THE INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN MARDIN

RELIGION, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Submitted by

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

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GLOSSARY

Agha: Chief, master, lord

Bajari: Urban

Eşraf: Wealthy and prominent families

Fılleh: Christian

Gundi: Rural

Jamaat: Religious group or community

Kirve: The person who bears the expenses of circumcision

Nasrani: Christian

Madrasa: School

Mardinite: In general, the residents of Mardin. In particular, a person who was born in the city centre of Mardin

Melfono: Syriac teacher

Melle: A local imam

Midyatite: A person who was born in the district of Midyat

Sayyid: A descendant of Prophet Muhammed

Sheikh: A honorific term that literally means ‘elder’

ABSTRACT

Mardin is a city situated on the Turkish border with Syria and populated by diverse ethno-religious groups. Its complex history and groups are different from other cities of Turkey. Its cultural, social and linguistic plurality has fascinated academics and politicians who search for the examples of multiculturality in Turkey. This is related to the recent national and international developments that resulted in the re-discovery and valorisation of Mardin. This valorisation has been supported by plenty of activities that reflect the new publicity of the 'multiculturalism' of the city to the world.

The Turkish State has not had a multicultural policy. However, Mardin's structure has been a device to show the multiculturality of Turkey. This has created a dominant discourse on the cultural and historical aspects of Mardin. Considering recent developments, this doctoral dissertation analyses the intercultural engagement of diverse components in Mardin. In doing so, the research focuses on the interaction of four ethno-religious groups: Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, Syriac Christians and Ezidis. It adopts the notion of engagement as connections between different cultural parts in a society. The notion refers to areas that are interlaced in social and cultural life, and it is used to indicate the relations of ethnic and cultural groups with others considering the links between local and national context as well as their interaction with transnational networks. The aim of this qualitative study – through participant observation, in-depth interviews and textual analysis of local and national archives – is to discuss the role religion plays in constructing and maintaining intercultural engagement in the case of Mardin.

Located within the interpretive paradigm, this study takes its theoretical impetus from the stream of social sciences known as symbolic interactionism. Based on the data collected with

two fieldwork trips in 2009 and 2011, this thesis discusses its findings in chapters 4 and 5, which consider the local context and analyse the role of religion in the engagement and disengagement of diverse components in Mardin. It furthers its analysis in Chapter 6, which deals with issues related to identity politics, diaspora and collective memory in order to illustrate the rapid transformation of the cultural fabric of Mardin in the Republican period. The findings of this study reveal that religion has a significant place in establishing and maintaining intercultural engagement in Mardin. It sometimes is a tool to distinguish ‘us from ‘them’, and other times it helps people to overcome the tensions of living together. Finally, this research indicates a threat to this unique aspect of Mardin’s society: rising ethnic nationalism can diminish the positive effects of religion on establishing social cohesion in a city.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity is a desirable fact of today's world. Multi-ethnic and cultural contexts have attracted a great deal of attention from policymakers, scholars and activists to discover how different identities live together. Urban settings with such diversity have become a social research subject in recent years. One of these urban settings is the city of Mardin in the south-east of Turkey which has, since 2005, gained national and international prominence in relation to some recent developments.

In 2005, the Prime Minister of Spain offered Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Turkish Prime Minister, to co-sponsor the Alliance of Civilisations (AoC), an initiative raised at the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). This alliance aims to encourage international action against extremism and foster international, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. In doing so, it places a particular emphasis on easing tensions between Western and Muslim countries. The Alliance has been accepted as a primary international enterprise for intercultural dialogue.

The Turkish Government as a co-sponsor of the Alliance promoted an international conference in Antakya (Hatay, Antioch) in 2005, which is a border city in south-east Turkey. Inspired by the thesis, clash of civilisations, of Samuel Huntington (2008), it was named as 'International Meeting of Civilisations – under the sun of Antioch'. This conference aimed to show the world an example of alliance of civilisations within the national context of Turkey. In choosing Antioch, previous attempts of its local government to represent the harmonious co-existence of Muslim and Christian groups in the city seem to have been decisive. A former mayor of Antioch, İris Şentürk, met Pope Jean-Paul II in 2002 in the Vatican to present the multicultural structure of her city (Dogruel, 2010). As a result of this meeting, Antioch became an internationally visible example of multi-ethnic and religious diversity in Turkey on

the eve of negotiations regarding the membership of Turkey in the European Union (EU) and the enterprises of AoC. Before the co-sponsorship for the AoC of the Turkish Government, the *Adalet ve Kalkınma* (Justice and Development) Party attempted to accelerate the process of Turkey becoming a member of the European Union as soon as it became the government party in 2002. These external relations of the government have also resulted in national and international prominence for both Antioch and Mardin.

The attempts of the local government of Mardin to represent the city to the world started before those of Antioch's local government. The first attempt of its governorship was related to the architectural landscape of Mardin. As a result, the city was included into UNESCO's 'World Heritage List' as a candidate, and classified as a protected zone in 2000. Since then, Mardin has been advertised as a city which has the best preserved historical architecture in the world, together with Venice and Jerusalem. Even though its cultural and religious diversity were noticed later than that of Antioch by the Turkish Government, Mardin's visibility in the promotion and advertisement of Turkey's multiculturality has eventually overtaken that of Antioch. Mardin has become a representative city of how different religious faiths and identities have peacefully lived in the national context of Turkey. The international linkages of both national and local governments have triggered this reputation for Mardin via the advertisement of the harmonious co-existence of Turkish citizens from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In representing Mardin as an example of tolerance, national and transnational political developments should be regarded, for there are recent changes in the political stance of Turkey, not only in term of its external relations but its national issues. These changes in its policy seem to have also fostered a dominant discourse on the history and culture of Mardin.

The discursive multiculturalism of the Turkish State

The Turkish State has not accepted multiculturalism as a state policy. However, it has embraced a discourse related to the multiculturality of its society in regard to globally celebrating differences between people and cultures, and attempting to be a member of the EU. This discourse, on the one hand, highlights the historical background of Anatolia which houses people from various religious and ethnic communities who have lived together for centuries. On the other hand, it is a set of complex approaches closely associated with the governments' political actions rather than based upon a specific multicultural policy. The main argument of this discursive multiculturalism is based on a long-standing co-existence of different ethnic and religious identities in Anatolia. This multiculturality is certainly not a result of rapid social changes or recent migration phenomena as happened in Western contexts, but it is a natural consequence of Turkey's geography and its social history, a point that must be considered in order to understand the multicultural experience of Turkey.

