in governorship, women are not holders of high positions. Out of 22 *muhtars* in the city center, only two of them are women. One of these *muhtars* is also the owner of one of the local newspapers, while the owners of the other eight ones are men. Unfortunately, I reached this person only towards the end of the study and I could not conduct an interview with her. On the other hand, sectors that women can work are very limited in Kars. One of these sectors is the service sector, in which particularly restaurants owned by women are the places where women prefer to work. NGOs are yet another field that women can engage with actively. However, there are few NGOs working for women in Kars and people joining activities of different NGOs are usually the same people. Therefore, it is important to note that the data remained dominant by male voices, in spite of the expansion of the sample and even though the aim of the study was not specifically giving voice to women.

As Henrietta Moore stated already in 1980s, an ethnography including only women participants is not enough to give a gendered account of the studied world (1988: 195-198). Moreover, as Jane Monning Atkinson suggests, feminist ethnographic work should be capable of providing a unified picture of how both sexes experience male dominated structure (Atkinson, 1982: 247). However, on the basis of my observations throughout the fieldwork, I strongly believe that conducting a research with specific focus on women's histories is necessary and urgent in Kars, even though my interests has been leading me to a different direction.

During three months, I walked and walked on the streets of Kars and find a way to sense the city. Hanging around and talking to people about the novel helped me to get informal narrations and to find out tendencies. I joined many activities including ceremonies for October 29, the Republic Day, and the celebrations of the anniversary of December 5, the enfranchisement of woman. I also observed the memorial of Sarıkamış martyrs that took place in a village and in the center of the town Sarıkamış<sup>7</sup>. I attended culture and art events organized by international, national and local NGOs varying from evaluation meetings to blues concerts. I spend most of my time in Kamer'in Mutfağı, the restaurant of Women Center, where helped to prepare and serve foods, listened gossips and felt at home. I worked as a volunteer teacher in the language school of one of the friends that I gained and lost. I was invited to and I attended many dinner parties and gatherings. I had chance to participate and observe weddings, the feast of sacrifice, the *Muharrem* month and the New Year. I met and accompanied journalists, photographers and even anthropologists out of town who drop by for short times.

Throughout the fieldwork period, I met various people from different backgrounds to whom I introduced myself in our first encounters as a researcher temporarily staying in Kars. Regardless of their reactions, I always tried to construct relations with them by prioritizing the needs of the research and I tried to avoid making ideological or personal decisions. This, however, was not an easy task to achieve because of the oxymoronic nature of participant observation (Behar, 1996) that challenges the researchers to control the conflict between their self identifications and the way they presents themselves in the field.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Turkish Armed Forces, 60 thousand men died because of frost and sickness in Sarıkamış during World War I, ([http://www.tsk.tr/8\\_TARIHTEN\\_KESITLER/8\\_8\\_Turk\\_Tarihinde\\_Onemli\\_Gunler/sarikamis\\_harekati/sarikamis\\_harekati.html](http://www.tsk.tr/8_TARIHTEN_KESITLER/8_8_Turk_Tarihinde_Onemli_Gunler/sarikamis_harekati/sarikamis_harekati.html), accessed on August 28, 2010). As a recent trend, a march is organized each year with the participation of young people mostly for the memory of them.

Besides participant observation, I used semi-structured, unstructured and focus group interviews as techniques of qualitative research method. I recorded most of the semi-structured and focus group interviews with voice recorder and I took daily field notes at my best, as journals of field experience. My sample composed of 60 people from various backgrounds. I had only daily talks and informal interviews with 11 of them. I conducted semi structured interviews with 27 people, three of which out of town, eight Kurds, eight *Yerlis*, four Azeris, two Terekemes and two Alevis; and three of which are women. I also conducted six focus groups; where groups were composed of two to six people. One of the groups was composed of NGO member women only, the other was with young academic men, and the rest of them were composed of men from mixed backgrounds including lawyers, businessmen, journalists and teachers.

During the semi structured interviews, I had an interview guide for directing the conversation. I asked descriptive questions to get familiar with the language of the participant; structural questions to understand the relations of different meanings; and contrast questions to understand how meanings are associated (Bryman, 2001: 336). Basically, I asked participants how they feel about being represented in a book. To understand more about their point of view, I asked how they experienced certain issues mentioned in the book in their everyday live in Kars: ethnic belonging, nationalism, West/Rest divide, headscarf issue and what the differences are. In case they did not know the book, I was usually giving a brief overview of the content concerning the part in question. I formulated questions in accordance with the participant's positions and experiences. Their answers lead me to people's representations of themselves and the city as well as their ideas and their individual strategies to deal with the issue. On the other hand, I reformulated my questions related to the participant's concerns. For instance, ethnicity was one of the topics in question before the fieldwork started. In time, however, I realized that it covers a remarkable space in the answers and I rephrased and related some questions on ethnicity.

Starting from January 2010, I transcribed the recorded material and organized the data for analysis. I started to code the data with Atlas.ti, the necessary software developed for grounded theory. I applied *in vivo* coding, which gives a way to interpret participants' own words. The first step in the analysis was open coding and I identified concepts. Then, I grouped these concepts under main categories. As a final gesture, I grouped categories for questions that I asked in the field. However, until the last moment I did not see that I was already looking at a puzzle that constantly talks about divides in Kars. Only after conversations with the supervisor of the study, as an experienced researcher, I came to realize the picture.

### **3.2 Rehearing the Field**

As I stated previously, in the part that I gave the rationale of this research, Pamuk's insights concerning textual representation was also influential for me to develop a curiosity towards his book and for designing this study. In his book, Pamuk poses "How much can we ever know about the love and pain in another's heart?" (2004: 266). When he was asked about this question he explains that he is aware of the impossibility of reflecting Kars as much as a Karsian would do since he is an outsider. On the other hand, he puts that he aimed to question this assumption. He says that he does not claim to be a mirror that reflects one single reality but rather he aims to tell what he sees on the mirror and the mirror itself (personal interview, January 18, 2002, *Radikal Kitap*).

In this context, Geertz states the impossibility of non-interpreted data as follows, "our data are really our own constructions of the other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (1975: 9). Throughout the process, I did not aim to portrait the exact picture of an outside world but rather I was aware of my involvement and my interpretations as the researcher (Charmaz, 2003: 314). Even though I was doing a research in the country that I was born in, because of the differences of Kars from my hometown Ankara and my own social circle, I still felt as if I was immersed in an alien culture, especially in the sense of being "cut off not only from familiar people and places, but also from characteristic

ways of responding and being responded to” (Kirschner, 1987, 221). Consequently, while involving into unknown relation circles at the beginning of the research, I was still defining myself as an outsider.

On the one hand, since I was unfamiliar with the dynamics of those circles, I found myself having difficulties of standing on shifting grounds and levels of relationships and networks. On the other hand, I was in need of urgent emotional acceptance under the conditions of loneliness and dependency in the field. Soon, I gave up my outsider position in certain circles and became an insider through intimate relationships. To put simply, I lived the same old tension between two parts of the ethnographer self which are the observer and the participant. Moreover, aiming to establish relationships without ignoring the imbalance between the researcher and the people under study, soon I realized that my position as a single woman in the town also had implications regarding power relations. In this respect, my surprising neglect concerning my gendered position in the field contributed to my vulnerability as a native observer (Behar, 1996).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

To conclude, in this chapter, I discussed the methodology involved in my research project. First, I presented my research rationale shaped by my questions. Then, I showed in what context and how I put this methodological choice into operation. In doing so, I gave an overview of the political landscape. I introduced grounded theory and the attitude of this research regarding objectivist and subjectivist differences among the proponents of the method. I explained the data collection and analysis processes in detail. Finally, I discussed my involvement into the field as a researcher.

I applied grounded theory method in order to achieve a comprehensive knowledge about what people in Kars think about the book rather than assuming the issues that they concentrated. This helped me to understand the local dynamics better. While trying to rephrase my questions according to my findings, my interests

were also channeled to the major questions and interests of people that I talked to. This also enabled me to be flexible in organizing my time and therefore I saw many faces of Kars.

## CHAPTER IV

### ETHNICITIES: OTHERS WITHIN

Kars, as the setting of the book, represents ethnic heterogeneity perfectly with mainly five ethnic groups which are Kurds, Azeris, Terekemes or Karapapaks, *Yerlis* and Alevis. However, ethnicity was not a topic that I was planning to investigate for this study. It was mainly because I did not come across with discussions or Pamuk's statements, where the book was evaluated regarding its implications on ethnicity during the media review that I did before the fieldwork started. However, I realized in Kars that the ethnically mixed structure is one of the issues that people point out when I open a conversation on *Snow*. For Karsians, their city is like a miniature of Turkey and "7 ethnic groups out of 77 in the whole country exist in Kars"<sup>8</sup> is a common expression that I heard many times. In this context, Pamuk's choice is appreciated by many participants because, for them, Kars is the best location if one is aiming to write a book where the whole Turkey could be represented.

In the sense of identification process, I take ethnicity as the ground to discuss 'others within', that is, others defined in daily face-to-face encounters. Therefore, Barth's conception of ethnicity as a social product constructed through interaction is very useful for analysis. By addressing the mechanisms that work to maintain and transcend boundaries which remain between groups, even the cultural traits of groups and organizational structure of the society changes, it is possible to understand the ways in which ethnic differences are produced, reproduced and

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<sup>8</sup> "Türkiye'deki 77 milletin 7 tanesi burada yaşıyor" (interview with Aziz, October 15, 2009).

communicated (Barth, 1969). Cohen adds that ethnicity is created as a political strategy to be instrumentally used in organizing competition over scarce resources and interests of groups (Cohen, in Eriksen 2002: 45). Also, referring to the simultaneous operation of individual choice and structural constraint, ‘situational ethnicity’ is helpful to explain the fluidity of ethnicity in relation to other forms of identification (Okamura, cited in Eriksen, 2002: 55).

In this chapter, I deal with tactics that people develop under various circumstances where the boundaries between ethnic groups are constructed, maintained and transcended. First, Then, I will introduce how people deal with ethnically mixed structure of the city that contradicts with the demographic premise of nation state promoted as a homogeneous nation. I will introduce the construction of *Yerlis* as an ethnic category to understand when ethnicity ‘makes a difference’ and how it is constructed with reference to past and present. Finally, utilizing the case of mayoral elections, I will show how self-definitions and individual choices are shaped in respect to differences within an ethnic group and differences among vthe existing ethnic groups.

#### **4.1 “What *Millet* are you?”: Overlapping Discourses**

It was the first day of the field; I and Anıl were having tea in the crowded garden of the Teachers House, the most popular place of Kars in the autumn. I was listening to Anıl very carefully since he was talking about the social structure of the city and he was explaining different cultural traits of each ethnic group. Meanwhile, I wonder his ethnic origin but I thought it would be too direct to ask. Thus, I asked whether he is from the city center or not. Anıl got my intention quickly and corrected me with a smile: “we don’t ask it in this way around here; instead, it is asked as *what millet are you?*”<sup>9</sup> This was a lesson to learn and I kept

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<sup>9</sup> “Burada öyle sorulmaz, hangi millettensin diye sorulur.”

this wording in mind for the next time. However, it did not work well as I supposed because the meanings of the word *millet* is constructed differently by varying ideologies and contexts. For instance, people did not like my question when I asked what *millet* they are in the Revolutionary Association of 78s Generation in Kars, which was newly established as a member of Revolutionary Federation of 78s Generation that is founded by those activists of leftist political movement who struggle for a socialist society during second half of 1970s and who were violently suppressed by the state after the military intervention that took place in September 1980. One of them reminded me that their generation defends internationalism and they do not care about ethnic origins of people in Kars, who, for them, are all ‘people of Turkey’<sup>10</sup>. In addition to the objections I received from the Revolutionary Federation of 78s, Cemal, the president of the Association of Journalists in North Caucasus with Alevi origin, did not want me to call different ethnic groups as *millet* because he thinks that it is an ‘ugly word’ and each group in Kars does not constitute different *millets*. Rather, he said, Kars has five different *etnik yapısı* (ethnic structures), which all together compose the Turkish *millet*. To identify them as different *millets* would imply dividing the society, whereas Cemal says that Kars never experienced conflicts based on ethnic structure.

During the Ottoman state was based on *millet system*, where the population is divided into strict religious compartments called *millets*. The meaning of the word was changed with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and it is used to define the ‘nation’ in modern sense. However, it keeps its reference to the integrative role of religion and implication of heterogeneous nature of ethnic composition (Çağaptay, 2006: 160-164). Lewis explains this as follows:

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The word was used to mean groups of people with the same religion in Ottoman. Though it still evokes its old use, the word can be directly translated into English as “nation” for its use in contemporary Turkish.

<sup>10</sup> “Türkiyeli”

Arabic, Persian, and Turkish all possess numerous words denoting ethnic groups. It is surely significant that these words did not furnish the terminology of emergent nationalism. Instead, Arabs, Persians, and Turks alike preferred to take old terms, with a religious meaning, and refurbish them to meet the new need. In both Persian and Turkish, the words for “national” and “nation” are *milli* and *millet*, from the old *milla* or *millet*, “a religio-political community.” Even today, in the secular Turkish republic, “nation” is *millet*, “nationalism” is *milliyet*, and nationalist is *milliyetçi* (Lewis, 1991: 41).

Although the Muslims were technically regarded as a homogeneous whole in the old *millet* system, the emphasis on religious differences should be taken into consideration for a better understanding of negotiating boundaries between different groups in Kars. Therefore, regarding the religious differences of the people that I talked to, who are composed of Jafari-Shias and an Alevi, it makes sense why people refrain from *millet* to define ethnic groups. Also, the word gives reference to the Empire or the Islamic past rather than the republic or the secular state of the present. Concurringly, secularists reacted against my wording and explained their rejection with arguments from their own political views.

Above all, what we understand from these expressions is that dichotomization and complementarization processes occur simultaneously in Kars (Eriksen, 2002: 28). On the one hand, the multiplicity in ethnicity is celebrated and identified as an important aspect of the city. Differences resulted from the ethnically mixed structure are very valuable and are preserved through ‘cultural tolerance’ which means mutual respect to differences and which, Karsians say, cannot be found in another city in Turkey. On the other hand, the shared culture is also emphasized with distinct ethnic belongings because ethnicity is closely tied to nationalism. Therefore, Karsians define their city as a needlecraft which “is knitted in a very peculiar way that colors were locked in a close embrace. If you unravel one of the colors, you tear the carpet”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> “Öyle birbirine dokunur ki renkler birbirine sarmaş dolaş olmuştur. Eğer siz onlardan birini sökerseniz, o halı bozulur” (Interview with Cemal, 14.10.2009).

Complementarization is also emphasized in daily talks, like in the saying *etle turnak olmak*, i.e. to be flesh and nail, which is used to emphasize that people are inseparably connected. Reminding their unequal citizenship rights, some Kurds indicated that they constitute the dispensable part in this analogy as the grown nail in a finger that can be wasted. Still, they also put the constant interrelation and exchange relationship between ethnic groups in Kars. For Safiye, a Kurdish woman, differences between ethnic groups do not create conflicts in everyday encounters, except in elections times. She says that “my closest friend is not from my *ırk* (race); besides, it is not only me, most of the people are like that.”<sup>12</sup> Here, as we see, race is another word which stands for ethnic identity. On the other hand, I observed many cases of ethnically mixed friendships, romantic relationships and partnerships in business.

With the aim to establish interethnic relations, Karsians utilize some institutions. One of them is *kirvelik*, which can be described as the construction of relation, which is basically similar to relative ties. The man who is pacifying the boy during the circumcision or bearing the expenses of the circumcision ceremonies is regarded to be *kirve*. The *kirve* becomes like a father and is regarded being responsible of the boy till the end of his life. This Muslim tradition has many similarities to godfather in Christian belief (Emiroğlu & Aydın, 2003: 478). It can be said that, *kirvelik* is very common among Kurds and Azeris in Kars, despite the conflict between them.

Intermarriage is yet another institution. It is a very common practice and possible with any correlation among five ethnic groups. However, marriage does not mean the exchange of person between different groups. Othering processes continue within the family and Safiye states that women suffer twice in the cases of intermarriages because they are suppressed on the basis of both their gender and their ethnic background. On the other hand, agency usually plays the greater role

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<sup>12</sup> “En çok görüştüğüm insan benim ırkımdan olmayan biri; sadece ben değil, birçok insan böyledir.”

in offspring's self-ascription in intermarriages. For example, I witnessed an occasion where friends of a man made fun of him because of his negotiations in his ethnic identity. The man, whose father is a Kurd and whose mother is a *Yerli*, introduced himself as a Kurd to me. However, his friends told me that he usually describes himself as a *Yerli* and uses his 'Kurdish card' when it becomes 'saleable' or when one of his identities is more profitable than the other one in the some circumstances.

While explaining how cultural differences are communicated, Eriksen indicates stereotyping as a strategy to define people with reference to their ethnic belongings. This can be best seen in the jokes that Karsians love to tell. Emin, a businessman with Terekeme origin, says that each ethnic group has their peculiar features and these features become topic of jokes through which people criticize each other. He explains that making fun of other's weaknesses or deficiencies is also an expression of a demand them to change. Then he tells one of those jokes:

A governor comes to Kars and calls a *Yerli*, a Kurd, an Azeri and a Terekeme to visit him. When they come, he asks them to parade and tells that he will make each of their wishes come true. The trick is that everybody will get twice whatever the person stands next to him wishes for himself. When the governor asks, *Yerli* gets confused. He thinks that it doesn't make sense if he wishes a cow because the other will get two cows then. So, he finds a solution and he asks to lose one of his eyes so that the other will lose both of them ... I mean, malice of *Yerlis* is a good topic.<sup>13</sup>

In short, people in Kars feel attached to each other and also, they sustain the boundaries and their interdependence through communication and social institutions. Ethnic identity is closely related to the sense of national belonging as much as it is related to the resistance against national belonging, as in the case of

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<sup>13</sup> "Kars'a bir vali gelir mesela, bir Yerli bir Kürt bir Azeri bir terekeme gelsin, giderler oraya. Vali der ki, sırayla dizilin. Sen yanındakinden bir şey isteyeceksin ki Allah ona iki katını verecek der. Yerli düşünür düşünür, ula on inek istesem ona yirmi tane verecek, diyor ben bir gözümü çıkarayım onun iki gözü çıksın... Yerlilerin hainliği iyi bir espri konusudur yani".

Kurds. Situational self ascriptions are also containing references to the nation state and its 'imagined community'.

#### **4.2 Yerli: Constructing the Past from Present**

In an evening, Emin was telling me the migration story of his grandfather. They had come to Kars from Georgia, worked hard to survive in harsh environmental conditions to establish a life in a village of Ardahan, which was used to be a part of Kars a decade ago. However, he said that his father had hard times to develop a sense of belonging to Kars. After sixty years, he could give up calling their lands in Georgia as his homeland and got adapted to Kars. Referring the migration past of many inhabitants of the city, Emin argues that the sense of belonging to the city is very weak among Karsians. I remember Tuncay, another businessman with Kurdish origin, also had a similar remark once. He had said that, in his eyes Kars is no man's land; it is a 'bastard',

because nobody feels permanent in Kars. It is a transition place. We gave a break here. We will take some rest, take our breath and continue to move. It is same for everybody living in Kars. (...) It is not about one ethnic group or another. Neither Kurdish nor Terekeme people prefer to stay here. Maybe it is their nature (...). Centuries are like seconds in the history of societies. Now we've just come from Caucasus. They say that we have roots here that go back to only 80 years ago.<sup>14</sup>

Historical records show that Caucasus is one of the regions that Anatolia gained a huge migration starting from the end of 19th century. Çağaptay presents that a large population of North Eastern Anatolia is composed of refugees who were settled down on the lands of non-Muslim Ottoman population, who were deported

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<sup>14</sup> "Piç bir şehir niye dedim, çünkü bu şehirde kimse kendini kalıcı hissetmiyor. Geçiş yeridir zaten, biz burada mola vermişiz. Yani biz burada nefesimizi toplayıp gideceğiz. Yani herkes için bu geçerli. (...) Halkların çatışması ya da halklardan kaynaklanan bir sorun değil. Kürt de burada durmak istemiyor. Terekeme de durmak istemiyor. Belki insanın doğasında da var. (...)Toplumların hayatında yüzyıllar filan saniyedir yani. Şimdi biz Kafkasya'dan gelmişiz. Diyorlar ki burada bizim kökümüz 80 yıldır burada, bir nefes almış gitmiş, biz de nefes alıp gideceğiz yani."

during the nation state building process (2006: 80, 161). If everybody was migrants, then who owns Kars? Who did remain here when Caucasus migrants came and who will continue to remain? I asked those questions during my stay in Kars, yet I did not get a clear answer. Instead I believe that an ethnic category, *Yerli*, which literally means local, was constructed by the Karsians in order to handle with these questions.

What is being *Yerli*? This very same question was also asked in a discussion group created in social space Facebook with the title of *Karslı Yerliler Topluluğu* (The Group of Karsian *Yerlis*) however, it is left unanswered even though members of the group were generous to share their ideas and comments under other discussions<sup>15</sup>. This is not surprising since I came across many narrations about the notion of *Yerli*, which were far from being unambiguous. In the end, I did not learn much about where *Yerlis* came from. Here, I present four prominent narrations that I heard from *Yerli* people.

The first one is the one that I listened from Fatih, the imam of Evliya Mosque. He is a religious leader of a large community. He says, he gives *kişisel dini hizmet* (personal religious service) from 50 to 500 people per day (and he also adds that no one within this religious community ever came and asked about *Snow* or attempt to open a conversation about it). Therefore, his powerful position as an opinion leader in the town cannot be ignored. He said that his ancestors came from Central Asia. After the Battle of Manzikert, Turkic clans invaded the Anatolia starting from Kars. Therefore, his origin allegedly goes back to the soldiers fought in this battle. This narrative supports the official history writing which can be found in educational history books used in accordance with the curriculums defined by the state (Eskicumalı, 2003: 25). As a representative of Directorate of Religious Affairs, Fatih rests his argument on nationalist state

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<sup>15</sup> “Yerlilik Nedir?”, <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=65877005427&topic=82> 74, accessed August 28, 2010.

ideology. His position as an Islamic leader also stresses the alliance between the nationalist and Islamist thinking that Bora was prospecting (2003: 427).

Another narration is what I heard from Anıl. He said that, Muslim people living in Kars left the city during the Russian occupation. However, seven families refused to migrate. Anıl says that those seven families are the ancestors of *Yerlis* of Kars today. However, Anıl does not know who those families are, even though their legendary resistance took place only a century ago. Anıl is an actor who defines himself as a leftist, with references to the revolutionary student movements of 1970s. However, he is not an active member of any organization including Association of 78s Generation. On the other hand, as an actor, he voluntarily involves in every cultural event that took place in Kars including those realized in cooperation with Armenia. As he expressed once, his reference to past concurs with the mixture of nostalgia of the period of Russian occupation, when Kars had met patterns of 'high culture', and the pro-Soviet movement in the city in the past, which is recalled with the legendary narration saying that Soviet flag was waving on the Kars Castle once.

I listened to the last two references to the common past of *Yerli* people in an informative and educative conversation where, once again, I learned that wording is very important. Having tea in a teahouse that I am familiar with from my previous visits, I was talking about the book with two *Yerli* men, who knew each other for a long time. As a retired inspector from Ministry of National Education, Vurol had worked as the provincial chairman of the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (The Republican People's Party or CHP) for many years. His friend Ahmet is another respected retired man of town. I asked them about their ethnic belongings.

- Vurol: I am *Yerli*. My mother and my wife are Terekemes.
- Ahmet: (to me) They call us Ottoman, ok?
- Vurol: (to me) I am not Ottoman! See, my friend considers Ottoman in the sense of a Turkic clan [which he assumes *Yerlis* in default belong to] but it is not. However, when you say Ottoman, it includes Bulgarians, Greeks, Bosniaks, Albanians, these and thats.
- Ahmet: (to Vurol) I've just said Ottoman, the clan. Don't correlate it with that [what you have said now].

- Vurol: (to Ahmet) I see. If you say Ottoman clan... You aimed to say the dignity of the women within the family during emperor times and all.
- Me: What does *Yerli* mean, then?
- Vurol: *Yerli*, [is] the native of Kars. Where did Azeris come from? They came from Gyumri, from Iran. Terekemes, also came from there. Kurds, also came from there. In this sense, since we are from here, we are the native of this place.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, I realized that Ahmet was referring to the Ottoman Empire as the source of the origin of *Yerlis* in the sense that Vurol does not agree at all. I was familiar with this reference from other occasions. Therefore, I understand that Ahmet aimed to emphasize the point that his descent goes back to the nobility of an empire when he said Ottoman. For Vurol, *Yerlis* are those who did not migrate to Kars but those who were already living here, this is all. Whether his roots go back to this or that clan does not mean anything to him. He interrupted his friend Ahmet in order to clarify the point that his reference to the Ottoman is not a reference to Ottoman times but rather a reference to Turkishness. As the establishing element of the Republic, Turkishness does not include any of the ethnic components of the cosmopolite structure that the bygone Ottoman Empire included. However, he also underlines that his ethnic group contains cultural traits or traditions of Ottoman times while he talks about the position of women. Hence, Vural, constructs an ethnic belonging by combining various references to first, historical boundaries between Ottoman Empire and Turkish republic; second, defined tradition or culture; and third, an essentialist version of nationalist discourse. On the other hand, Ahmet sensed what Vurol objected quickly and

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<sup>16</sup> “Ben Yerliyim. Annem Terekemedir, eşim Terekemedir. / Bize Osmanlı derler, tamam mı? / Ben Osmanlı değilim! Osmanlı’yı bir Türk boyu olarak düşünüyor arkadaşlar ama değil. Osmanlı derken Bulgar’ı var Yunan’ı var bunun Boşnak’ı var Arnavut’u var işte şunu var bunu var. / Ben demin Osmanlı kavimi dedim. Şimdi onla bağdaştırma. Anladım, yani Osmanlı kavimi dersiniz... O imparatorluk dönemindeki kadınların aile içerisindeki saygınlığı filan demek istediniz. / Yerli ne demek peki? / Yerli, Kars’ın yerlisi. Azeriler nereden gelmiş? Gümrü’den gelmişler, İran’dan gelmişler. Terekemeler de oradan gelmişler. Kürtler de oradan gelmiştir. O bakımdan biz buralı olduğumuz için buranın yerlisiyiz.”

changed his remark in order not to contradict with Vurol, who reclaims the official statement on the homogenous national structure in the presence of a stranger researcher. It is important to keep in mind that, this does not necessarily mean that they speak about ethno-genesis when there is no alien around, like me. As supporters of CHP, these two men have different perceptions regarding their ethnic belonging and their conflicting explanations of the past also represent a peculiar case that does not fit with official Kemalist imagination of nation.

### 4.3 Negotiating Boundaries: The Case of Election

“There are situations where ethnicity is relatively unimportant, and there are situations where it provides decisive mechanisms for exclusion and inclusion as well as clear guidelines for behavior” (Eriksen, 2002: 199). Election time is one of those times when ethnicity becomes important. It is known that in Kars, people prefer to support candidates who come from the same ethnic origin. This is primarily because of the aim of enjoying economic power in the allocation of the resources. For instance, a municipality worker asserts that the previous mayor, who has Kurdish background, prioritized Kurdish neighborhoods while neglecting Azeri neighborhoods most in bringing infrastructural services where Kurdish population lives intensively,. Hikmet, a Kurdish man working as a journalist for one of the powerful national news agencies, calls this phenomenon as ethno-nationalism. He thinks that relations on the basis of *kabile* (tribe), or ethnic group, control the city economy through political power:

At the time of the elections *kabilecilik* (tribalism) or ethnic nationalism can openly be observed here. In other words what I mean by ethnic, there is ethnonationalism or nationalism in a micro level is at issue. And democracy and bureaucracy feel obliged to cooperate with these families [who are actually using ethno-nationalism within their own circles].<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “Seçim sırasında kabilecilik ve etnik milliyetçilik vardır. Daha doğrusu etnik dediğim, etno milliyetçilik ya da mikro düzeyde yapılan bir milliyetçilik söz konusudur. Ve demokrasi ve bürokrasi de bu ailelerle işbirliği yapmak zorunda hissediyor kendisini.”

While discussing the role of ethnicity in the social classification, Eriksen suggests focusing on both vertical and horizontal aspects of ethnicity, where the former refers to power relations constructed between different levels of the same ethnic group and the latter highlights the ways in which boundaries are maintained between different ethnic groups (2002: 49). In this section, I aim to address how ethnicity operates in Kars vertically and horizontally with the help of the case of elections. Pointing specifically on Kurdish and Azeri populations, I will introduce how ethnic identity varying for individuals and groups effect decision making processes.

#### **4.3.1 Class Differences within Kurds**

Even though it is argued that people vote based on their ethnic identities, it was not possible to talk about a common social will among Kurdish population in the last elections. In the elections of March 2009, there were three parties competing for the votes of Kurdish population. One of them was the DTP, defending acknowledgement and implementation of human rights concerning Kurdish ethnic community in Turkey. The CHP was the other party addressing Kurdish votes with a Kurdish candidate who referred Kurdish ethnic identity in his statements. Finally, there was the ruling party, the AKP, which have no reference to Kurdish ethnic identity.

The differentiation within the Kurdish group is based on class, and migration plays the central role here. According to population records of 1879 taken by Russian administration, Kurdish population was very minor with the 6,8 %; yet it was increased gradually starting from 1927 and have became the largest ethnic group in Kars today (Alakom, 2009: 24). Although there is not a record on ethnic proportion of the city, I was told that the population of Kurds in Kars is close to 40% today. The change in ethnic composition of the city is based on two different population movements. First, as an economically disadvantaged city at the east, Kars was deserted through the country-wide population movements after 1950s which escalated especially after the military intervention of 1980. For instance, I

listened to many narrations where people described the intensive out-migration of Azeri population, Russians and some other ethnic groups with small populations. Secondly, the city center receives migrants from rural parts, where Kurdish population was concentrated most after they migrated from Caucasus. I was told that Kurds preferred villages to settle because they were dealing with animal husbandry and agriculture which were not suitable occupations for the city center. However, there are other arguments that make me question this stereotyping explanation which fixates the role of Kurds as ‘natural’ farmers (Eriksen, 2002: 51). In his article based on the document research regarding the Kurdish question in Turkey, Mesut Yeğen informs that the government reports prepared in 1920s did not permit selling or renting the estates and lands in eastern provinces left from Armenian people to Kurdish people but rather it is advised to resettle Muslim immigrants from Caucasus in this region (2009: 601). Though he does not give information about the following policies of this report, Yeğen’s implications might illuminate why intensively migrated Azeri population was living in the city center and Kurds did not appear in the city until 1980s<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, the migration between years 1984 and 1999 can be explained by the internal displacement, which influenced predominantly Kurdish population and which occurred because of the conflict between Kurdish armed movement and the Turkish Armed Forces. According to the report of the research on migration and internal displacement in Turkey, Kars is one of the places which are both receiving and sending migration (Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Nüfus Etüdüleri Enstitüsü, 2004: 15). Besides, based on the findings of the same research, it is known that there are more than thousand of cases of forced migration in Kars (Kurban et al., 2006: 282).

Therefore, there is a class created by migrant Kurdish population in Kars now. Concerning the internal dynamics of the group, in Kars, those who support the

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<sup>18</sup> This information should be supported by deeper archive research and oral history in order to have a better understanding of history making in Kars.

DTP are regarded as Kurdish *elites*, caring more about cultural rights like education in native language. Apart from this wealthy minority, there is no grassroots support for the DTP in Kars city center. It is argued that Kurdish population in Kars tends to elect the candidate of ruling party to get more public service from the government. A previous municipality worker states that:

at least, those of whom living at the city center are not keen on politics done over deprivation of Kurds, suppression of Kurds or a campaign over using “q, w” letters. Because they care about something else, which is to eat their fill; because, they are very poor.<sup>19</sup>

To support this argument, the CHP’s candidate was the mayor of the city since 1999 and he entered the elections that he won with ruling parties in the past. However, in the March 2009 elections, he was not assigned as mayor candidate by the AKP and he decided to enter the elections from CHP. As a result, the AKP’s candidate won the municipality with the support of Kurdish population even though he was a *Yerli*.