In spite of the fact that the Turkish State has not adopted a specific policy, multiculturalism has been on the circulation of academic milieu in Turkey as a discourse or an expression of social experience. As a policy, a multiculturalist approach is the result of a set of experiences and conflicts which are closely related to the contexts of Western societies. Despite its cultural, social and linguistic plurality, the multicultural experience of Turkey has not been a focus of Turkish scholars, tough improved relations between the EU and Turkey have prompted the consideration of the cultural diversity of Turkey. This has resulted in the re-discovery and valorisation of its diverse contexts such as in Mardin. The re-discovery of this multiculturalism has been supported by numerous national events which also reflect the new publicity in Turkey.

However, Mardin has only become well known nationally and internationally since it became highly publicised in the media. The local official administrations of Mardin have taken many steps to represent their city since 2000. Thus, Mardin has been very visible in the media as the picture/proof of multiculturality of Turkey and the pluralistic openness the Turkish State for ethnic and religious minorities. In relation to its representative position, the culture of Mardin has been re-identified by the dominant discourse of the State.

The dominant discourse of the State on the culture of Mardin

Although having lost a lot of its historical importance and multiculturality, Mardin continues to be as a diverse local context with its inhabitants including different ethnic and religious groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Syriacs, Armenians, Chechens and Ezidis bounded to religious affiliations under the umbrella of Islam, Christianity and Ezidism. When various cultural, political and ethnic affiliations and identifications that cross-cut the boundaries of these groups are taken into account, the social setting of Mardin can be identified as a multi-layered society. However, the pluralistic cultural experience of the city has reached the present day with discontinuities and unsteadiness since the society of Mardin has undergone many transformations in the national context of Turkey. To understand how much the visual and symbolic expression of discursive multiculturalism in Turkey is grounded in its societal relations and everyday practices requires seeing the hidden aspects of the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinite groups which do not take place in the advertisement of the city.

What is accepted as the authentic culture of Mardin, however, needs to be analysed from a number of perspectives. First, it has been under the rule of a Unitarian nation-state and being exposed for 90 years to the ethnic homogenising processes of the Turkish State. On account of national and local nationalist tendencies, the social and cultural patterns of Turkish society have been changed. Therefore, the social setting of the city does not overlap with the

dominant discourse of the State and the majority's perception of ideal society. One research question of this thesis is, therefore, whether the intercultural engagement of diverse components in the cultural fabric of Mardin has been protected without being exposed to discontinuities. To find an answer to this question, the thesis attempts to analyse the relations of four ethno-religious communities; Muslim Arab, Muslim Kurd, Syriac Christian and Ezidi, in Mardin through the findings of data collected during two fieldwork trips.

As a result of previously articulated developments, Mardin has come to be seen as a representative model for cultural and religious diversity within the national context of Turkey. It is presented as a small model of Turkey itself in terms of ethno-cultural plurality. Importantly, the city has been advertised as *hoşgörü kenti*, the city of tolerance, since its historical experience of diversity has been seen as having provided the foundation for tolerance amongst different religious faiths, civilisations and languages.

The Ministry of Culture of the Turkish Republic and the governorship of Mardin have publicised the city to outsiders, using advertising methods including pamphlets and introductory films (Taşer, 2007; Varlı, 2008). These advertisements of Mardin are revealing and celebratory, but are in many ways misleading since they highlight the positive aspects of Mardin's history and culture. As a result of official advertisements, a 'utopian' picture of Mardin's local context has been more visible than the reality of its social construction.

In the presentation of Mardin as a city of tolerance, many slogans have been articulated, mainly focusing on the cultural and historical richness of Mardin and fostering a misunderstanding about the reality of the local fabric of the city.

> Mardin, the city has the culture of tolerance
> Mardin, the poem of stone and belief
> Mardin, the city where civilisations have blended/met
> Mardin, the city where religions and languages have met

The district of Midyat which has some features similar to those of the capital of Mardin has also been advertised using similar slogans.

> Midyat, the city where religions, languages and cultures have blended/met
> Midyat, the city where civilisations have blended

The State's dominant discourse on the history and culture of Mardin and its district, Midyat, is selective especially in terms of sensitive political matters. This can be seen in its highlighting of the Syriac community and ignoring other minority religious groups such as Armenians and Ezidis, or majority Muslim groups such as Kurds and Arabs. In the prominent place of the Syriac community in publicising the city, the Syriac Mardinites in diaspora have been effective because of their political connections in Europe which have been prompted since the mid-90s. One of the results of their political activity is the Return Project which is an official call for the Syriac Christians who immigrated to other countries after the 1960s to come back to their 'homelands'. Some diaspora Syriacs have responded to this call and lately re-settled in the district of Midyat.

In contrast the diaspora Syriacs, the Ezidis of Mardin who have immigrated to European countries have not been on the agenda of the State. However, the Ezidis have very recently stated that they also want to return to their 'homelands'. Considering the Ezidis' recent demand, the importance of the Syriacs' return to the Turkish State becomes clearer since there is not a special call for the Ezidis in diaspora, even if this religious group's return would be a prospective step in articulating cultural and religious diversity in Turkey. The Mardinite

Ezidis have suffered from being politically and religiously an unrecognised religious group, but the main reason for them leaving for European countries, especially in the 1990s, was security problems in the south-east of Turkey. Their request to return to their 'homelands', however, indicates that the recent political stance of the Turkish State has encouraged the Ezidis in diaspora to reactivate their relations with the region.

This selective dominant discourse on Mardin has been re-produced through some cultural and academic activities held in Mardin with the financial support of the State and the EU. The first prominent one was the restoration project of the governorship of Mardin. On the scope of this project, new constructions attached to the historical stone houses in the capital of Mardin have been demolished to retrieve the original landscape of the old settlement. Thus, the project tends to create an 'open museum' which enables domestic and foreign tourists to detect the originality of Mardin's old stone houses and neighbourhoods. The second important development in the city was the establishment of Mardin Artuklu University which generates a set of social changes in the local context. A few historical buildings like *madrasas* in the capital have been attached to the university as education buildings. In addition, the university has organised both national and international academic conferences in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat. With the financial support of EU commissions, some other academic and cultural projects have been accomplished to promote the intercultural interaction of Mardinites and to protect the cultural heritage of the city. For example, the Ottoman records on Mardin were translated into Turkish in the scope of the project of Mardin Ihtisas Library. The university has seemingly acted as an agency in endorsing the reputation of the city through promoting academic, social and cultural events.

Another significant feature of the dominant discourse is that it tends to reify the culture of Mardin by stressing only some aspects of its material culture. First of all, it emphasises the

architectural uniqueness of the city, but ignores the recent changes in its landscape in the capital of Mardin. In advertising the city to outsiders, it uses some historical buildings of Muslims and Christians such as the *madrasa* of Kasımiyye and the monastery of Dayr'ul Zaferan as the examples of religious tolerance between the Mardinites. In doing so, the dominant discourse on Mardin's culture fails to emphasise the historical existence and contribution of other ethno-religious communities of Mardin to its history and culture. As a result, the Shamsie, Ezidi and Armenian inhabitants are merely taken into account as symbols of living together.

Finally, the dominant form of Mardin's representation seems to have regarded the history of the region as continuous since it became the capital of the Artukids, a Turkish dynasty, and given special attention to its social construction under the rule of the Ottoman State; as a result, it has loaded a rather more harmonious meaning than Mardin actually has today. In doing so, the dominant discourse has focused on the previous cosmopolitan experience of the city, rather than its social conflicts and transformations which occurred under the rule of the Turkish Republic. Yet, many Mardinites seem to have adopted this dominant discourse on their city, affirming its 'mediatic and poetic vision' (Oktem, 2005), and have produced a 'demotic discourse'[1] (Baumann, 1996).

The demotic discourse of Mardinites

The Mardinites have articulated the dominant discourse of the State and the local administrations in presenting their cities to outsiders as if this was their own understandings about their city and its socio-cultural relations. Economic reasons seem to be deciding factor for taking this position because the appearance of Mardin in the media has resulted in some

[1] To analyse the context of Southall, which is a town of London, Baumann (1996) offers an alternative discourse to the dominant discourse on the congruence between culture and community, and names it as 'demotic' (of the people). This research adopts this concept to identify the discourses of the Mardinites.

benefits for its residents. Both religious and cultural tourism have contributed to the revival of trade life in the city. Thus, the residents of Mardin have enjoyed this economic recovery through selling their local products such as jewellery, handmade soaps and clothes, and opening new businesses such as cafes and hotels in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat which serve both domestic and foreign tourists. Because of a growing interest by tourists in *telkari* jewellery as souvenirs of Mardin, some Muslim Mardinites have joined the Syriac Christians and become the owners of silversmith shops as well. In addition to the economic recovery, the residents of Mardin are very proud that their city has gradually gained a world-wide reputation. Therefore, there is a positive image of the city which residents are keen to protect as it is the basis of their economic wealth and their city's reputation. Looked at from this perspective, it is understandable why the Mardinites have adopted some features of the dominant discourse about their city, avoiding to give any negative impression about their city and social relations to outsiders.

The Mardinites have, thus, developed a demotic discourse which implements the dominant form of Mardin's presentation to outsiders. They keenly re-produce this discourse expressing the unique aspects of cultural and religious diversity in their city, and the peaceful co-existence of 'differences' in Mardin. They frequently refer to the material culture of the city such as *madrasas* and monasteries, which are also pictured in the advertisements of the city. In the accounts of Mardinites, cultural tolerance between the diverse groups of Mardin is considered to be social glue, and is illustrated by the Syriac existence in the local context. Consequently, the residents of Mardin have contributed to the reification of Mardin's culture, expressing their tangible culture and being selective as the dominant discourse of the State does.

The dominant discourse on the culture of Mardin, in turn, has been confronted with some criticism arising from the locality, which reflects different political and cultural views. Criticisms expressed by some Mardinites are related to the functional and selective usage of the historical processes in order to promote the positive image of the city whereby the periodic events and groups that are not in accord with the dominant discourse are being left outside of history. One example of covering up the tensions occur in the local context of Mardin is to highlight the Syriac culture and heritage in the city. Some Muslim residents indicated they are troubled by the attendance of Syriac Christians at every event held in the city and their representation that implies 'they are the only ancient community of Mardin'. Besides, some former Armenian residents have objected to publicising the Syriacs as the only Christian residents who contribute to the reproduction of Mardin's culture. As it is seen, the dominant discourse on Mardin has also created tensions between the Mardinite groups, and it has led some residents to be more critical about the misapprehension of their culture.

The demotic discourse of the Mardinites, therefore, has a concealed aspect which becomes visible when their collective memory is reawakened by indicating the past incidents happened in the local context. In contrast to their desire to have a share from the market profit, the collective memory of the residents from different ethno-religious backgrounds rejects the dominant from of presentation on Mardin's culture and history. While many Mardinites in the capital of Mardin prefer to be silent about controversial social and political issues, the residents, mostly from the hinterland, seem more eager to criticise the poetic and mediatic images of their social relations and culture. It is very apparent amongst the Mardinites that these images do not satisfy them since they refer to a 'utopian' city, and deny that the residents of Mardin from different communities have encountered difficulties in terms of the pressure of living with others. Indeed, some believe that the dominant discourse of the State and the local government of Mardin mislead outsiders by fostering the misapprehension that

the Mardinite groups have not had any problems living in a multi-ethnic and religious context. Beneath the surface of their embraced demotic discourse, the residents of Mardin have disapprovals, hesitations and suspicions about their city's presentation.

Despite the dominant and demotic discourses in understanding Mardin's culture, Mardin has experienced a *sui generis* multiculturality in its local context. Having a multicultural society, Mardin has had a locally embedded experience of diversity regardless the non-existence of multiculturalism as a state policy in Turkey. Avoiding serious tensions, the Mardinite groups from different religions, cultures, languages and ethnic structures have shared the local context of the city for a long period. As a result of this long term co-existence, not only the multi-ethnic, multi-religious but also the multifaceted political and cultural identities of groups and individuals permits clear expressions in public life. The local context of Mardin is so resistant to erosion by new, more modern principles of organisation that they still remain active and have very visible consequences.