#### **4.3.2 Encompassing Religious Differences of Azeris**

Azeri people are followers of Jafari Islamic school of law of Shia sect of Islam, which has similarities with Alevism but it is not the same. Shiites have a different cemetery and they have different mosques. Azeri mosques usually do not get state support. An exceptional case was experienced during the construction of a new Shiite mosque, which was financially supported by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The religious leaders of Shiites are called *Akhund* and the existing *Akhund* is trained in Islamic Republic of Iran<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Merkezde yaşayanlar en azından, böyle bir Kürtlerin ezilmişliği, Kürtlerin mahrumiyeti üzerinden yapılan bir politikaya ya da işte “w, q” harflerini kullanmak üzerinden şey yapılan bir kampanyaya o kadar sıcak bakmıyorlar. Çünkü onlar başka şeyin derdindeler ki o karınlarının doyması; çünkü çok fakirler.

<sup>20</sup> “Kars Ehlibeyt ışıklı Camii: Hocaları”, Electronic document, <http://www.karsisiklicamii.org/bilgiler/kars-ehlibeyt-istikli-camii-alimleri.html>, accessed August 2, 2010.

Can is a lawyer who is known by human rights cases that he brings to European Court of Human Rights including those of Azeri refugees expelled during Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and those of people who were subjected to state violence during the Digor events, which I will elaborate in the following chapter. He believes that Azeri people differentiate themselves from the rest of the society in Kars because of their religious difference. For instance, he says, “Other ethnic groups discriminate Azeris, because their religion is different. They are Jafari. Since our childhood, they taught us that they are fifth sect, they are bad Shias...”<sup>21</sup>

I also observed that Azeris are excluded and othered by Sunnis during the month *Muharrem*, which is the holy month known for *aşure*<sup>22</sup> for both Shia and Sunni Muslims. However, in Kars, people do not eat everybody’s *aşure*. When I went to a friend’s house for dinner during *Muharrem*, her sister told us that the Jafari neighbor brought *aşure* during day time. She accepted but threw it away because she was told that Jafaris put a drop of their own blood in it.

There is another example that I observed about *aşure*. Evliya Mosque is the biggest mosque in Kars, with the largest community. The mosque was newly constructed and it is located at the center of a huge religious complex that includes the Armenian Church, which was converted to a mosque in 2007, and a shrine of the devout Hasan Harakani, whose promotion for religious tourism started very recently. When I met the imam of the mosque, I asked him about the relations between different religious groups in Kars. However, he preferred to take my question as if I asked about ethnic groups and he did not specify Shiits as a different sect. He also announced that he was organizing an *aşure* making event for *Muharrem*, which, as a happy coincidence, matches with the day of

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<sup>21</sup> “Azerilerin dışındaki bölümü, Azerileri bizden olmayan diye ayırıyor ve sebebi de din. Bunlar Caferi. Çocukluktan beri bize işte beşinci mezhep, kötü Şia diye öğretiler...”

<sup>22</sup> A sweet soup, symbolizing the diversity of living creatures survived in the Noah’s ark according to Muslim belief.

martyrdom of Harakani. Therefore, he arranged a meeting where both Harakani and Tenth of Muharrem<sup>23</sup> were going to be memorialized. In fact, throughout the month, there were already meetings for the memory of martyrs in the Shia mosques and also Shiites organized a march from the city center to their cemetery.

This example reminds us of the way that the Directorate of Religious Affairs treats Alevism as a part of Islam rather than a distinct system of belief. It also fits to the encompassment grammar of Baumann where the self recognizes the other as inferior and as a part of self. Therefore, while Fatih ignores that Shism is a different sect, he gives the message to Shiite people that: “you may think that you differ from me in your sense of values or identity; but deep down, or rather higher up, you are a part of me” (Baumann 2002: 25).

In short, Azeri community in Kars experiences othering and they resist against it through strong solidarity relationships. What helps to develop group consciousness is the shared religion. However, Can states that the power that religious elites are holding within Azeri community should also be included to the analysis. For instance, the *Akhund* is a very respectable figure among Azeris and he is supported more compared to the other religious leaders in the city. As I learned from a friend, *Akhund's* car had broken down in an accident that happened right before my arrival. Then, the Azeri community gathered money to buy a new car to their religious leader. This story was told me many times because it demonstrates the solidarity within Azeri community which is not observed within other ethnic groups and appreciated by other Karsians.

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<sup>23</sup> Tenth (or Remembrance) of Muharram is a time of mourning in the year for Shia Muslims who remember the martyrdom Ali, the third Shia imam and the grandson of Muhammed, and his allies during the Battle of Karbala in the year 61 according to Islamic calendar. Though it is a sacred period for Sunni Muslims too, they don't organize events.

Terekemes, or Karapapaks<sup>24</sup>, are counted as a distinct ethnic category in Kars. However, it is added that they have many similarities with Azeris. The only difference, that they states, is the religious affiliations; because, Terekemes in Kars are Sunni<sup>25</sup>. In this sense, Azeri's degree of difference from Terekemes is lower than any other group in Kars. For Can, this fact supports his idea that religion is the reason for Azeri community to show a closer group structure. Can states that the economic cooperation among Azeris is supported by *Akhund*. Since the state does not support Shiites, survival of houses of worship, as well as the institution of *Akhundship* depends on the financial support of Shiite community. This is why *Akhunds* works hard to keep the Azeri community together. They work even harder during the election times.

Not surprisingly, Azeris present inviolable unanimity in terms of voting. Aziz, a representative of the *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party or SP) with Kurdish origin, says that he appreciates Azeri people because of their economic and political solidarity. He states that:

I appreciate. If there is a benefit, they wish someone from their group gets it. They always shop from each other's markets. They are highly organized. Other groups do not have the same solidarity and this is why [they lose]. They [Azeris] never divide their votes in terms of politics.<sup>26</sup>

Although they are usually represented as the pioneers of leftist tradition in Kars, today Azeris are known to be supporters of the MHP, the extreme nationalist party

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<sup>24</sup> Those people that I meet in Kars usually introduce themselves with the word Terekeme first. Then they sometimes add Karapapak. Therefore, I will use the word Terekeme to define this ethnic category.

<sup>25</sup> Karapapaks in Azerbaijan follow Shia Islam. However, in Kars they are Sunni. Still, the differentiation between Terekemes and Karapapaks requires further research.

<sup>26</sup> "Ben takdir ediyorum. Ortada bir hayır varsa onların kendi adamları hayır alsın isterler. Kendi marketlerinden alış veriş yaparlar. Fazlasıyla organizedirler. Kars'taki diğerleri bunu beceremedikleri için [kaybediyorlar]. Politik anlamda da oy bölmezler."

on the right wing. There are rare cases where individual act independently from the group in public. There are some leftist Azeris who were active during 1970s. However, because of the repression they experienced during the military invention, they do not involve in politics, rather they live in seclusion. On the other hand, those of who prefer to be visible in politics suffer from being into the middle of the conflict between leftists and nationalists. For instance, an Azeri admitted that he abstains attending gatherings of the Association for Solidarity with 78s Generation because of the reaction that he receives from his own ethnic group.

On the other hand, while ethnicity becomes more and more determinant in the political choices and in the attachment to a political party, the ideological differences blur among citizens as well as among the political parties. Can says that though some groups accumulated on certain political parties within years, he will not be shocked to see, for example, Azeris voting for the CHP in case an Azeri becomes a candidate from this party. In fact, something similar took place in Kars during last mayoral elections. An Azeri man decided to support the AKP instead of the MHP and votes were divided. Then, supporters of the MHP attacked this man when the results were announced and they learned that their party took the second place. One person was killed during the incidences<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, it can be said that voting behavior has instrumental implications for the benefit of the whole group and individual violations of the group consent is suppressed for the sake of the solidarity within the group.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Ethnicity is a significant aspect of everyday life in Kars and it is defined by words *millet*, *ethnic yapı*, *ırk* and *kabile*. All of these words are preferred by different agents. For instance, *kabile* is used by Hikmet in a pejorative way to emphasize

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<sup>27</sup> “Kars'ta seçim kavgası: 1 ölü, 6 yaralı” April 3, 2009. Electronic document, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/11355510.asp>, accessed 28 August, 2010.

how ethnic belonging rather than ideological ones shape political decisions of individuals.

In this chapter, I shared my observations and show in what extend individuals can negotiate and are bounded by their ethnic identities, which are constructed within varying circumstances. It can be said that the word *millet* in the context of Kars has two meanings; one refers to the ethnic belonging while the other is used to refer Turkish nation in a broader sense. Departing from the wording, I showed that ethnicity is closely tied to nationalism and while people differentiate each other in accordance with their ethnic identity, they at the same time feel the need to emphasize that they share a common culture and constitute the larger society. I also described the interethnic relations through institutions like *kirvelik* and marriage, where gender based power relations remain.

Distinguishing *Yerlis* as an invented category, I aimed to interpret different historical references selected for the construction of an ethnic category in accordance with the needs of present. The idea of *yerli*, meaning indigenous or local, is needed to be filled concerning the migration history of the region. Therefore, it might be argued that *Yerli* is a label to make a differentiation between the group of people who come from outside and the group of people who signify the native inhabitants of the city. This label is presented as an ethnic category today. Also, the multivocality and ambiguity in the history making for the common descent of the ethnic group reflects the political different tendencies of individuals.

Although ethnicity does not necessarily lead to conflict, elections are cases where the ethnic differences are highlighted and boundaries are negotiated at the most. Therefore, in the context of mayoral elections, I compared the political behaviors of Kurds and Azeris. In the former class differences involve in a collective action, because there are differences among Kurdish people concerning class and this class division is based on migration. While those who settled down into the city center earlier have economic advantage, those who moved to center within the last

decade have not. Their economic interests shape their political behaviors and it also defines the importance of the ethnicity as a part of their identity. Whereas, I showed strong solidarity in the case of Azeris, who are othered on the basis of religious differences through ways that fit to the encompassment grammar of Baumann. Therefore, the religious differences contribute to the idea of the distinction from the rest of the society.

## CHAPTER V

### MAKING THE NATION AT THE FRONTIER

Many Karsians rejected Orhan Pamuk particularly because of the interview he gave to Peer Teuwsen for a Swiss magazine *Das Magazin*, a weekly supplement to a number of Swiss daily newspapers. In this interview, which was published in February 2005 with the title of “The most hated Turk”, Pamuk said that “Thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody dares to talk about it. So I’ll do it. And for that they hate me”<sup>28</sup>. After having carried out my fieldwork, I would not say that Karsians hate Pamuk but rather that most of them feel offended by this statement as it addresses two issues on which state nationalism concentrated on the most – the Kurdish question and the Armenian question. To give an example, in his speech after the mayoral elections of 2009 when the DTP gained the municipality of Iğdır and became the second party in Kars after the AKP, Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Çiçek used a controversial statement relating the success of the DTP in the Eastern border

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<sup>28</sup> Peuwsen, Peer, “Der meistgehasste Türke” (in German), February 5, 2005 Electronic document, <http://sc.tagesanzeiger.ch/dyn/news/kultur/560264.html>, accessed August 28, 2010. As a consequence of the interview, Pamuk was prosecuted on a charge under the article 301 on the “public denigration of Turkishness,” punishable by up to four years in prison. However, the charge was rejected by the court. For a discussion on the role of media in this issue, see Murat İri and Esra Arıcan. 2007. “The Orhan Pamuk Case: How Mainstream Turkish Media Framed His Freedom of Speech”, *Sosyal Bilgiler Dergisi*, 18: 17-24

regions to the Kurdish separatist movement implying that Kurds might involve in cooperation with Armenia and this alliance might threaten Turkey's land unity<sup>29</sup>.

By attributing the success of the DTP to an implied alignment between Kurdish citizens of Turkey and the Armenian state, Çiçek points out the sources of nationalist anxiety inside and outside of the state borders.

Ethnicity and nationalism are not easily separated from each other because both of them are constructed on the basis of shared culture through symbols and therefore create a sense of belonging (Eriksen, 2002: 99). However, the difference of nationalism is that it is a construction which aims to link a self-defined cultural group to a state through which abstract communities, different from kinship based communities, are created (Gellner, 1994; Anderson, 1995). The experience of globalization created neo-nationalism, which also found its response in Turkey (Gingrich, 2006; Bora, 2003), while local experiences of nationalism became more interesting especially at the borderlands.

By looking how nationalism is reproduced in everyday practices, in this chapter, I will introduce two basic issues which are mostly discussed within nationalist discourses that are introduced in Bora's taxonomy and which are also very significant to the Kars context. First, I will ask how the Kurdish question is perceived in Kars, which is one of the cities where predominantly Kurdish population lives and where measures against the Kurdish national movement have been exercised intensively. Second, I will discuss how Karsians perceive the Armenian question as the residents of a city which borders to one of the historically constructed 'others' of the nation. Concerning the present political and economic interests at the global

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<sup>29</sup> "Çiçek'e DTP'den Ermeni tepkisi", April 9, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Siyaset/HaberDetay.aspx?aType=HaberDetay&ArticleID=1077952&Date=01.04.2009&b=DTPden%20Ermeni%20tepkisi&KategoriID=4&ver=07>, accessed August 28, 2010.

scale, I will show how the challenge of the nation state is experienced at the local level.

## 5.1 The Kurdish Question

Kurds are stigmatized in Kars. Safiye, a Kurdish woman, told me that she did not know about her ethnic belonging until she moved from her ethnically homogeneous village to the city center when she was a child. I asked her how she found out and she answered as follows:

I learned it first... while playing with other children. I learned when they said “dirty Kurd”. Children... were using it as if it was something bad, similar to “Armenian” or “dirty Gypsy”. I learned these here. I didn’t realize that these are used for insulting others until I reach to a certain age.<sup>30</sup>

The migration played important role for shaping the image of Kurdish ethnic group in the city. While remembering the old days of Kars, Fevzi, the owner of a long-established local newspaper with *Yerli* origin, expressed how much he is annoyed by the adaptation problems of migrants, composed of especially Kurdish people, to the city culture:

This was a very developed city once upon a time. What happened when the rich people, the cream of the society had gone, who came here? Villagers did. What did they bring here? I don’t disparage them but they brought rural culture, conflicts, gangs and illegal political groups with them.<sup>31</sup>

With this statement, Fevzi does not express that he is against visibility of Kurdish people in the town. In contrast, he stresses that his family established ties with

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<sup>30</sup> “Nasıl öğrendim... İlk oyun oynarken öğrendim. Çocuklar “pis Kürt” dediği zaman öğrendim böyle bir şeyi. Çocuklar... Çocuklar sanki kötü bir şeymiş gibi, “Ermeni” demek gibi. Ya da “pis Çingene”. Ben onu burada öğrendim. Bir yaşa kadar onun hakaret olduğunu anlayamadım.”

<sup>31</sup> “Burası çok gelişmiş bir yerdi bir zamanlar. Ne oldu, buradaki zenginler, kalburüstündekiler, gitti, Kars’a kim geldi? Köyden geldiler. Ne getirdi bana köy? Ben köylüyü aşağılamıyorum. Köy kültürünü getirdi, at davasını getirdi, it davasını getirdi, örgüt davasını getirdi.”

Kurdish people through intermarriage as his sister is married with a Kurdish man. However, he also associates many problems of the city with the newcomers. Those newcomers are people with Kurdish origin, members of a group which is being stereotyped and linked to meanings such as backwardness, rural culture and *örgüt* (which refers to 'illegal political group'). Therefore, in this case, Fevzi identifies himself as the real owner of the city and defines Kurdish population as the other of the city. However, his brother-in-law, for instance, as an exception represents a potential 'us'.

I observed that this us/them dichotomy is produced by others too. In a circumstantial lunch, I met Tuncay. He is a businessman dealing with agriculture and he defines himself as a leftist, which is a commonly used expression in Kars giving reference to active involvement into the political movements in 1970s. He asked many questions to me when he learned that I am doing a research in Kars. Later he explained that his curiosity comes out from the fact that he did not like the attitudes of the researchers, who worked in Kars previously. As he informs, scholars from a university carried out a research in Kars years ago and during which they visited villages for learning more about people's *etnik aidiyet* (ethnic belongings). For him, this information was unnecessary and this research would only have evil intentions such as 'awakening' people about their ethnic identities and encourage them to mobilize separatist movements, just like Kurdish people do. He further explained his ideas about the book *Snow*. For him, Pamuk's book announces the world's public opinion that Turkey does not have a homogeneous national structure so that it gives the message that it can be divided into pieces.