Although the dominant discourse of the State has identified the social and cultural heritage of Mardin as the culture of tolerance, it can be named as the culture of *tahammül*[2] which is derived from both the results of interviews and participant observation. For many Mardinites, the term tolerance is not a demanding fact since it refers to one who is powerful tolerating the other. As an alternative, as some Mardinites stated, the term *tahammül*, which comes from Arabic, to explain the interaction of groups seems to be more appropriate for identifying the intercultural engagement in Mardin. Apparently, the meaning of this term is more than that of

[2] The term *tahammül* in Turkish has some negative implications that are similar to those of the term tolerance. However, it is originally an Arabic term that gains different meanings with different patterns. In the pattern *tefaul*, the term *tahammül* indicates mutuality. This means not only majority groups but also minority groups are involved in the process, appreciating the difficulties of living together with other ethno-religious groups and accepting the entities of others. Considering that Arabic has been the primary local language in the capital of Mardin, it is understood that the Mardinites use this term in the pattern *tefaul*, which seems more appropriate to identify their interaction. This is supported by the fact there is no exclusion of others in the minds of the residents. They see each other as inseparable parts of Mardin society.

tolerance because it acknowledges a compromise in mutual understanding and acceptance of the existence of the other, even if it is hard to put up with it. Hence, the term *tahammül* enables to realise that the diverse religious groups of Mardin have fulfilled a commitment to live with other religious faiths, enduring the tensions created in this diverse context.

The argument of the research

By considering the dominant and demotic discourses on the culture of Mardin, this research aims to analyse the role of religion in the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites. The religious multiplicity of Mardin has been expressed in its mediatic and politic image in addition to its cultural diversity. Nevertheless, the fact of religion in the cultural interaction of the Mardinites has not been considered as significant political, cultural and economic factors. The secularist tendencies of current studies clearly promote this lack of interest in religion in addition to ethnic and politic discussions in the national context of Turkey which do not emphasise the importance of religion in intercultural relations.

However, religion as a social fact has had a significant impact upon the culture of Mardin since it became a settlement. Therefore, the role of religion in the engagement and disengagement of diverse components in the cultural fabric of the city needs to be investigated. The purposes of this thesis, then, are:

- To identify the dominant discourse on the culture of Mardin and analyse the demotic discourse of the Mardinites

- To examine the socio-cultural relations of the residents of Mardin to detect the significance of religion in promoting intercultural engagement and social cohesion in the city

- To analyse the position of religion in re-constructing the relations between the Mardinites in the city and diaspora

- To detect the enduring effects of both national and transnational developments on the local context of Mardin

Drawing upon recent discussions on diversity and studies on Mardin, this thesis attempts to analyse the context of Mardin. The main argument of the thesis is that religion has contributed to the maintenance of socio-cultural interaction in Mardin either through established ceremonies, rituals or cultural prejudices and religious boundaries. Therefore, religion has a double function in the case of Mardin, which consists of various structures that are related to national and transnational structures. In observing these cultural structures and finding the dynamics of social cohesion in the cultural fabric in Mardin, the argument of this research is supported by the findings of two fieldwork trips conducted in 2009 and 2011. Consequently, the thesis attempts to analyse the fact of religion in the engagement and disengagement of diverse components in the local context of Mardin, considering the relationship between the local, national, and the transnational structures.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis is composed of seven chapters. This introductory chapter has dealt with how the multiculturality of Mardin has become a representative example for the diverse structure of Turkey, identifying the dominant and demotic discourses on the culture of Mardin which emerge in relation to the discursive multiculturalism of the Turkish State. Chapter 1 gives background information to the research. At first, it draws a picture of Mardin's context through considering its significant historical stages and social matters. The second section of Chapter 1 provides some basic information about the ethno-religious groups of Mardin who

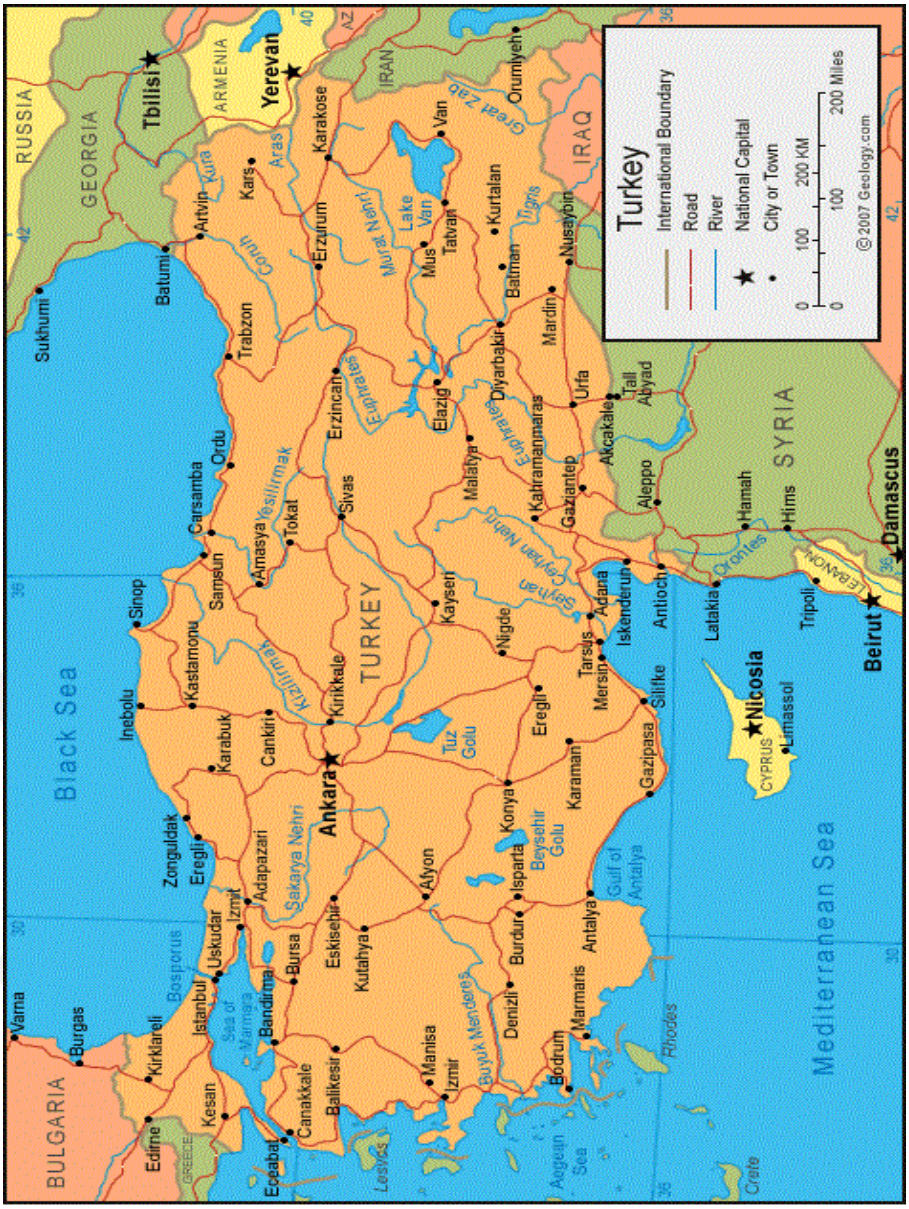
are the subject of this research. Chapter 2 firstly discusses recent theoretical considerations such as multiculturalism, interculturalism, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism that deal with diversity and its consequences. Later, the chapter identify the gap related to the role of religion within the literature on Mardin. Chapter 3 aims to describe the design of the research, highlighting its theoretical position and framework. It also expresses how participants were selected, and which methods were applied for the collection of data during fieldwork.