Therefore, for those who do not appreciate *Snow*, like Tuncay, the danger of the book is that it implants some inexistent ideas to Kurdish people and puts the harmony in Kars into danger. This implies the rejection of the subjectivity of Kurdish residents of the city and ignores their independent positioning. As a part of this way of thinking, there are some prohibitions to preserve the 'harmony' in the city. For instance, I saw a notification in one of many internet cafes saying that

“it is not allowed to visit websites of separatist organization”<sup>32</sup>. Those who support Kurdish movement are known as *Kürtçü*, meaning the one who favors Kurds, and their act of propaganda is called *Kürtçülük*. However, it is not clear what might be a *Kürtçü* act exactly. Perhaps this is why Vedat whispered to me when introducing his ethnic belonging for the first time: “I am a Kurd”<sup>33</sup>.

### 5.1.1 ‘Unemployed Kurds’

There are two representations that annoy Karsians. When I ask them about the book, first the people usually remind me this phrase: "It continued snowing all morning, while Ka walked the streets playing the intrepid reporter—visiting coffeehouses packed with unemployed Kurds, interviewing voters, taking notes—and it was still snowing later [...]"<sup>34</sup>

This description is well known and it is also considered provocative by some Karsians. When I asked his opinion about such comments, a lawyer that I met in 78s Generation Association smiled and asked me whether I understand which ethnic group he belongs to from his appearance. As accents are too much mixed into each other, I replied that it was not possible for me to identify people’s ethnic backgrounds unless they do not tell. This was the answer he expects; so, he continued as follows:

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<sup>32</sup> “İllegal örgüt sitelerine girmek yasaktır”.

<sup>33</sup> “Ben Kürdüm.”

<sup>34</sup> “Bütün gece yağmıştı. Ka sabah sokaklarda yürür, işsiz Kürtlerle dolu kahvehanelerde oturur, hevesli bir gazeteci gibi eline kâğıt kalem seçmenlerle görüşür[ken][...] kar hiç dinmedi.” (p.15)

Orhan Pamuk, Snow, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Knopf, 2004), 10. Orhan Pamuk, Kar (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002). Translations from Pamuk’s original Turkish text cite Maureen Freely’s English translation. The original Turkish will be given in the text or in the footnotes, as appropriate.

What grabbed my attention in the book is that he [Pamuk] says, ‘I went inside a teahouse, I saw unemployed young Kurds’. He underlines this on purpose. Now, I wonder according to the measurement of what barometer did Orhan Pamuk concludes whether they are Turkish or Kurdish. We can understand this as local residents. We are a family here. I think it is because he doesn’t know the city well enough. [He assumes] that only Kurdish people are living in Kars.<sup>35</sup>

Later, I learned that this lawyer is a Kurd and he thinks that the underlying intention of the book is to separate the nation into two as Kurds and Turks.

The debate related to the ‘unemployed Kurds’ had been articulated first in an open session program in 2002, after the book was published. The program was broadcasted on the only local TV station, *Serhat TV* (or Borderland TV), the owner of which is the previous mayor, who also contributed to the promotion of the book in the city by selling *Snow* in Kars at half price. During the program, participants came up to agree that the publication of the book is beneficial to Kars because it will cause publicity and attract attention for investments. However, the director of the program did not have the same opinion because he thought that Kars was insulted by the author. He argued that the book divides Karsians on the basis of their ethnic identities because of the phrase ‘unemployed young Kurds who spend their time at coffee houses’. Since he got involved into the discussion from a standpoint which was in conflict with the political stand of the station, the director was fired right after the program ended. I met this director, Yalçın, to learn more about his oppositional reaction.

Yalçın is a *Yerli*. He publishes his own local daily newspaper now and he was elected to the central executive board of neo-Kemalist or *ulusalcı* the *İşçi Partisi*

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<sup>35</sup> “Benim dikkatimi çeken o kitapta,

diyor ki, “bir kahvehaneye girdim, kahvehanede boş oturan Kürt gençleri gördüm”. Özellikle altını çizmiş. Yani, Orhan Pamuk hangi barometreyle ölçerek onların Kürt ya da Türk olduklarını anlamış orası beni şey yaptı. Biz anlayabiliriz, burada yerleşik düzeyde olanlar anlayabiliriz. Burada bir aileyiz. Şehri tanımaması ile alakalı biraz. Sanki Kars’ta sadece Kürtler yaşıyor [sanıyor].”

(Worker's Party or İP) after I left the field. Although he lost his job because of his opinions on the book, Yalçın thinks that *Snow* did not have an impact on Kars at all. He argues that the book was written by the order of imperialist powers of the West. The aim of publishing this book is to provoke the Kurdish community, which, he claims, is the weakest link in the state and to justify claims of neighbor states over the lands of Turkey. He thinks that Pamuk was paid and was rewarded with the Nobel Prize to articulate claims of Western states, which will never accept Turkey's membership in EU. Therefore, in return, these states will be able to argue in the future that "See, it is not we [the Western powers] who speaks. It is your Nobel laureate author, your journalist, your TV station speaking. They are not Armenian, not Greek, not Jew but they are your own nation who confirms [our claims]"<sup>36</sup>.

Parallel with the nationalist discourse, Yalçın does not acknowledge PKK as a political movement and reduces it to a terrorist organization. He makes a distinction between the PKK and Kurdish people because he does not think that PKK is representative of Kurdish people. Moreover, he explains his remark with an example: "When a *şehit* (martyr) comes to the city, Kurds, Azeris, this and that pray for him all together. Nobody says that 'your fellows killed this man.' If you go and look, you will see that most of the participants are Kurds and they are the ones who cry the most."<sup>37</sup> Yalçın's example resembles what Baumann calls 'selective racism' (2004: 40). One wonders what happens to some Kurds who do not attend funerals in Kars because his remark also implies that there are cases

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<sup>36</sup> "Bakın biz demiyoruz. Sizin Nobel ödüllü yazarınız söylüyor, sizin şu gazeteciniz söylüyor, işte şu televizyonunuz söylüyor. bunlar Ermeni değil, Yunan değil, Yahudi değil, bunlar sizin kendi milletiniz, onlar söylüyorlar."

<sup>37</sup> "Buraya mesela şehit geliyor. Şimdi orada kürdü de Azeri'si de şusu da busu da bir araya gelip namaz kılıyor, yani kimse o kürdü oradan çıkarmıyor, kardeşim bak seninkiler bunu buraya gönderdi bak, demiyor. Kürt daha çok orada, gidin bakın bir şehit cenazesine ağlayanın da çoğu Kürt'tür."

when Kurdish people are associated with the PKK. An unfortunate example is again, Hikmet. After graduating journalism and working for the pro-Kurdish daily *Gündem* in Ankara, Hikmet came back to his hometown and started to work for a national news agency. However, shortly after, he was accused of being a trained militant of PKK by some other journalists, since he did not hesitate to write about improper practices of the governor.

### **5.1.2 Kars as the ‘City of Fear’**

The second controversial representation of Kurds in the book is closely linked to the way people perceive the first one that I presented above. The problem is the way Pamuk presents the domination of guerillas of the Kurdish armed organization and the related conflict in the city.

By many locals Kars is represented as the unique town in the East where Kurdish national movement could never become successful. Karsians say how proud they are of not being involved in the conflict that all the Eastern towns are suffering from. However, they are upset mostly because they think that Pamuk describes their loyal town as if there is a strong Kurdish militant movement. Once Erkut, an Azeri having ties with the extreme right movement, said that “there is nothing happening related to terror in Kars, except for those students who distribute newspapers and from time to time shout slogans in groups of 15-20 people but Kars residents do not take them seriously”<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, Yılmaz, who defines himself as a leftist and *ulusalci* journalist, thinks that Pamuk created an image of Kars as ‘the city of fear’, where secular professors are killed, Kurdish militants control powerful bodies and illegal organizations play politics. He also stresses that natives of Kars do not support Kurdish movement. He says that today Kurdish residents in Kars, who settled down years ago, do not take those students

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<sup>38</sup> “Yani bu terör adına bu Kars’ta hiçbir olay yaşanmadı. Ha şimdi yaşıyor. Mesela rastlarsın, caddelerde bazen 15-20 kişi gösteri yapar. Onlar da üniversite öğrencileri. Dışarıda, doğu ve güneydoğu’nun diğer illerinden gelen.”

propagating Kurdish separatist movement seriously at all.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, Kurdish movement is defined as something ‘exterior’ to Kars.

Since the owner of the only foreign language teaching school of Kars was a friend of mine, I was sometimes teaching English there during my fieldwork. Almost all of my students were undergraduate students in the political science department of Kafkas University. They were from cities like Batman, Van, Şırnak, Hakkari and I had the chance to observe their respect to the Kurdish political movement during our classes. For example, for them it was possible to understand women’s rights, only if I could refer to similar examples from Kurdish identity politics.

*Kafkas Üniversitesi Öğrenci Derneği* (the Student Association of Kafkas University or KAÜ-ÖDER) the only student club of Kars organizing political events and members of this association are those students that Erkut and Yılmaz mentioned, those who were spreading newspapers and organizing protests on the streets. For instance, the last protest that they had organized was against the increase of the ticket prices of public transportation. While I was conducting my fieldwork, some of these students were arrested during protests on the streets or in the no-knocking raids of police to student houses. Five months after I left the field, this only student association of Kafkas University was closed down with the decision of the local court saying that the members of the association are related to the illegal terrorist organization<sup>40</sup>.

However, besides these ‘student events’ there had been other events that Karsians do not like to talk about. Vurol is the previous provincial chairman of the CHP with *Yerli* origin. He states that:

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<sup>39</sup> “Kars merkezin Kürdü, yıllardan beri merkezde, şu anda dışarıdan gelip de Kürt kimliğini ortaya çıkaranlardan uzaktır. / -Onları ciddiye almıyor mu? / -Almıyor.” Interview with Yılmaz, November 25, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> “Öğrenci Derneği Kapatıldı” May 10, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.dha.com.tr/n.php?n=ogrenci-dernegi-kapatildi-2010-05-10>, accessed August 28, 2010.

there... I don't remember exactly but it took place in 95 or something... It was an attempt to organize a meeting by gathering our people living in the area. A military conflict occurred... anyways. Even this event didn't affect people's relationships. Neither, it created dispute against the state among Kars people.<sup>41</sup>

Meliha, an active member of the NGOs and an entrepreneur in Kars, also believes that people in Digor were forced to join the demonstration:

When I was living in Subatan Yolu [which is a district of Kars], many people who migrated from Digor settled there. They were direct witnesses of the event. They said that PKK's terrorist members came to the village first and forced them to march; I mean a march against the state. Then they started to march.<sup>42</sup>

This marching event, where Kurdish national movement was manifested, was narrated me as 'Digor Massacre' by Kurdish Karsians. On the weekend of August 14-15 of 1993, people from Kağızman, Iğdır and other villages gathered in Digor for a pro-Kurdish march. However, the police, namely the functional team of security forces, opened fire to the demonstrators. As a result, 17 civilians were killed and 63 of them were injured<sup>43</sup>. Polices were on trial but they were found innocent after ten years of juridical process. Then, relatives of the killed civilians took the issue to the European Court of Human Rights. Before the court had decided on the case, Turkey offered a friendly settlement in 2007. As a result, the

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<sup>41</sup> "Bir orada işte... çok iyi hatırlamıyorum ama 95te filan mı olmuştu ne etmişti... İşte oradaki insanlarımızı toparlayıp bir miting yapma hareketi olmuştu. İşte orada da bir askeri çatışma filan çıktı ... Neyse. Yaşanan bu olay bile Kars'ta insanların birbirleriyle, insanların devletle sürtüşmesi sonucunu doğurmadı."

<sup>42</sup> "Ben, Subatan Yolu'nda oturduğum zaman orası daha çok fazla Digor tarafından gelenler yerleşti. Onlar daha çok birebir yaşayan insanlar. Dedi ki köye önce şey geldi, PKK'nın şeyleri terör elemanları bizi zorla yürüyüşe zorladılar yani hükümete, devlete karşı. O yürüyüşe başladık, dedi"

<sup>43</sup> "Digor'da 'özel' bir beraat", February 24, 2008. Electronic document, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=179532>, accessed August 28, 2010.

lawsuit against the suspicious policemen was opened again and the case has not been concluded yet.

The Digor Massacre is the most well known event experienced in Kars concerning the Kurdish question. Can is a lawyer who defines himself as Kurdish after living in Diyarbakır for his law studies even though he is the son of a *Yerli*-Kurdish couple. He draws a different picture from Vurol and Meliha's:

There was serious state pressure in early 1990s in Digor and this outcropped in 1993. Thousands, ten thousands villagers marched to the city center and they were fired. 17 people were killed, 65 seriously injured. After this event Kurdish consciousness among Digor people got strongly developed.<sup>44</sup>

Muzaffer is an architect and the owner of the news portal. Also, for him, Kars was at the center of the conflict between the armed forces and the PKK; and Pamuk's book captures this reality very successfully. He states that:

now, when he [Pamuk] issues, namely appends, Turks and the PKK there, I mean in the book, he makes his point through the people from Digor. we have experienced situations in the city intensively similar to the incidents about how Digor people are interrogated at the entrance to Kars; how organized guerillas come to and dwelled in the peripherial neighborhoods of Kars; and the incidents that would be directed to a conflict in the city. In other words, thus, apart from the fictional language of the book itself, these things were not distinct to us. But if you look at these from a distant to this region, you may not perceive it as such.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Özellikle 90 sürecinde Digor'da devletin müthiş bir baskısı var ve bu baskı hatta 93'te patladı. Binlerce on binlerce köylü merkezde yürüdü, üzerilerine ateş açıldı, 17 kişi öldü, 67 kişi yaralıydı. O olaylardan sonra Digorlular da baya baya bir şey olmaya başladı, politik bilinç arttı."

<sup>45</sup> Şimdi Türkleri ve PKK'yi bu konuda orada kitabında işlerken yani ilişitirirken, Digorlular üzerinden geliyor. İşte Digorluların Kars'a girişlerinde polis tarafından nasıl sorgulandıklarına dair, işte Kars'ın dış mahallelerinde örgütlü gerillaların nasıl gelip yerleştiklerini ve bunun kentin içerisinde bir çatışmaya yönelik olacağı durumların benzerlerini bu şehirde çok yoğun yaşadık. Yani dolayısıyla, kitabın kendi kurgusal dilinin dışında bunlar bizim çok uzak olmadığımız şeylerdi. Ama siz eğer buna çok uzak bir noktadan bu bölgeye bakarsanız bunu bu şekilde algılamayabilirsiniz. Ama biz algılayabiliriz.

Yeğen argues that Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey refuses to be assimilated within the constructed Turkish nation and got alienated from the Turkish political community (Yeğen, 2009: 610). In this respect, the way Kurds are represented in the book disturbed some Karsians whose perceptions of Kurds do not correspond with Yeğen's argument and who refuse to acknowledge the distinctiveness claim of Kurds. On the other hand, their construction of Kurds as national other is challenged by their daily encounters with their Kurdish neighbors living in Kars. In such cases, we observe 'selective racism', where people make exceptions for individuals in the process of identification and leave room for a possible dialogue with those individuals while excluding the rest for good (Baumann, 2004: 40). In short, Kurdish national movement is the target of radical Turkish nationalism as well as the official nationalism and Kemalist nationalism or *uluslactlık*.

## 5.2 The Armenian Question

“During the Ottoman period, many different peoples had made Kars their home. There had been a large Armenian community; it no longer existed, but its thousand-year-old churches still stood in all their splendor” (Pamuk 2004: 25).<sup>46</sup> As Pamuk states, Armenians were a majority in Kars at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, today there are not any Armenians living in the city as far as I observed. If there were some Karsian Armenians in the recent past, they had left with those who migrated from the city after 1950s. In the 1980s, the whole Armenian population had already moved. While Karsians love to remember and talk about other groups like Russians, Germans and especially Molokans, they do not show the similar nostalgic attitude towards Armenian. “Anthropology would stress that history is not a product of the past but a response to requirements of

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<sup>46</sup> “Osmanlı zamanında çeşit çeşit milletin, mesela bin yıl önce diktikleri kiliselerin hala bazıları bütün haşmetiyle duran Ermenilerin, Moğollardan ve İran ordularından kaçan Acemlerin, Bizans ve Pontus devletinden kalma Rumların, Gürcülerin, Kürtlerin, her tür Çerkez kavminin yaşadığı bir yerd burası.”

present.” (Eriksen, 2002: 72). Therefore, the way people remember Armenians tell a lot about their present interests.