Considering the demotic discourse of the Mardinites, Chapter 4 analyses the role of religion in the intercultural engagement of diverse components in the cultural fabric of Mardin. After mapping the social construction of Mardin's capital, the cultural interaction of the former residents of Mardin is discussed in order to indicate the social transformation and change that has occurred in the city over a few decades. Later, the chapter discusses the findings of fieldwork considering the demotic discourse of the Mardinites. Since the notion of intercultural engagement indicates more than social interaction, the chapter illustrates some other aspects of the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites.

Chapter 5 furthers the investigation of the hidden aspect of the demotic discourse of the Mardinites, analysing the disengagement of diverse components in the context of Mardin. In doing so, it focuses on the cultural prejudices of the residents which also reveal the effects of religious understandings on the interaction of diverse religious groups. The chapter finally reflects on the approaches of each group toward inter-religious marriage which establishes a very strict boundary between the ethno-religious groups in Mardin.

In addition to local matters, some other factors have transformed the social setting of Mardin. Chapter 6, thus, analyses some national and transnational effects on the socio-cultural relations of diverse groups in the city, focusing on identity politics, diaspora and collective

memory. In the light of the findings, Chapter 7 summarises the effects of the dominant discourse of the State and the local government on the culture of Mardin. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings about the role of religion in the intercultural engagement of diverse components in Mardin. Finally, some deliberations on discontinuities in the socio-cultural life of Mardin are raised to indicate that the emphasis on ethnicity in the case of Mardin may lead to social distance between the Mardinite groups in the near future.



Map 1: Turkey. Retrieved 10 May 2013, from www.mapturkey.org

CHAPTER 1

MAPPING THE CONTEXT OF MARDIN
HISTORY, SOCIAL FORMATION AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Mardin is looking for its future in its past.
The governorship of Mardin

1.1 Introduction

On the Silk Road, the city of Mardin had been a centre for trade, culture and education until the early twentieth century when it witnessed a rapid transformation in its local context. In the Ottoman period, the society of Mardin had its own balance and its locality was prominent. In this period, social change in Mardin was steady and it was, therefore, easy to maintain the social and political balance between diverse structures. In contrast, the religious and cultural diversity of Mardin became the subject of rapid changes for several social, political and economic reasons under the rule of the Turkish Republic after the 1920s. In the process of creating a new nation, the multicultural structure of Mardin was deeply affected as the new Turkish State was born in 1923.

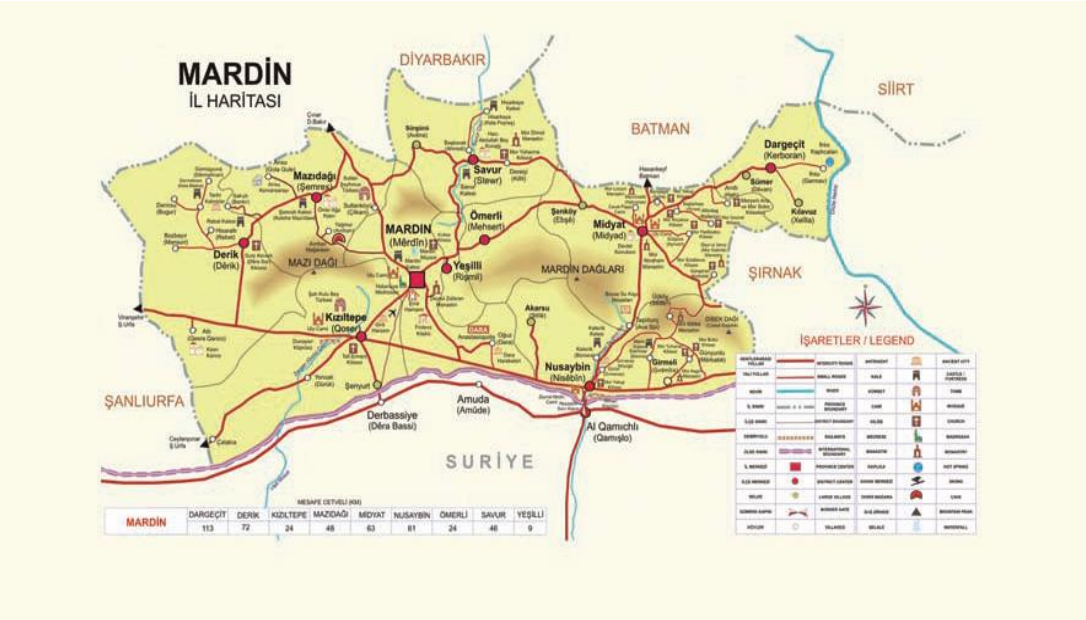
Ignoring its rapid transformation in the national context, the dominant discourse on the city of Mardin introduces a misunderstanding about its history and culture. A key element of the dominant discourse rests on the architectural uniqueness of the city and its material culture. As it highlights, Mardin occupies the first place in the group of cities in Turkey that best protect its architectural structure. The city's architecture, which is decorated with locally sourced soft stone, reflects the heritage of its history in mosques, churches, monasteries, caravanserais and houses. This impressive landscape was established by Armenians, Arabs,