### **5.2.1 Re-inscriptions of History**

When I went to Kars, the residents of the city were very much occupied with the relations of Armenian and Turkish people because of a crucial diplomatic development. As a result of a long running process of secretly carried out negotiations between foreign affairs of both countries, Turkey and Armenia decided to sign protocols for the normalization of their relationship. In the long run, this rapprochement between the two countries might result in the opening of the Doğukapı/Akhourian border, although it will not directly result in it. The border was closed in 1993 in the context of an escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict<sup>47</sup> between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in addition to Armenia’s uncertainty over the recognition of its common border with Turkey.

At the beginning of the November 2009, when I talked to Fevzi, the owner of an old local newspaper, he told me how he perceives Pamuk’s speech on Armenian genocide:

I disagree with Pamuk. [Can you ever imagine that] so many Kurds and Armenians were killed? Didn’t Armenians kill? Armenians also killed many people here. This is normal. This should be put clear. This is history. Now, this border will be opened. They are going to open it until the end of this month, it seems. The Doğukapı. Armenians come here; they will come more when the border will be opened. We are told not to go Armenia, to Yerevan. Ever. “Don’t go to Kars”, they say, “They are

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<sup>47</sup> For this highly complicated international land dispute, please see "Regions and territories: Nagorno-Karabakh", May 21, 2010, Electronic document, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/countryprofiles/3658938.stm>, accessed August 28, 2010; “Paylaşılamayan ülke: Dağlık Karabağ”, April 04, 2009, Electronic document, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/ayse-hur/makale-paylasilamayan-ulke-daglik-karabag.htm>, accessed August 28, 2010.

going to slaughter you”. They came, we embraced them [Armenians], respected them. It is all about Diaspora. Diaspora complicates things.<sup>48</sup>

Fevzi makes a common explanation which I heard many times that the violence was experienced mutually. Taner Akçam states that it is very hard for a group of people to talk about evil behaviors attributed to them even though they did not get directly involved in. Therefore, he continues, people tend to distribute the responsibility and get rid of the heavy feeling of ‘guilt’ by sharing it with others (2007: 16). In this case, Fevzi shares the violent acts with Armenians and by that tries to normalize the past. Furthermore, he states that the mainstream belief on Turkish-Armenian conflict is misleading and that fear is fostered by Armenian Diaspora, to whom Fevzi attributes extreme nationalism. He argues that people from both sides are open to dialogue. Once more, Fevzi exemplifies orientalist grammar where identification with national identity others Armenians and excludes a third party, the Armenian Diaspora, from the dialogue. Fevzi excludes Diaspora because he had connections with Armenian people and he achieved to establish communication, where mutual recognition of differences and similarities were represented. Whereas, an outsider, namely the Diaspora, which is related to the constructed other, fails to achieve the same communication and remains an unknown threat for the Turkish nation within which Fevzi locates himself into.

Using the opportunity of the political context of rapprochement in early October 2009, people working for a local TV station of Gyumri visited Kars in order to record and broadcast their impression on Kars and Karsians, the city and its peoples, which are still largely unknown in Gyumri. In fact, in the final report of

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<sup>48</sup> “Orhan Pamuk gibi düşünmüyorum ben bu konuda. Yani o kadar Kürt mü öldürüldü, o kadar Ermeni mi öldürüldü? Ermeni öldürmedi mi? Ermeni de öldürdü burada. Tabi ki olacak. Bunu kabul etmek lazım. Tarih bu. Şimdi bu kapı açılacak. Bu ayın sonuna kadar açacaklar, öyle görünüyor. Doğu Kapı. Şimdi tabi Ermeniler şimdi kapı açılınca Ermeniler geliyor buraya. Aman gitmeyin Ermenistan’a, Erivan’a diyorlar. Sakın. “Kars’a gitmeyin, Türkiye’ye gitmeyin, sizi kesecekler”. Gayet geldiler, biz burada kucak açtık, hürmet ettik. Bu Ermeni Diasporası var ya, işi o karıştırıyor.”

the “Armenian and Turkish Citizens Mutual Perceptions and Dialogue Project” carried out by TESEV, Kentel and Poghosyan inform that neither Armenian nor Turkish people have comprehensive knowledge about each other even though they are neighbor peoples (2004: 44). Therefore, I decided to accompany these Armenian journalists/documentary makers to see what encounters of ‘strangers’ might tell me about Kars.

Right after Armenian journalists appeared on the streets with their camera, a couple of curious people surrounded us. The small crowd welcomed the guests and asked about the purpose of their visit in Kars. Journalists explained that they want to know more about their neighbors, especially because of the protocols, which promise the opening of the borders in short term. I listened to the neighbors of borderland expressing their wish for opening of the border to each other. They also did not refrain to share their concerns about the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and genocide. Meanwhile, an old man approached us. He listened to the conversations and he suddenly started to shout to the Armenian group. He accused them ‘murdering’ his ancestors. Thereupon, I expected a dispute between the two groups. Yet, there was no tension at all. The locals of Kars witnessing the behavior of old man first laughed and then, convinced the Armenian visitors that he is *deli* (insane)<sup>49</sup>. Armenians got relaxed and continued discovering the city. Two months later, *Serhat TV* went to Gyumri for the same purpose. They produced a documentary on the theme of similarity between two cities.

In Kars, many organizations take place in corporation with NGOs from both sides especially by a Gyumri based NGO called City Research Center in order to underline the similarities between the two cultures and promote amity between Turkish and Armenian youth. I was told an anecdote from one of these organizations where Azeri, Armenian and Kurdish people joined workshops for artistic production. They told me that one day when people get hungry in the

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<sup>49</sup> “Saçmalıyor, boşver”

middle of two workshops, an Azeri participant from Kars named Erkut had decided to take his Armenian guests to a restaurant where they were serve *tandır*<sup>50</sup> kebab. Armenians had asked what *tandır* is and Erkut had replied with a sarcastic smile on his face, “come on, do not worry, it is the place that I am going to burn you down”<sup>51</sup> and everybody could not help laughing. When we met, Erkut explained his sarcasm as follows:

Look, I have constructed friendships with them [Armenians], we exchanged gifts, and we had tea together. [When one says that] our grandfathers killed each other... This is ignorance. I have nothing to do when the past is put in words and when it is politicized or it is used to mobilize nationalism. I am also a nationalist as much as a Jew or an Armenian is...<sup>52</sup>

However, later I learned that Erkut removed his Armenian friends from his Facebook list a few months later from the organization.

I knew that Erkut has relations with *Ülkücüler* (Idealists), the youth organization of extreme nationalists. He is running his own business and he is doing his PhD in Turkish Literature at the same time. He has academic interests and loves to read books. However, he has not read *Snow*. Still, like almost everybody that I met in Kars, he had read many reviews and he has an opinion about it. Erkut thinks that Pamuk expressed his ideas about Armenian genocide in the book and in this way he harms Turkish society:

“A person or an author should bring his works into use of his society; his works should serve to the benefit and needs of his own society.

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<sup>50</sup> Tandır is a kind of oven made in a hole in the earth for cooking meat basically.

<sup>51</sup> “Gelin korkmayın, sizi tandıra koyup cayır cayır yakacağım”

<sup>52</sup> Ya bakın, benim onlarla arkadaşlıklarım var, hediye de aldık, hediye de verdik. Çay içtik. Ben senin deden benim dedemi kesmiş [dendiği zaman]... O cehalettir yani. Yapacak şeyimiz yok ama bunlar dile getirildiği zaman, bunlar siyasetleştirildiği zaman veya milliyetçiliğe döküldüğü zaman. Bir Yahudi bir Ermeni ne kadar milliyetçiye biz de o kadar milliyetçiyiz... “

Otherwise, the author loses his value in the eyes of his own people and he is burnt out.<sup>53</sup>

He is also disturbed by the way Pamuk describes Kars. He thinks that Pamuk showed Kars as an ancient Armenian city, which, for him, is a fabrication. He says, Kars has never been an Armenian city, even though Armenians lived in Kars just like Molokans did once upon a time.

Erkut's perception is shaped by his own positioning as an Azeri and as a Turkish nationalist. Even though he perceives the differences among Armenian people, in the end he totalizes them and associates them with Armenian nationalism, which he defines as the reference point of his own political ideology. Therefore, he assumes that the book serves to the constant opposition against Turkey and the campaigns originated from abroad to force Turkey to the wall. By rejecting the fact that Armenians established a civilization in Kars, the most visible evidence of which is the abandoned medieval city of Ani located at the Turkish side of the Armenian-Turkish Border, Erkut redefines the land to make claims on it because he feels threatened by the claims of Pamuk. To put it differently, he utilizes Pamuk's statement and the book as a tool to firm his political positioning. This political positioning is also against the reopening of the border.

### **5.2.2 The Closed Border Phenomena**

In fact, many Karsians want the reopening of the border because the closure had its most negative impact on the local borderlands. Since the border is closed, export in Kars is almost over. However, the economy of Kars was mainly based on the export of animal products to Soviet Union starting from 1930s and there was a remarkable accumulation especially during 1970s, as I learned from Emin, who is a businessmen dealing with organic agriculture and whose father was the

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<sup>53</sup> "Bir insan veya bir yazar bir şair, sanatını eserlerini toplumun ihtiyaçlarına yönelik kullanmalı veya toplum menfaatine kullanmalı. Bunu yapmadığı zaman toplumun gözünde o yazar değerini yitirir, epey bir yıpranır."

president of *Doğu Anadolu İhracatçılar Birliği* (the East Anatolia Exporters Union) for 19 years before the union was moved to Erzurum from Kars in the 1980s. Vedat, the literature teacher, defines the situation of local people in Kars regarding the border sarcastically as follows:

In all borders, there are problems. How nice that we don't have problems because it is closed! But we didn't close it. People who don't live in this place opened this gate and then, they decided to close it down. Interestingly, we cannot decide on our relationships with our neighbors in our daily lives as we wish. [...] I don't like money but unlike others, I believe that we need the money which will hopefully come from the other side of the border, because it is going to change some ideas. It is going to break prejudices.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, some people expressed their concerns about the possibility of illegal flow of goods with the opening of the border will be reopened; because, they had already experienced disadvantages of animal smuggling in the past. Besides smuggling, human trafficking is also a problem experienced at all borders. I learned from a journalist that many women coming from the former Soviet bloc countries were forced to be sex workers in Kars in the past. The experience of these women as their initial meeting with liberal market was also widely observed in the Eastern Black Sea Region (Bellér Hann and Hann, 2001: 89). There are still approximately a hundred of foreign women living and working in Kars<sup>55</sup>. I also know a hotel at the city center which is full of men coming from

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<sup>54</sup> “Bütün sınırlarda bir problem var ama bizim sınırimızda ne güzel problemimiz yok çünkü kapalı! Yani, kapıyı da biz açıp biz kapatmadık. Burada yaşamayan insanlar bu kapıyı açtılar sonra kapattılar. Gariptir yani gündelik hayatımızda istediğimiz gibi komşularımızla olan ilişkilerimizi kendimiz belirleyemiyoruz.(...) Ve ben parayı sevmeyen biri olarak, Türkiye'ye ve Kars'a Ermenistan'dan gelecek paraya ihtiyaç olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çünkü o para bazı fikirleri değiştirecek. Belki o para beraberinde farklı şeyler de getirecek, kaçınılmaz bu ama insanların önyargılarını değiştirecek bu.”

<sup>55</sup> I did not see them on the streets because, as the journalist explains, the customers, who are the farmers were not paid their agriculture subsidies yet. It is curious to look at whether farmer's consumption behaviors are related to the bans for grazing, which is a state measure for security purposes against Kurdish armed movement.

Nakhchivan through Iğdır to work in Kars illegally. There are also illegally working Armenian people who are usually hired in construction works, the conditions of which are very bad. I heard that one of them died while working in one of the construction sites by falling during the time that I was there. However, this information was not released in the newspapers.

The Armenian-Turkish border causes one of the major international contentions because of its political significance. In the past, Kars had the largest border with Soviet Union, as the frontiers of NATO, because Iğdır and Ardahan were districts of Kars. In 1993 these two districts became separate provinces. Today, Ardahan has a border with Georgia and Iğdır has borders with Nakhchivan and Iran. On the other hand, the only border that Kars has is with Armenia which is closed. In the report focusing on Turkish-Caucasus border, Burcu Gültekin states that reopening of the border has a priority on the agenda of business community in Kars, since Armenia is considered as a natural market for them (2005: 126-129). In fact, Turkey already exports goods to Armenia. However, it is not a direct trade. There are daily flights from Istanbul to Yerevan and ships departing from Trabzon carrying various goods to Batumi which eventually reach to the Armenian consumers (Gültekin, 2005: 133). Moreover, since the goods pass through Georgia or Iran, the transportation expenses are very high. On the other hand, the actual distance between Kars and Gyumri is not even 100 km. Therefore, traders in Kars rightly expect immediate gain from the reopening of the border. They expect to export various goods including metallurgy and forestry products, besides agricultural products, because of the construction material need of Armenia after the earthquake of 1988. Traders know that Kars has the required infrastructure between the two countries to transport these heavy materials in a cheaper way, because it is a part of the railway system in Transcaucasia constructed by the Russian Empire, even though the system requires rehabilitations. Moreover, this railway connection between Kars and Gyumri is an integrated part of an international project titled TRACECA, The Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia or the "New Silk Road". In her article on this

project, economist Serap Ovalı reports that the aim of the project is to reach cheap raw materials in the ex-USSR countries like Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan but also to deliver European goods to these new markets through cheap and fast transportation (2008: 152). The mentioned sources include natural resources like natural gas. Also, if projects like this one would be realized, European dependency on Russian and Iranian sources would diminish. This means a shift in global politics. However, the full realization of the project requires the reopening of the border between Armenia and Turkey. Hence, reopening of the border and the rapprochement process are global issues with economic and political dimensions.

An important component of the picture is Azerbaijan, whose General Consulate was officially opened in Kars in 2004 (Gültekin, 2005: 127). Before the protocols, foreigner journalists arrived to the city in order to keep finger on Karsians' pulse regarding the rapprochement. I accepted to work with them for three days, when I learned that they need a translator. I also accompanied them during their appointment with the Consul General. When a journalist asked the Consul General about Azerbaijan's position on the signing of the protocols, he answered by saying that Azerbaijan never assumes itself the right to interfere into another country's political decisions in domestic and foreign affairs. However, right after this calm comment, he furiously stated that Turkey should never ever open the border unless Armenia retreats Nagorno-Karabakh. Later, I learned that the General Consulate does not hesitate to interfere into domestic politics of Turkey. Among other cases, an example is, his public statement against the "I apologize" campaign raised by a group of intellectuals in Turkey.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Başkonsolostan özür tepkisi", January 4, 2009. Electronic document, <http://www.kenthaber.com/dogu-anadolu/kars/Haber/Genel/Normal/baskonsolostan-ozur-epkisi/74a685d9-c018-486d-afd2-8ec6c4e55082>, accessed August 28, 2010. Also see, <http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com>.

### 5.2.2.1 Between Submission and Amity: The Case of Monument

In June 2004, Kars Municipality started a petition campaign with the support of the previous mayor for reopening the border and 50.000 people signed the petition in Kars<sup>57</sup>. However, Karsians still did not get any answer from the parliament to their request, which is an example of a local initiative aiming to interfere with foreign politics. Another example to the conflict between local initiative and central government is the case of the debate on a monument. As an attempt to attract the interest of the government to the reopening of the border, construction of the Monument of Humanity was started in 2007. According to the initiators of this project, the Genocide Monument in Yerevan fosters hatred, even though it represents memory for Armenians. Therefore, as a reply, their initial idea was to construct a monument which symbolizes amity between people of Armenia and Turkey. Sculptor Mehmet Aksoy designed it with the height of 35 meters and weight of 350 tons. However, he could not finish his work, which only has minor works left. The construction was stopped in the period of the previous mayor, before the mayoral elections. The new mayor's position, on the other hand, does not make it clear whether the monument should be completed, destroyed or carried to somewhere else<sup>58</sup>.

On a snowy day in Kars, when I was hanging on the streets and lost all of my patience against cold, I decided to warm up in the shop of someone that I knew, Oğuz. I met him right after my arrival to the city because of his interest in photography. He had studied electronics. However, when he was a young man who was passionately curious about the history of his hometown Kars, he decided

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<sup>57</sup> "Alibeyođlu'na Provokatör Suçlaması", July 23, 2008. Electronic document, <http://www.politikars.com/haberdetay/9015/gazete.php?gazete=star>, accessed August 28, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> "Kars'taki İnsanlık Anıtı'nı Yıkmayan Başkan Hakkında Suç Duyurusu", March 24, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.dha.com.tr/n.php?n=insanlik-anitini-yikmayan-baskan-hakkinda-suc-duyurusu--2010-03-24>, accessed August 28, 2010.

to be a photographer. He runs this shop and takes photos of the urban landscape of Kars since 1970s. At the same time, he was among those who harshly criticized Pamuk when *Snow* was published. He even shared some documents containing his reactions to the book as well as some photos of Kars from his personal archive, which is very precious and famous among Karsians. On that cold day, after he welcomed me, Oğuz and I started chatting on Pamuk again. As usual, he turned the topic to the Monument of Humanity, which stands still on the hill that the window of his shop directly looks at. He is against both the construction of this monument and the idea of making peace with Armenians; because for him, Armenians accuse Turks of being murderers without taking their own acts into consideration. After a while he started to stare at the monument from the window of his shop and he said that he will do his best and use all of his power to get the decision of the destruction of this monument. If they will not destroy it by law, he will destroy it by himself, he said. Then we both could not help laughing because the monument is huge.

In fact, the same statement was done by the local head of the MHP. He asked "why is one figure standing with its head bowed, as if [it is] ashamed?" because, for him, the figures imply submission of Turkey to Armenia<sup>59</sup>. The MHP applied to the Council of Monuments with the claim that monument is constructed on a historical site and therefore should be demolished. However, the Council has not made a final decision since 2008. The debate heated when the mayor stated that he is determinant to destroy the monument as soon as he receives the decision. However, shortly after he changed his statement and said that displacement of the structure might also be an option<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> "Sidesteps Obstacle to Armenia Pact", October 8, 2009. Electronic document, [http://online.wsj.com/article/NA\\_WSJ\\_PUB:SB125486375834268801.html#urkey](http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB125486375834268801.html#urkey), accessed August 28, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> "Bozkuş: Anıtı Yıkacağız", February 18, 2010. Electronic document, <http://www.karsmanset.com/kars-gazeteleri/kars-haber-gazetesi-1.htm>, accessed February 18, 2010.

Those who want to keep the monument are economically powerful bodies. They say that the monument would be a good symbol of the wish shared by the locals of Kars and would show the determinant stand of them against the central government, which insists to close the border and therefore prevent the free flow of goods and people to cross. On the other hand, many people are against the construction of such a huge monument because of its expenses which create a contradiction to the deep poverty experienced by many locals of Kars, who migrated from the rural parts to the city center within the last two decades. Besides, those who do not share the political idea, which the monument manifests, are disturbed by the symbolic use of the common urban landscape as such. For instance, for Seda, an active NGO member with Azeri origin, the monument is a reminder of mass violence exercised by Armenians against Turks. She says: “My grandfather used to tell that they [Armenians] were allies of Russians in the war and inevitably, if you are in the kitchen you have to stand the heat... So, I am totally against this peace monument or whatever”<sup>61</sup>.

When it comes to the *ulusalcı* wing, it is possible to talk about two positions. Yılmaz, the local journalist, thinks that the idea that the monument symbolizes is nice and he indicates his support for the local attempts targeting reopening of the border. However, he thinks that it is an exaggerated structure and it is nothing than a waste to spend huge amounts of money while infrastructural needs are waiting to be met by the municipality. Whereas, Yalçın, another local journalist, does not approve the monument and believes that it functions to support Armenian claims on the recognition of genocide and compensation of loses by land and money from Turkish state.

Apart from the strategic importance of the border in international politics and economics, the urban landscape of Kars is already a contested space as it can be

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<sup>61</sup> “Benim dedem anlatırdı, savaşta Ruslar’ın yanında yer aldılar ve bunun kaçınılmaz sonucu, hamama giren terler hesabı... Onun için ben bu barış anıtına filan tamamen karşıyım.”

understood from the street names<sup>62</sup>. Therefore, the fear to lose the land is also at the center of the radical Turkish nationalist discourse, which presents the most aggressive tone concerning Armenian issue. Both the way that the past is constructed in the memories and the way the future is prospected in the involvement to the public debate regarding the use of urban landscape, radical nationalist discourse emphasizes ‘territory’ and also ‘the threat of external powers’, namely Europe, which, have a loose sense of land, as they stated. Erkut, the PhD candidate in Turkish literature, expresses:

Tevfik Fikret [a famous Turkish author] says that “my home is earth and my nation is humanity”. They [Europeans] might have the same idea. However, it is unfair to ask people living here to think in a similar way; because, these are the lands where the Armenian-Turkish conflict was lived. They didn’t listen to the stories of Armenian massacre from their grandfather. I listened. It is hard for you to bear them but we were born and raised with these stories.<sup>63</sup>

While the individual initiative of the previous mayor was not welcomed by all of the inhabitants of the city, the reaction of the ruling party was also far from appreciation. The AKP did not present the previous mayor as its candidate for the 2009 mayoral elections. On the other hand, the new mayor has to deal with the complex problem of the monument by considering the shaking grounds of

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<sup>62</sup> There are an Atatürk Boulevard and a Cumhuriyet District as in all cities of Turkey. Names of main streets at the city center are coming from the names of military officers fought in Kars like Kazım Paşa, Faik Bey, Gazi Ahmet Muhtar Paşa and Halit Paşa<sup>62</sup>. Besides, there are many statues of uniformed Kemal Atatürk and Kazım Karabekir in the town to symbolize military power and glory. Furthermore, the castle signifies the military nature of the city too. In fact, some participants expressed their disappointment that *Snow* paid little attention to the historical Kars Castle compared to the Armenian Church of the Twelve Apostles that Pamuk describes at length.

<sup>63</sup> “Tevfik Fikret diyor ki vatanım toprak, milletim beşer. Oradakilerde [Avrupalılarda] böyle bir düşünce olabilir. Ama buradakilerden bunu istemek haksızlık olur. Çünkü bu olayların cereyan ettiği, yani bu ermeni Türk sürtüşmesinin yaşandığı olaylar buralar. Onlar dedelerinden bir Ermeni mezalimini dinlememişlerdir. Ben dinledim. Sana dinlemesi zor geliyor ama bunlarla doğmuş büyümüşüz biz.”

international politics. Since 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2009, when the protocols were signed between the two states, Armenian and Turkish governments did not take any action except for giving controversial public statements regarding the protocols. Finally, the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan said that his country freezes the process of ratifying the protocols in April 2010 because of USA's position regarding the recognition of the genocide. As a result, the Armenian question remains unsolved and so does the monument debate.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed nationalism around two issues, namely the Kurdish question and the Armenian questions, which have been debated in Turkey for a long time. I think the nationalist discourse that is heard in this debate provides a case from Turkey where Gingrich's sandwich model for neo-nationalism can be applied. While introducing the case from Austria, Gingrich says that:

if the uniqueness of a particular case can be understood in terms of the complex results of local and regional history, this does not mean that this case does not contain parallels of wider relevance. And while these parallels may be of only secondary significance locally, they may have a different weight in wider transnational and globalised contexts (2006: 214).

For this, Kars represents a specific local case from Turkey. Concerning the geographical position of the city as a borderland of South Caucasus, it can be said that nationalism in Kars is based on two threats, which can be categorized as below and above the nation.

The first one is the Kurdish ethnic group, below the nation, or inside the country. As Kurds have migration background and they are becoming the dominant group in the city, they might be compared to the immigrants in Austria. Being aware of the ethnic diversity of the population that composes the nation, responses to the Kurdish national movement are reluctant to acknowledge neither the claims of Kurdish ethnic group nor the visibility of the pro-Kurdish political activism, as in the case of university students and Digor. The conflict is not on the basis of the

fear of downward mobility but rather it is based on varying concerns including loss of modern urban culture. On the other hand, despite the fact that Kars was not one of the hot points in the past and it is still not one of them considering the violent conflicts between the Kurdish national movement and the Turkish Armed Forces, the Kurdish population living in the city developed and preserve the consciousness over their ethnic belonging.

Secondly, Armenian Diaspora can be understood as above the nation, or outside of the country, because of the claimed connection of it with Western powers. To put more precisely, these Western powers are defined as European Union and USA. The Armenian issue is understood within the framework of international politics where these Western actors involve and put pressure on Turkey to acknowledge genocide claims. Especially the involvement of the EU member states reinforce into this discussion reinforce the idea that membership of Turkey is closely linked to Armenian issue. Accordingly, as the main carrier of these claims in international politics, Armenian Diaspora is indicated as the target of nationalist discourse in Kars. On the other hand, what complicates the Armenian issue in the local of Kars is the Azeri population. Feel attached to Azerbaijan, Azeris see the ongoing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenian state as the main determinant of the relation between Turkey and Armenia. In this context, the debate on the monument illustrates different groups within those who refuse the construction of the monument. On the other hand, pro-monument front develops its arguments on the basis of the negative impact of the closed border upon the economic situation of the city. From this point of view, it is curious how the current government, which acts with Islamic-liberal-nationalist motives, will solve this monument question, which relates to the conflict with Armenia as a part of highly complicated international politics.

## CHAPTER VI

### ISLAM INSIDE AND OUT OF KARS

When *Snow* was translated into English in 2004, the discussions about it expanded to the globe. The book was obviously puzzling for some readers as Pamuk quotes one of his European friends, whose opinions about Turkey were challenged by the book: "You know, I used to be in favor of Turkey's accession, but now I've read your novel and I'm horrified. Is it really that dismal in your country [?]" (interview, October 21, 2005, Spiegel Online). For Pamuk, the comment of this European reader is exactly what lies at the core of the nationalisms observed in the non-Western countries. He states that:

nationalists' concern is not the value of their own culture or history but rather, what Westerners or others think about them. Nationalism in Turkey, similar to many other places, gets its spiritual energy not from the enthusiasm of living and reproducing its local material but rather, from the anxiety about how awful things that Westerners think about us. [...] In Turkey, perceptions of the way my books and writings are perceived in West are tied to this paranoiac state of mind, which is constantly wondering about 'what Europeans say about us?' (Pamuk, interview, January 18, 2002, Radikal Kitap, translation is mine).

As supporter evidences of Pamuk's observations, I listened people in Kars who express me their concerns about the image of their city in the eyes of European countries. They were disturbed by the way they and their city were represented in the book, especially in terms of the way it deals with secularism in everyday life:

“[I think that,] it is like a Dutch or a Swedish person might say ‘shame on you Karsians!’ when he or she reads the book”<sup>64</sup>.

They underline that Kars is not a place as Pamuk defined, where Islamic organizations are very powerful, professors are murdered by Islamic radicals and women commit suicide because of being suppressed by their families besides being frustrated by the ban that forbids wearing headscarf at universities and other public places. In the interviews, Pamuk stated many times that he acknowledges Karsians’ objections and clarified his position as follows:

What interests me is representing Turkey, it is not necessarily representing Kars as it is. If you look at the history of Kars [...] it is more social democrat [...] whereas I described it as if there is an Islamist movement [...]. Yet, I had to do this in order the novel represents the whole Turkey and I had to dare to do so in order to move to the topics that I wanted to discuss. [...] On the other hand,] some parts of the novel are and insist on being bounded to Kars in a realistic manner (interview, January 27, 2002, ntvmsnbc.com, translation is mine).

In Turkey, secularism has strong bounds with modernity project which is equated with westernization (Keyder, 2006: 73). Therefore, the image of their country in the eyes of Europe, as the civilization to be reached, is important for the citizens of Turkey. However, the definition of modernity has changed and secular Turkey experiences difficulties with this new definition, which celebrates multiplicity and human rights (Hale, 2010: 130) especially regarding cases of women wearing head-scarf (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu, 2008: 515). This is an emphasized topic that Pamuk’s book deals with and it is at the same time what Karsians find problematic most about the book and what they openly react against it.

In this chapter, I aim to understand how people perceive secularism in relation to modernization project and how they reproduce the essentialist dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident by locating themselves circumstantially sometimes to the former, sometimes to the latter and sometimes to the both. In respect to this, I

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<sup>64</sup> “[Düşününce,] kitabı Hollandalı ya da bir İsveçli okuyunca, “puuu size Karşılar!” der gibi.”

ask the meanings of headscarf as a cultural representation and accordingly, how secular woman is defined in contrast. I also ask how headscarf knots the idea of secularism and redefined modernity, which emphasizes democracy and human rights today.

### **6.1 “Kars Has Nothing to Do with Religion”: Islam Kept Out**

There are two camps in the city in terms of the Islamic cultural representations. One camp defends the idea that Islam is not lived in a publically manifested way in Kars, which is a modern city. This definition of the city gives reference to the lifestyle promoted by the leftist ideology and ethnically diverse structure. Especially, stories concerning how people show respect to each other in public life are associated with the past experience with Russia. In order to emphasize how liberated the public life in Kars is, they described me the images from the past in their minds such as ice skating or biking women who do not disappear from the streets until late in the night, traders having rakı with their wives in front of their shops on the Kazımpaşa street and weekend picnics, where everybody enjoys consuming alcohol with their family without any trouble. This history of the city highlights the contrasts between past and present patterns of public life in Kars. At the same time, it enables people to construct an image for Kars which is closer to socialist ideals of Soviet Union, where there was no room for religion at all. The other camp shares Pamuk’s observations about the existence of religious networks, their visibility and power in the city. However, people in this second camp also believe that Kars, in essence, is not a religious but rather a modern city. They indicate the university students coming from other cities and economic based relationships that they carry with as the source of manifestations of Islam in public life of Kars. In this sense, both camps locate Islam outside of the city and they do not contradict in their basic perception. Moreover, they both base their claims on the dressing codes of women. In this way, they fixate the image of their city and also maintain the border defined by secularist discourse against Islamist political discourse.

### 6.1.1 “We Don’t Fast As You Do”: Othering Erzurum

Someone from 78s association defines Kars as a perfect city because “it has nothing to do with religion”<sup>65</sup>. For them, this is a result of being neighbor to Soviet Union, where religious practices were not allowed by the state. In 1970s, when leftist movement was still powerful, it was believed that Kars will join to USSR one day.

As Ferhat Kentel, et al. indicated in their sociological study on perceptions and mindsets of nationalism in Turkey, Karsians usually define themselves in contrast to Erzurum in many respects (2007: 228-229). There is a historical rivalry between the two cities in terms of first, their conflicting political tendencies and second, the competition in the economical development. While Kars was known as the *solun kalesi* (or the castle of the left) in the past, Erzurum was associated with *faşizm* (fascism or the right wing nationalism, as it is understood in daily language). The rivalry is also economically based. Karsians think that because of the political choice of its inhabitants, Erzurum gained more governmental investment and became the financial and administrative center of the region<sup>66</sup>. Above all, people in Kars perceive Erzurum as the place that is exactly the same with the fiction city Kars in *Snow*. Many times, I came across with the statement

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<sup>65</sup> “Dinle de hiç alakası yok.”

<sup>66</sup> However, Karsians advocate that it was their status in the past. They give the example that many governmental bodies carried to Erzurum from Kars and customs is one of them. For Karsians, this is meaningless; because, Erzurum doesn’t have a border even. While I was still there, many people in Kars were hoping to have warehouses and stores, which were planning to be constructed by the Turkish State Railways, in their own city. However, recently it is announced that this huge investment with 3 billions dollars budget will be made in Erzurum and not in Kars. See, Antrepo Erzurum'a Kuruluyor!, Electronic document, <http://www.karsmanset.com/haber/tcdd,-daha-once-karsa-kurulacagini-ifade-ettigi-depo-ve-antrepolari-erzuruma-k-3079.htm>, accessed August 28, 2010.

that the book does not fit to Kars but it would be perfectly true if Pamuk would have written the same story for Erzurum.

Encounters with Erzurum show how strong the self-definition is constructed in contrast to the other. Mesut, the research assistant in the university, is at the same time a PhD candidate in Atatürk University, Erzurum. This is why he has to travel between the two cities at least once a week. In order to illustrate the leftist character of Kars in contrast to Erzurum, he told me a story about Ramadan. One day, while he was on his way home, in the bus of a Kars origin travel agency, he witnessed the conversation between some of the passengers from Erzurum and the Karsian bus driver. Passengers asked the bus driver to give a break at any restaurant on the road so that they can break their fast. However, the bus driver refused to stop by saying that “we are from a communist town, we don’t fast or so as you do. We are not going to stop”<sup>67</sup>. Mesut likes this story because he appreciated the behavior of the driver.