Turkmens, Kurds, Syriac/Assyrians and members of different faiths like Muslims, Christians, Jews, the Shames and the Ezidis. In contrast to its cultural heritage, the social setting of Mardin has been progressively altered by a set of external factors, as will be discussed in the following sections.

This chapter provides background information about the city and its four ethno-religious groups who are the focus of this thesis. In doing so, it indicates some significant historical stages of Mardin's development. It is important to understand the historical basis of today's ethno-religious, cultural and political diversity conditions in the city of Mardin. After expressing some historical stages of Mardin, the chapter addresses changes in the positioning of religion in social life using the examples of the ban of *madrasa* education and the roles of sheikhs. Second, the relation of the Ottoman State's management of diversity through its societal millet system to today's experience of diversity is discussed within the context of Turkey in general and Mardin in particular. The chapter also argues that the mobility of Mardin's diverse population has changed the demographics of the city, which has had a considerable impact on the interaction of the Mardinite groups. Then, the distinction between urban (*bajari*) and rural (*gundi*) are discussed in reference to the social classification of the four-ethno religious groups in Mardin. Finally, it analyses the stages of social trauma that takes place in the collective memory of the residents of Mardin. This section is followed by information about Muslim Arab, Muslim Kurd, Syriac Christian and the Ezidi communities whose members participated in this research.

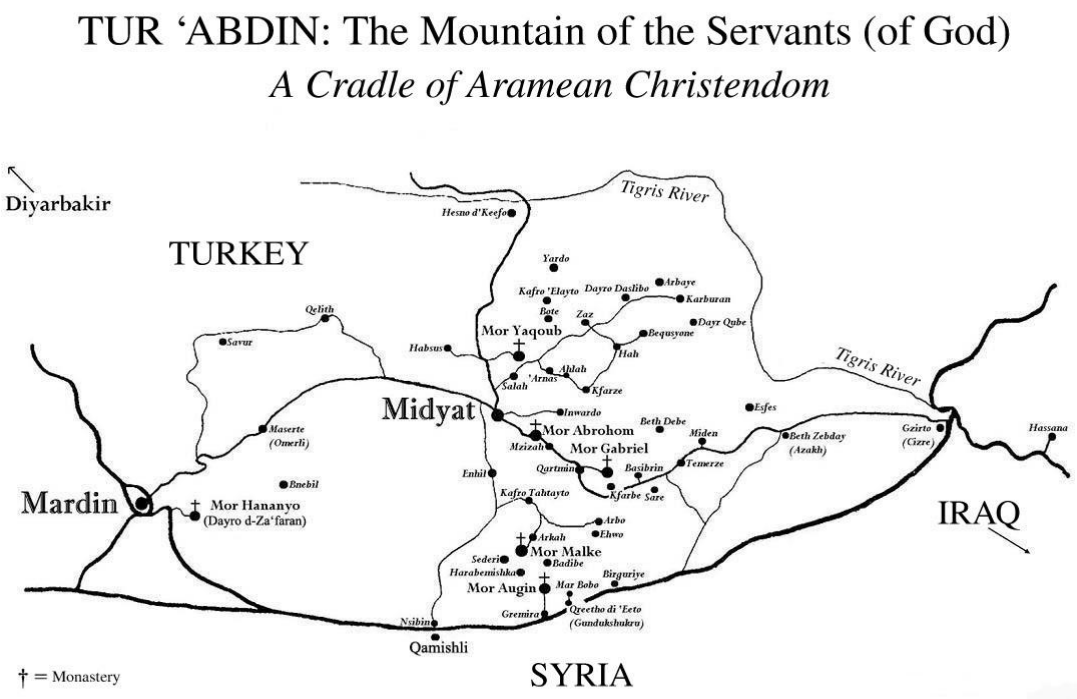
1.2 Mardin as a local context within Turkey

The city of Mardin, one of the oldest settlements of north Mesopotamia, is located in the south-east of Turkey (see Map 1). The city has a total population of 750,000. The capital city is positioned on the slope of a hill looking south to the Mesopotamian plain. Located along the historic Silk Road, Mardin has been an important regional trade and cultural centre, and remains on the rail and highway routes connecting Turkey to Syria and Iraq (Aydın, Emiroğlu, Özel, & Ünsal, 2001). Mardin is surrounded by the cities of Diyarbakır and Batman to the north, Şırnak and Siirt to the east, the city of Şanlı Urfa to the west and Syria to the south. The city is set between the Dicle (Tigris) and Fırat (Euphrates) rivers in the Upper Mesopotamian Basin, covers 12,760 km^2 and is divided by the Mardin Mountain Range to the west (see Map 2).



Map 2: The province of Mardin. Retrieved on 10 May 2013 from www.mesopotamia-ita.com

The area in which Mardin is located is called the *Fertile Crescent* (Aydın et al., 2001); in other words, the cradle of civilisation. The city, more specifically, is a part of *Tur Abdin* – the mountain of the servants of God – which is a hilly region in south-east Turkey bordered by the eastern half of Mardin, the city of Şırnak and the west side of the Tigris on the border with Syria (Aydın et al., 2001). One of the districts of Mardin, Midyat, is accepted as the heart of *Tur Abdin* and is a highly significant region for Syriac Orthodox Christianity since it reflects the social, material and spiritual aspects of the Syriac culture (see Map 3).



Map 3: The district of Midyat. Retrieved 5 December 2011 from aratta.wordpress.com

As well as having religious significance, Midyat was also a centre for trade, culture and education until the period of the Turkish Republic. Like the capital of Mardin, it has been presented as a space where religions and languages merge into each other. Midyat has

similarities to the capital of Mardin in terms of cultural and religious diversity, which is why this district of Mardin is a focus of this thesis.

1.2.1 The historical background of Mardin as a settlement

The name of the city was first recorded as *Maride and Lorne Castles* by the Roman geographer Marcellinus in the 4th century. After being annexed to the Ottoman State in 1517, Mardin was recorded as *Marida* in Ottoman records. Some suggestions about the origin of the term Mardin include that it may etymologically have come from the term *Merdo* in the Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, *Mardi* in Armenian, or a tribe named *Marde* (Aydın et al., 2001). Nevertheless, the term *merdin*, which means castles in Syriac legends, seems to be a more feasible root of the city's current name (Öztürkatalay, 1995), considering the city was also named Mardin by the Arabs and Turks after the Assyrians/Syriacs. The district of Midyat is known as Mati-Yatu and is named as Matiate, mirror, or the city of caves, in Assyrian records and its history dates back to 2000 BC (İ. Çetin, 2007).

As the dominant discourse highlights, Mardin has a rich historical background that reveals its cultural wealth. According to archaeological excavations and research, the foundation of the city dates back to the Subaris, living in Mesopotamia between 4500-3500 BC. After the Subaris, the Sumerians and then the Akkadians took control of this area. During the Sumerians' period, Mardin was very advanced in areas of city planning, irrigation and agriculture. Subsequent to being dominated by the Akkadian-Sumerian State in 2500 BC and by the Babylonian State from 2200-1925 BC, Mardin and its surroundings were occupied by the Assyrians in 1367 BC. In the 13th century BC, the Aramaic descendants of the Semites started to migrate to the north and this migration continued during the 11th and 10th centuries

BC. The waves of migration were also the major force in establishing the ethnic and cultural structure of south-east Anatolia (Aydın et al., 2001). Mardin stayed under Assyrian control until occupation by the Urartians in 800 BC. When the region was conquered by the Persians in 6th century BC, Aramaic was made the official language in south-east Anatolia (Akyüz, 2005) and this led to the Aramaic culture becoming prominent in this area.

A few phases in the history of Mardin shaped the characteristics of its local context. The first phase was the rise of Christianity, which had the greatest influence on the cultural development of Mardin after it became part of the Roman Empire in 250 AD. Mardin at that time was one of the regions most affected by continuing disputes between the Byzantines and the Sassanids (Aydın et al., 2001). The entrance of the Arabs in the 7th century into the region started a second significant phase in the history of the city. Mardin remained an insignificant military location until the Arab conquests; therefore, Islamic civilisation played a significant role in the cultural and social development of the city (Aydın et al., 2001). The third important phase of Mardin's history, in terms of its urban space, was when it became the capital of the Artukids and thus a significant centre for trade and education in the region. Another significant phase in terms of social organisation were the waves of Turkmen nomadic groups that arrived at the beginning of 12th century AD. These groups were active in the area surrounding Mardin's capital when it was still under the dominance of the Seljuqs and the Artukids, which were Turkish dynasties (Aydın et al., 2001). This period was followed by the Aq Qoyunlu and Safawi sovereignties until Mardin and its surroundings were annexed by the Ottoman Empire in the time of Sultan Selim in 1517. In this historical stage, Mardin was ruled by the local administrations, such as tribes and seignories, for nearly four centuries even though it stayed within the borders of the Ottoman State. In fact, the central administration of

the Ottomans was not able to completely take control of this area because of resistance from its social and political structure. From its annexation to the Ottoman State to the early stages of the Republic, Mardin was under the control of *eşraf*, wealthy families, and tribes. This structure was so powerful that even the bureaucrats, governors and soldiers charged by the central administration of the State in Istanbul were absorbed into it after their settlement in the city. Besides, the State did not pay much attention to the city as long as taxes were paid by the residents or the balance between the local administrations was stable. Still, the importance of Mardin in trade and education continued until the period of the Turkish Republic, the last phase in its history. Under the rule of the Turkish Republic, Mardin became a province, where it was a district of Diyarbakır or sometimes Musul in the Ottoman period.

The historical background of Mardin reveals the city's cultural and religious diversity since it became the capital of the Artukids. Many civilisations have settled and faded in the city throughout its history, and each civilisation left its mark on the landscape. The current architecture of the city reflects its cultural layers: monasteries, churches, mosques, *madrasas* and various religious symbols, such as peacocks or the sun, which are drawn on buildings or represented on jewellery and clothes. There are two considerable monasteries that are symbols of the Syriac culture: *Mor Hananya Monastery* (*Dery'ul Zafaran*) established in the 8th century and *Mor Gabriel Monastery* (*Deyr'ul Umur*) founded in 397, which is the oldest surviving Syriac Orthodox monastery in the world. *Dery'ul Zafaran* is the oldest known temple of the Shamsies[3] who worship the sun. Another significant monastery that was

[3] This religious group was mentioned in the Ottoman records and Syriac archives. However, there is not much reliable information about the Mardinite Shamsies. The Ottoman records did not include information on their religious practices and beliefs. According to the records, there was a Shamsie neighbourhood in the old settlement of Mardin in the 16th century. For further information see (Göyünç, 1991). The foreign travellers mentioned Mardinite Shamsies as Armenian speakers and worshippers of the Sun. According to Çayır, Yıldız, and Gönenç (2007), Shamsies and Harranis are the same group who worship the Sun, stars, the moon and other

prominent as a centre for education in its time was *Mor Yakup* in Nusaybin, a district of Mardin where the Syriac priests translated works of Greek philosophy into Arabic for the Abbasids. Similarly, the *madrasas* of *Kasımiye* (*Qasimiyyah*) and *Zinciriye* (*Zinjiriyyah*) are the most prominent symbols of Islamic cultural heritage of the city. Because of its material culture, Mardin has been advertised as a city of tolerance by the dominant discourse of the State.