In fact, Ramadan is also used to stress how Karsians tolerate those who do not fast. For instance, I was told that all restaurants are open in Kars during Ramadan, whereas one would definitely ‘starve to death’ in another city nearby. In this sense, Kars is defined as the ‘liberated area’ in the region and at the same time as a modern city close to West.

Murat was one of the leftist activists of Kars in late 1970s. He was imprisoned by the 1980 military government because of his political involvements while he was studying in Ankara. Today he defines himself as *ulusalci*. He deals with trades but at the same time he is very much interested in reading history. When he learned that I am writing a thesis on *Snow*, he liked the idea of being a part of it. About the book, he says that Kars is not a conservative place as it is assumed in the book. Rather, he defines Kars as a modern city with cultural facilities like movie theatre and inhabitants who read newspapers to follow daily political agenda.

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<sup>67</sup> “Kardeşim biz komünist memlekettiniz, sizin gibi oruç moruç tutmuyoruz. Biz durmayız”

Accordingly, he states that Kars has an established urban culture and issues like ‘turban’ or organized political Islam do not fit into this picture. However, he thinks that these issues fit to Erzurum, where “we see *çarşaf* (veil covering the whole body) and *peçe* (veil covering the face) for centuries in the conservative family life that follows Islamic tradition. However, this lifestyle doesn’t exist in Kars”<sup>68</sup>. Then, I ask him his own opinion about the headscarf issue in Turkey:

If we handle the issue in terms of freedoms, it is not right to interfere into people’s religious lives, daily practices and their clothing. However, I don’t agree that defending things that brings regression rather than improvement of the society, things that are behind the times, means defending freedoms. These are in contradiction. You should defend freedoms which bring people to the future but if you defend a freedom that declines them, you run into a contradiction.<sup>69</sup>

He also states that enjoying all rights of citizenship in Turkey requires abandonment of turban. Therefore, he says, women should not cover themselves or agree to be out of political and administrative bodies. However, this implies limiting political representation of women.

A strong secular reflex against Pamuk’s book came from the İP right after the book was published. Yalçın, the local journalist and a member of the party for whom the book

[...] tells stuff that insults Kars. As if women with black veil live, suicides take place and honor crimes had happened in South Anatolia are

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<sup>68</sup> “Yüzyıllardır oradaki İslami geleneklere dair aile yaşamında biz çarşafı ve peçeyi çok görüyoruz. Ama Kars’ta böyle bir yaşam tarzı yok.”

<sup>69</sup> “Şimdi, özgürlükler anlamında düşünürsek, insanların dindar yaşamı, günlük yaşamı, kılık kıyafet yaşamı, insanları özgür bırakmak gerekir, eğer öyle düşünürsek. Ama toplumu ileriye götürecek şeylerin yanında toplumu geriye götürecek şeyler, çağa uymayan çağın gerisinde kalan yaşama özlem içerisinde olan bir anlayışa da göz yummak bana çok fazla özgürlüklere sahip çıkmak gibi bir şey değildir. Bunlar aslında birbirleriyle çelişen şeylerdir. Siz insanları ileriye götürecek şekilde özgürlükleri savunacaksınız. Ama insanları geriye götürecek düzeyde bir düşünceyi savunduğunuz zaman da kendi özgürlük anlayışınızla çelişkiye düşersiniz.”

also lived here (...) At that time, we organized something here which was published on national dailies too. We put the book into a black veil and we took it to the publication company. If there is something that is veiled in Kars, it is Orhan Pamuk's book. There are no veiled women or something in Kars.<sup>70</sup>

For Yalçın, being represented as if there are black veiled women all around is insulting for Kars because, it symbolizes a lifestyle which contradicts with *çağdaş* or civilized/contemporary one. Whereas, he thinks, Kars is a modern city and it is close to the Western culture. He says, the book complains about the backwardness in Turkey; it functions as a “petition written to complain about Turkey and submitted to the West.”<sup>71</sup> Yalçın's idea of West is highly associated with the imperial colonialist power. In this respect, he positions himself at the East. Yalçın is a critique of ‘the West’ but at the same time, he reproduced the meaning of veil as a symbol of backwardness and in fact, this meaning was created through orientalist discourse of Western knowledge (Yeğenoğlu, 2003: 52-92). Scholars argue that the Republican project of modernity adopted the orientalist discourse to realize secularist reforms (Berktaş, 2002; Ahıska, 2003; Özyürek, 2007). In addition to this argument, it is worthy to notice that analysis of *ulusalcı* secularist discourse requires the inclusion of historical roots of it, which goes back to the earlier Kemalist/leftist movement. However, this curiosity requires a different study than this one.

### 6.1.2 Diversity Explanation

Together with the explanations based on leftist culture, another perspective that differentiates Kars from other Anatolian cities is based on the diversified cultural

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<sup>70</sup> “[...] Kars'ı aşığılayan bir şeyler anlatıyor. Özellikle kara çarşaflıların filan olduğu intiharların, ondan sonra o Güneydoğu'da yaşanan töre cinayetleri filan sanki burada yapılmış gibi filan. (...) Biz burada o zaman şey de yaptık, birkaç ulusal gazetede de çıktı. [Kitabı] kara bir çarşaf içerisine koyduk, yayınevine götürdük. Kars'ta kara çarşafa girecek bir şey varsa o da Orhan Pamuk'un kitabıdır, Kars'ta çarşafli marşafli kadın yoktur, öyle bir şey yok.”

<sup>71</sup> “Batıya Türkiye'yi şikâyet etmek için yazılmış bir dilekçe”

structure of the city. This argument gives reference both to the existing multiplicity composed of Sunnis, Shiites and Alevis as well as non-Muslim groups, who were living in the city during the times when Kars was under Ottoman and Russian rules. In this respect, it is argued that people in Kars are not very fond of religious practices. The businessman Tuncay prefers to explain this situation with a joke as I would expect him to do. According to this joke, once upon a time, there was a church in Kars. One day, the monk of this church realizes that a corvine bird defecates on the bell every day. In order to decide on the best solution for this obscene problem, first, the monk puts a glass of wine next to the bell so that he can understand whether the corvine bird is a Muslim or not. The other day the monk sees that the bird defecated on the bell again but it drank the wine too. Tuncay tells that the monk explains this awkward result as follows:

“It’s not a Muslim because it drank the wine. It is not a Christian, because it wouldn’t defecate on the bell. Then this corvine bird should definitely be a Karsian.” You see, nobody can say that he is a pure something. We are partially Turk, partially Armenian, partially Laz. We are partially religious, partially not. It is not clear what we are.<sup>72</sup>

There are two points to be underlined in this narrative. The first one is that it indicates fluidity of religiosity. Although there is an overemphasis, it is important in the sense that it implies the negotiation of religious belongings and boundaries in varying circumstances. The second point to be depicted from this narrative is its reference to the history. Tuncay implies that it is hard to observe conservative versions of a constructed and homogeneous Muslim culture in a place where Christianity was a part of the public life in the past. For these reasons, Tuncay thinks that newly experienced public visibility of the Islamic lifestyles in the city is not something that can grow within Kars.

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<sup>72</sup> “Papaz diyor ki, “bu Müslüman olsa şarap içmez, Hristiyan olsa çana sışmaz. Bu olsa olsa Karlıdır.” Şimdi bizde her şeyden bir parça var. Hiçbir şey tam değil. Biz biraz Hristiyanız. Hiç kimse demesin ki ben buyum. Biz biraz Türküz biraz Ermeniyiz, biraz Lazız. Biraz dinciyyiz, biraz dinsiziz. Bizim ne olduğumuz belli değil”.

## 6.2 “The Novel Came True”: Islam Interferes from Inside

Safiye, is a member of *Kadın Merkezi* (Women’s Center or Kamer), a Diyarbakır based NGO for promoting a non-violent society<sup>73</sup>. She participated and organized many conscious raising meetings and trainings on gender equality in Kars, which she owns a lot for realizing herself, she says. Moreover, she ran the restaurant *Kamer’in Mutfağı* (Kamer’s Kitchen) for two years and she still has strong ties with headquarter of the organization and with the restaurant.

A few years ago, while Safiye was studying in Diyarbakır, she had the chance to ask her questions about *Snow* directly to its author, who was visiting the city for a festival. What Safiye was puzzled about the book was that Pamuk described veiled women who do not exist in Kars in reality and therefore, she asked why he did so. Pamuk replied that it is a fiction and Kars was just a space to use, a landscape for the story he tells. Safiye thinks that it was a convincing answer but she also thinks it is still too easy to get confused because, there are many things connected to Kars in the book or maybe, Kars became more like the city that was described in the book. When we were talking, Safiye insisted that there were not as many covered women when the book was published as there are in Kars today. She thinks it is a political process because headscarves became widespread after the AKP came to power. In this sense, the ‘dystopia’ narrated in the novel came true.

Safiye defines herself as a feminist and she thinks that all women should have their human rights regardless of their differences. However, she admits that she has hard times to tolerate headscarves which differ from traditional styles:

Turban case is rather different. Even though I hate discrimination, I still call them *sıkmabaş* [‘squeezed head’ in direct translation].<sup>74</sup> It is a

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.kamer.org.tr/>

<sup>74</sup> A word with peyorative meanings, used to insult women covering their head with a new style different than traditional way.

symbol, so it is different. I was talking to my mother's mother and my father's mother before the book was published and they told me that it was modern times in the past. My grandma was even telling me that they were going to balls once upon a time, when my grandfather was a member of CHP (...). There were movie theaters, dinner parties; girls were walking around with miniskirts...<sup>75</sup>

I observed the same nostalgic representation of the past with admiration again and again in Kars. In their report on nationalism, Kentel et al. also indicate that they listened many stories of 'the modern Kars' of 1910s (2007: 228). On the other hand, Safiye is recalling the fashion of miniskirt of 1960s and 1970s as well as the dress codes which are adopted in the 1920s by the young Republic of Turkey with the aim of modernization. After 1950s, women who cover their heads started to be visible in the urban public life. Soon, it became the marker of Islamic revivalism (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu, 2008: 519). Not only for Safiye but also for many Karsians, miniskirt is the symbol of the secular character of the city and they locate it on the opposite side of headscarf, which is regarded as a threat. In this way, female bodies become a space mapped and defined, on which both of these competing ideologies are manifested (Kandiyoti, 1997: 217).

On the other hand, Safiye admits that she finds it problematic to discriminate covered women because she also defines herself as a feminist. For her, the definition of modernity is democracy, which means providing opportunity of political representation to all segments of the society including those at the margins. In this respect, she says, Turkey would surely fail in any comparison with Europe.

Cemal, the president of the association of journalists, thinks in the same way. For him, Turkey lacks the culture of democracy, meaning individuals having the right

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<sup>75</sup> "Türban olayı daha farklı. Ben ayrımcılıktan nefret ediyor olmama rağmen sıkıbaş diyorum. O kadar simgeleştirilmiş.. o ayrı bir şey. Bu kitap çıkmadan önce de babannemle annemle konuştuğumuz zaman çok modern deniyordu. Hatta annemler bana derdi ki biz balolara giderdik, o zaman dedem cumhuriyet halk partisi'nden.(...) Sinemalar vardı, yemekler verilirdi, kızlar mini eteklerle gezerdi..."

to interfere into politics as active agents of society rather than being repressed by the state apparatuses. On the other hand, he does not approve headscarf because for him, it is a threat rather than a part of human rights. He thinks, the more political Islam becomes visible, the less tolerant the society becomes. He says, if a woman wears headscarf, she wishes her neighbor to wear it too. For him, this is not freedom. Therefore, people should be careful about it. Cemal adds that Kars is protected against such threats, in contrast to what Pamuk writes in his book.

A retired public servant, Şinasi, who helped Pamuk a lot during his stay, also admits that it was hard to resist giving an emotional reaction against the picture of Kars created by the book, even though Pamuk's implications should be handled carefully to have a comprehensive understanding of today's Kars. Şinasi underlines that Pamuk's fiction tells about a structural organization that got stronger within last years. Therefore, today, there are people in Kars who understand and live religion as it is described in the book. However, he stresses that this is something new:

All of the negative characters exist in the book also exist in Kars today. There is such an emotional reaction [against the book] because Kars was not known with these people until 2000s. However, if one thinks rationally and restrainedly, one can realize that these are parts of ordinary daily life of Kars and the author put them all rightly.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Muzaffer, the owner of a web portal, thinks that Karsians who say that there are not veiled women in Kars are those who are incapable of analyzing the society that they are living in:

There is turban issue in Kars, women get veiled intensively and the university is the main source of this trend. It is the university youth. Besides, women are traditionally veiled in Kars too as they do in many

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<sup>76</sup> "Romanda ne kadar olumsuz tip varsa bugün Kars'ta hepsi var. 2000li yıllara kadar öyle anılmadığı için böyle bir duygusal tepki var. Ama insan aklıselim ve soğukkanlı düşündüğü zaman bütün bunların olağan yaşamın parçası olduğunu ve yazarın hepsini hakkıyla yerine koyduğunu düşünüyor insan."

rural towns of Anatolia. 50 out of 100 women on the streets of Kars are veiled.<sup>77</sup>

### 6.2.1 *Cemaatler*: An Outsider's Point of View

One of the questions that I asked during our conversations to all participants of my research was that whether they observed any change in the city regarding the topics that the book discusses. Vedat, the literature teacher, told me that he stated to count how many veiled women on the streets and this was the 'selective perception impact' of the book on him:

I definitely don't interpret this [headscarf] as fanaticism or reactionism. I think it is all about individual rights and freedoms, and I say this totally independent from the recent turban discussions. Alright then, let's interpret this with good intentions but there is this fact that there are women who started to wear turban after these discussions raised. There are those who use turban to feel belong to somewhere.<sup>78</sup>

He further clarifies that he means with 'the feeling of belonging to somewhere' as being a member of a *cemaat* or religious community<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> "Kars'ta bir türban sorunu var, Kars'ta insanlar çok yoğun bir şekilde örtünüyorlar. Bundaki en büyük etmen üniversitedir. Üniversite gençliğidir. Hem zaten Kars'taki kadınlar başlarını geleneksel olarak örterler, Anadolu'daki pek çok taşra kentinde olduğu gibi. Kars sokaklarındaki yüz kadından ellisi örtülüdür."

<sup>78</sup> "Bunu hiçbir şekilde bir bağnazlık bir gericilik olarak da değerlendirmiyorum. İnsanların tamamıyla kişisel hak ve özgürlüklerle alakalı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Son günlerde biraz daha türban tartışmalarından bağımsız olarak söylüyorum bunu. Peki, onu iyi niyetle değerlendirelim. Tabi, şu da var, bu tartışmalar ortaya çıktıktan sonra türban takanlar da oldu. Türbandan bağımsız olarak kendini bir yere hissetme anlayışıyla kullananlar da var."

<sup>79</sup> In Kars, the word *cemaat* is used to define large religious organizations rather than religious communities. Though it usually refers to the followers of Fethullah Gülen, the word denotes all religious orders active in Kars. There are mainly five religious orders in Kars, which are namely Nurcular, Süleymancılar, Mahmutçular, Menzilciler and Zehracılar. Throughout the thesis, I will use religious community to refer *cemaats* without pointing out a specific one.

Hikmet, the local reporter working for a national news agency, argues that *cemaats* are very affective and the headscarf is intensively used in Kars. In contrast to the common belief, Hikmet states that the organization of political Islam in Kars started in the years when Pamuk was visiting the city. Therefore, he says that if Pamuk integrated what he observed in Kars into his book rather than writing a pure fiction, Snow is a well done work. Hikmet tells that he should know because he was within the circles of religious communities in the past.

Hikmet argues that any high school student in Kars knows that she or he has to be successful in the student selection examination (or ÖSS) because young people in Kars have no choice but having a university degree to survive. Vedat, who works as a teacher in a *dershane*, explains this situation of youth by describing them as those who are “suffering from being born in the cube power of the despair and living a life in an unimportant city of an unimportant country of the world”<sup>80</sup>. Therefore, students have to get high points from the examination and in order to do so, they have to follow private teaching institutions, known as *dershanes*, as almost all university candidates in Turkey do. However *dershanes* bring additional expense to the family and it is better if their children become successful with the less expense. In this respect, the *dershanes* which are owned by the community claim to offer good training for the exam to the cheapest price. Therefore, they are able to attract many students in Kars. Hikmet tells his story as follows:

Lil Dershanesi had recently opened. I had enrolled there. Most of the teachers had been part of the community and they were very successful. They organized high school students in *dershanes* and university students through the student hostels. They were very successful. I am talking about the year 1990. Since I had already known the structure from Erzurum, I avoided involving in. However, I kept being in touch with them in order to get whatever I needed to be successful at the

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<sup>80</sup> “Çaresizliğin üçüncü kuvvetinde doğmaktan; dünyadaki önemsiz bir ülkenin, önemsiz bir şehrinde, önemsiz bir hayat sürmekten muzdarip.”

examination. I was going to their hostels from time to time. There was surely a [political Islamic] organization.<sup>81</sup>

Hikmet tells that his family sent him to Erzurum to get a better education while he was still a high school student. There, he was staying at a *cemaat evi* (the student hostel), in Erzurum. However, Hikmet did not like these obligations and turned back to Kars after a while.

*Cemaat evi* is a place where many students live together and share the responsibilities of the house by paying cheaper rents. Each house has a leader, either an *abla* (sister) or an ağabey (brother), who has advanced knowledge on religious rules and he or she follows students whether they fulfill religious obligations that the *cemaat* defines. Hikmet says that there are 300 community's student houses in Kars<sup>82</sup>. He says that this is not something suddenly occurred in one or two years of time but rather, this is a process in time:

It is not possible for urban people who were grown up in a city with leftist tendencies to accept people with long beards and *şalvars* (baggy trousers) on the streets. Naturally, this requires a serious organizational structure because you have to break the resistance. They started this at that time. However, ordinary people on the streets don't know about it. Who can know? Only people who are interested in [or make research on] it can know.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "O zaman Nil Dersanesi vardı, yeni açılmıştı. Ben oraya kayıt yaptırıp, Nil Dersanesi'ne gelen öğretmenlerin büyük bir kısmının tamamen örgütlerin içinde olduklarını hissettim ve çok da başarılıydılar. Üniversiteye girecek öğrencileri çok iyi örgütlediler, kurdukları yurtlarda öğrencileri çok iyi örgütlediler. Çok da başarılı oldular. 1990 yılından bahsediyorum. Ben tabii o yapıyı Erzurum'dan bildiğim için çok içlerine girmedim. Ama üniversiteyi kazanabilmek için alabileceğim, dershaneden faydalanabilmek için ilişkilerimi sıkı tuttum. Ama bazen evlerine filan gidiyordum. Vardı öyle bir örgütlenme."

<sup>82</sup> Kars'ta 300 Tarikat Evi Var, August, 2, 2008. Electronic document, <http://www.politikars.com/haberdetay/7312/Kars%E2%80%99ta-300-Tarikat-Evi-Var.asp>, accessed August 28, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> "Sol tandanslı bir kentin düşünce ikliminde yetişen kent insanının bir anda şalvarlı uzun sakallı cübbeli gezen insanları kabul etmesi birdenbire olan bir şey değildir. Doğal olarak çok ciddi bir

I understand that there are many student hostels as it has been suggested. Vedat, the literature teacher, says that he knows that the house next to his is used by a religious community. Meliha, an entrepreneur, says that once she had chance to observe what happens in student hostels. Only two people had rented her house at first but then the number of people living in the house increased. She says it is very comfortable for high school students who have to live in the city center alone since their families live in villages of Kars. However, in time, students have to accord to the rules of the house and change their behaviors as well as their clothing style for pragmatic reasons. She gives the case of a female student who was her own daughter's friend:

She was staying at a student hostel of a religious community last year. She said that in the evenings there was praying, so she couldn't focus on her classes enough. Her family put her here; they thought that the community's hostel was a safe place to resign their daughter. She was a friend of my daughter. I went to the school, I talked to teachers and she passed the courses that she actually failed. Then her father wanted her to stay at the community's hostels again but she objected and enrolled to distant learning program. So she comes to Kars on the weekends and stays at my house. It is not something bad to say God's name but studying and praying should be separated. Once I rented my house to a teacher. However, two dozens of young people were coming to the house early in the morning and guess for the purpose of what: for praying. I had to ask them to leave my house.<sup>84</sup>

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örgütlenme gerektirir, çünkü o yapıyı kırmanız lazım. Buna ta o zamanlar başladılar. Fakat sokaktaki insan bunu göremez. Bunu kim görebilir? Bu konuyla ilgilenen insan görebilir.”

<sup>84</sup> Mesele benim evimde bir kız var, o da geçen sene cemaatçilerle kalıyordu. Tam bu akşam ders saatinde abla diyor sürekli ibadete, namaz kılmak, tespih çekmek filan vardı, derslerden kaldı o. Ailesi getirip buraya koymuştu hani köyden geldi diye burada güvenli bir yer var diyorlar, cemaat evi. Benim kızımın arkadaşıydı, derslerden kalmıştı. Okula gittim, çok rica ettim, çocuk kendisini derslere veremedi, böyle bir ortamdır falan filan, derken o kaldığı derslerden geçti. Şimdi yine babası cemaat evine koymak isteyince kız girmemiş, onun için açık öğretime yazılmış, hafta sonları dershaneye geliyor, hafta sonları da benim evimde kalıyor. Tabi ki Allahın adını anmak kötü bir şey değil ama derse ayrılan bir yer var bir de o şeye ayrılan bir yer var. Ben bir öğretmene vermişim o evi, sabahın o beşinde evde yirmi beş tane genç geliyordu eve, neymiş, ibadete başlıyorlar. Ben evimden çıkarmak zorunda kaldım.

One day my friend who owns the foreign language school asked me to give a special course to a student who has to catch the level of the class that he is going to be a part of. This is how I met Selim. He was a student in economics department of Kafkas University. His family lives in Van. Before Kars, Selim lived in big cities like Istanbul and Ankara to work. Meanwhile, “he always had an ambition to study in his heart”<sup>85</sup>. However, the situation back then was not very much feasible for him for a sustainable education. When some people from the religious community that he belongs now offered him assistance for his education, he did not hesitate to accept.

Besides community houses, there are also dormitories run by the *cemmats*. Selim stays at one of the dormitories run by a *cemaat*, which is called *Süleymancılar* and he is responsible from the management of the canteen. This is an important position with many responsibilities. This is why Selim’s schedule is overloaded most of the time. He gets up at 4.00 am. He joins the Morning Prayer and opens the canteen. There are courses that the community obliges and he attends them. These courses, house visits and the canteen takes most of his time. Then he has classes at the university until 10.00 pm. He was attending the English language classes in the weekends. However, he could not continue for a long time because he did not have enough time to study and catch up the level of the others in his class, in spite of his enthusiasm and ambition to learn.

When I asked him to tell me more about the community life, he started his words with complaints. For him, religious communities became less goal-oriented and rules are not strict enough as they used to be: “You know there is something called moderate Islam. So, I call this moderate community”<sup>86</sup>. The main reason behind is the fact that relation between the community and students is based on mutual economic dependency.

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<sup>85</sup> “Hep yüreğimde bir okuma hevesi vardı.”

<sup>86</sup> “İlimli İslam diyorlar ya, bu da ilimli cemaat.”

Aziz, a representative of Refah Partisi (Felicity Party or RP) explains that this system based on ‘deprivation of people’. People help students and feel relieved. Mesut, the research assistant at the university, confirms this argument saying that religious communities provide the chance to survive in the city center to those migrant Kurdish people who come from villages. He says that for these migrant people, it is not possible to find a job at the state offices if they do not have education. Besides, Mesut says that religious communities operate as alternatives to the armed Kurdish movement for Kurdish youth, who do not see a future in other bodies. Thus, religious communities work hard to attract students at the beginning of the academic years.

Selim says that the aim of the community that he belongs to is to raise a pure generation, who will work for their nation and bring the golden age of Ottoman Empire again to the earth. This turns the religious community into an organization with a defined political project. Correspondingly, Aziz claims that the religious communities have representatives at each city of Turkey. This organized structure, he says, makes these representatives even more powerful than local authorities including the governor and the chief of police.

Since headscarf issue is discussed a lot with the topic of religious communities, I asked Selim how women in the community develop tactics against the headscarf ban in the universities. His reply sets the seal on the problem:

There are no female students. We don’t take this risk. The environment of the university is not suitable for women. The community is not against women studying at universities, neither the ban is an insurmountable issue. However, university is a morally corrupt place and this is why we don’t take this risk.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “Kız öğrenci yok. O riski almıyoruz. Üniversite ortamı kadınlar için uygun değil. Üniversite okumasına karşı değil kadınların. Başörtüsü de sorun değil. Ama üniversitede ahlak sorunu olduğu için kız öğrencilerle bu riski almıyor cemaat.”

I ask whether the same risk threatens male students also or not. He says that there are rotten men in the community as there are rotten tomatoes in every crate and the community is based on the thriving tomatoes. He explains the difference between men and women by claiming that women's ideas can be easily disrupted. For example, he says, women were not smoking outside when he came to Kars years ago, however they started to smoke on the streets just like men do. Contrary to the narrations that I listened from Karsians about the public consumption culture, he thinks that this is not normal for Kars. Here, Selim justifies his argument with an example that contains additional messages. He thinks that women smoking outside will become something normal in time and he is worried that people will not find it odd soon. For him, minor changes like this example will damage the moral values and lead to a catastrophe for the public life of the city.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

In the context in 2000s, Turkey was dealing with Islamist militant movements and headscarf question. Accordingly, the discussion developed after *Snow* was based on the conflict between secular and Islamists parts of society. Although Islamic militant movement sublimates when it comes to 2010, the headscarf is still a problem that confuses public opinion in Turkey which continues to experience the democratization process. Accordingly, in Kars, protests against the book were raised mostly from this issue that Pamuk provokes. Even though the political agenda in Turkey changed and the secularist anxieties relatively sublimated in time, Karsians still remind and prolong the public discussion that the book created around the Islamic revival in the city.

People that I talked define Kars as a modern city. While some of them base their argument on the leftist culture of the city or the diversity in cultural structure, they all share that Kars had never been a place where Islam became the dominant public discourse. Furthermore, Islam was not used as a cultural code in the past either. It is argued that it was something outside of the everyday lives of ordinary

Karsians. Specifically, Erzurum constitutes to be the negative other as it is defined as *sağcı* (supporter of right wing) and *dinci* (religious) while Kars is defined as *solcu* (leftist) and secular. Calling Baumann's grammars, it can be said that Kars is located at the West and Erzurum is at the East within this orientalist formulation of self. Another important point to underline here is that people usually refer to dress codes of women while talking describing secular way of life. 'Miniskirts' and 'balls' are words to define past, while headscarf describes the alien culture to the essence of Kars. In this way, women are objectified and their bodies become political spaces.

On the other hand, what Kars experiences today is that, Islam started to be visible and therefore started to interfere into public life. This happened mainly after the university was established because economically beneficial religious communities followed them through their institutions, like student hostels. To conclude, it is openly observed that the alliance of the doctrines of *cemaats* with the existing perception on gender in Kars, whether secular or not, goes hand in hand to suppress women.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

*“My book is a novel dealing with current events. More than ten years have passed since the time it is set in, and the country has changed drastically. Leaving aside the reactions to my comments on our past for a moment, one must say that we are now living in a different Turkey.”*  
(Pamuk, April 14, 2005, *Die Zeit*)

The idea of making ethnography with the inspiration of a novel sounded very weird for many people who asked me what I am studying throughout this thesis project. I believe that it is not only because of the fact that anthropology is not commonly known in Turkey but also because a literary text seems to offer very few for anthropological curiosity. What I have done, however, was following traces that a novel left behind, in the city Kars, where its sparking story raised upon. Even though many people asserted that the discussion on *Snow* sublimed in time, political agenda changed very much and the issues that the book discussed, like raising Islam, are not very significant to think on anymore; some others expressed that they can follow what Pamuk wrote in his book in the news every day. The point is that the discussions on the book that waved in the city were not forgotten and the book was still being discussed with minor modifications in previous remarks. Throughout the thesis, I tried to present these discussions with their references to politics of ethnicity, nationalism and secularism.

In the first place, ethnic structure of the city is an important issue in Kars for self-identifications and self-representations. People in Kars describe themselves in accordance with their ethnic belonging and define their group's distinctiveness by making comparisons with other groups. However, their ascriptions are situational.

As I tried to indicate, Kurdish ethnic identity might be a stigma in times or it might remind of the Kurdish nation movement, which is perceived as separatist. However, in everyday relations Karsians establish ethnically mixed alliances and they institutionalize it.

The category of *Yerli* tells us that ethnic categories are constructed when there is a need to make differentiation. In the case of *Yerlis*, we understand that people who were already living in Kars ascribed a collectivity to themselves when migrants or émigrés come at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I included different narratives about the historical formation of the ethnic group in order to illustrate that how different perceptions of the past might be in accordance with the interests and positions of individuals who belong to the same ethnic group. However, the category of *Yerli*, as well as other groups living in Kars, needs to be investigated further than I could do in my research. I could not find any source of oral history realized in Kars concerning migration. I believe such a study is required to have a better comprehension of past and diverse constructions of history by different actors living in the area.

I also tried to look at ethnicity with its horizontal and vertical aspects. Elections were still a hot debate in Kars when I was conducting my fieldwork. Accordingly, I compared two ethnic groups in the case of elections. I highlighted class differences within Kurds and religious differences of Azeris within other ethnic groups. Accordingly, I showed how different belongings work together as they either reinforce or scatter ethnic belonging.

Secondly, in order to discuss nationalism in Kars, I precisely brought two hot topics of the day, which were also brought up by *Snow*. Similar to governmental level statement that I quoted, the Kurdish and the Armenian question were framed in an intermingled way by the interviewees of this research as I introduced my questions with referring to Pamuk's controversial public speeches. On the other hand, they denote the threats against the nation from inside and outside of the country. The distinctiveness of the Kurdish question is that Karsians deal with the

so called 'Kurdish reality' because of the significant amount of the Kurdish population. Those who belong to other groups have direct contacts with Kurds and this forces them to make a differentiation between Kurds whom they know and Kurds who are supporters of Kurdish national movement. However, it is not always clear where the boundary is drawn.

For the Armenian question, a different dynamic operates because of the border. The closure of the border is perceived differently by different political positions which varies from some Kemalist nationalists who perceive Armenia as a threat and totally against to the normalization of the relationships between Armenia and Turkey to the social democrats who do not necessarily have a direct gain from the reopening of the border; but the main divide is between business world who have economic concerns and prospects and the radical Turkish nationalists which is composed of mainly Azeris, who prioritize the settlement of land dispute on Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and the ally country Azerbaijan. I used the case of the project of Monument of Humanity provides the possibility to map these differences.

Although the Armenian-Turkish border gains attention from disciplines of economy and international relations and even from military researches, there is not any study on it, except for the one that Zehra Ayman realized in a village of Digor, Kars (2006). I think that a comparative ethnographic study in neighbor cities Gyumri and Kars that looks at how people of this borderland from both sides perceive and react to the dramatic international changes occurring around them would be illuminating to understand the ways they interpret the past, the present and the future. Such a study would also contribute to our knowledge about embolism of transnationality in the case of a closed border phenomena.

Thirdly and finally, I showed how secularism is perceived and how public life is built in accordance with what I call the 'European gaze' by departing from Keyder's arguments (2006: 73). I discussed the ways in which Karsians locate Islam in their social space and therefore limit it. I also provided examples where

acknowledgement of lifestyles in accordance with different interpretations of Islam, which Karsians find strange but which exist in the city one way or another. The conflict between those who acknowledge and those who reject these lifestyles echo two distinct perspectives in Turkey that are heard: the former holds social democratic and liberal ideas and the latter defends Kemalist ideals. None of these views are in power in Turkey but pro-Islamic neo-nationalist view is. In this sense, my analysis pictures the conflict between two political positions which are both in opposition today. What is more is, as I asserted before in the methodology chapter, this study of mine needs to be complemented by another where women's voice heard more than men's.

The ethnic boundaries are maintained and transcended through communication mostly, under the circumstances of an urban setting. National boundaries get the shape of national frontiers and become visible in the case of Kars. Economic interests interplay with historical construction of the nation. The boundary between public and private realms is drawn on the female body through the resistances of Islam and secularism against each other. All and all, this ethnographic study illustrates that ethnic, national and religious identifications are multiple and contextually shaped, besides they are cut across by class and gender differences. On the other hand, people negotiate the boundaries constructed between the self and the other tactically on the basis of their changing interests. In any case, as this study shows, they use or consume the cultural products to define and redefine their political views. Therefore, the way different participants of this study reflect upon Pamuk's novel *Snow* shows that people produce meanings in accordance with the particular positions that they hold and the power relations that surround them.

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