Like other multi-ethnic areas in south-east Turkey, the context of Mardin has experienced rapid social change and transformation under the governance of the Turkish State. A set of socio-political reforms were made by the State to ensure a new social space and a national identity. Two of these reforms should be indicated since they have had long-term impacts upon the interaction of groups in Mardin. The first reform relevant to this thesis is the ban of *madrasa* education, which can be seen as a mediator institution that promotes social mobility and development in the region. Another reform in terms of social change in Mardin is the language reform, which was constituted by Turkish becoming the official language.

1.2.2 Social cohesion and the role of sheikhs and madrasas in the area

In the process of nation-building, the Turkish State took a number of steps to establish a new national context. One of these was the passing of the law of *Tawhid-i Tedrisat*, the unification of education. With this law, *madrasa* education was prohibited in 1924 just a year after the

planets. Since they mostly lived near Harran, which is a district of Urfa, they were identified as Harrani. It is assumed this religious group disappeared in the 18th century Ottoman records on Mardin because they were mostly recorded as Syriac tax payers. Tomas Çerme (2003) asserts that this religious group was, in time, assimilated within the Syriac community through marriage. He adds that their religious symbols can be seen on Syriac churches and monasteries. For further information about Shamsies see Göyünç (1991), Özcoşar (2008) and Deveci Bozkuş (2012). According to Participant 108 (Muslim Arab, 65, male, retired civil servant), a well-known Muslim family in the capital of Mardin has a Shamsie background. Participant 108 stated that some Shamsies pretended to be Christians and others to be Muslims to hide themselves in the past. Eventually, they became Christians or Muslims. The family hid their religious background from their Christian and Muslim neighbours because they thought this may create a negative impression on them.

State's establishment in 1923. This ban also affected other religious communities so the Syriac residents of Mardin could not receive officially permitted religious education in their monasteries as they did in the Ottoman period. In addition to education, *madrasas* and monasteries were sources of social and cultural mobility and they had a function of balancing social relations among the diverse religious groups in east and south-east Anatolia.

As mediator institutions, *madrasas* played a significant role in the local context of Mardin. To illustrate this point, the strengthened positions of the sheikhs[4] should be considered, as they gained powerful status in the area as a result of political and social changes that occurred in the 19th century. This was when the power balance between the Armenians and Kurds, who were the majority groups in the south-east of the country, changed. In this period, the activities of Christian missionaries[5] accelerated and the missionaries started to explicitly support the local Christian groups to extend their political goals for the region. However, their main target group was the Armenians (Özcoşar, 2008) because they were more powerful than other Christian minorities. At the same time, Russia sought ways to improve its relation with this minority group in order to achieve its goals in east and south-east Anatolia. This Russian interference in the internal issues of the Armenians strengthened this religious community more than before. As Özcoşar (2008) states, these developments affected the sensitive balance between the religious communities in Mardin. They raised tensions among the Kurdish

[4] The term sheikh literally means 'elder'. In the context of this study, this term refers to a religious leader who received this honorific title from his father or graduating from a *madrasa*.

[5] The Catholic missions in Mardin were ruled by the centre of Mosul missionary. These missions were active in the city from the 16th century to the end of the 19th century. The Protestant missionaries had a chance to be active in the city in the 19th century by the works and political support of American missionaries. These missionaries belonged to the American Board of Commissionaires for Foreign Mission (ABCFM). For further information about the political influence of these missionaries see Kieser (2005), Pikkert (2008) and Özcoşar (2009).

inhabitants[6] in the area (Bruinessen, 1992; Lewy, 2011) and concerned them much more than the previous lack of political authority between the Kurdish tribes who had control of rural areas.

According to Vergin (1985), rapid social changes in a society can increase the religiosity of the people. When this point is taken into consideration, it is understood why the political strength of the Armenian community reinforced the domain of sheikhs in the area. The Kurds needed an authority that would be accepted by the various tribes which had conflicts with one another (Bruinessen, 1992). Considering Christianity as a basis for the relations between Russia and the Armenian community, the Kurdish tribes readily accepted the religious authority of the sheikhs. This, in turn, strengthened the power of religious leaders over Muslim Kurds in maintaining peace and security among the Kurdish tribes. 'Some of these sheikhs achieved to impose their authority on even the largest tribal chieftains of their regions. They ultimately became the most widely accepted spokesmen for the Kurds as a whole' (Bruinessen, 1999).

The *sufi* (mystical) orders linked with *madrasas* also played important social and political roles where the Kurds formed a majority, because these orders were independent of the tribes as well as the State. *Qadiriyya* and the *Naqshbandiyya* became powerful *tariqas*, which literally means path or way, in the region in spite of the fact there were many distinct *Sufi* orders. However, the most influential religious movement in the area in terms of this research has been the *Naqshbandi* order. In the first half of the 19th century, this order gained political

[6] A remarkable development in the relations of Kurds and Armenians is seen in stories of the Mardinite Kurds who believe they share a common fate with the Armenians. This development may urge Kurds in Mardin to talk about their Armenian grandmothers who were forced to be a second or third wife by their grandfathers at the time of the relocation of Armenians, which is discussed later.

importance and spread rapidly in south-east Turkey (Bruinessen, 1992). By the end of the century, the sheikhs of this order held positions of great influence in many parts of the country where Kurds were a majority. This was related to other major political developments of the period as Bruinessen (1999) notably explains:

> In the first decades of the century, administrative reforms abolished the last remaining autonomous Kurdish principalities and brought all of Kurdistan under centrally appointed administrators. These governors lacked the moral authority that the Kurdish emirs had had, and they could not keep tribal conflicts in check as the emirs had done. The following decades were characterised by a marked decrease of public security and a corresponding rise in violence and conflict. The sense of insecurity was exacerbated by a series of Ottoman military defeats at the hands of European powers and by the conspicuous activities of European missionaries among the local Christian communities. It was this situation which thrust the sheikhs into the role of intermediaries in conflicts. Precisely because their authority was independent of tribal affiliation and their followings cut across tribal boundaries, the sheikhs were well-placed to resolve conflicts, either through mediating between conflicting parties or by simply imposing a solution upon them.

After gaining a powerful position in the society of Mardin, the sheikhs acted as conflict solvers between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, since the local Christians also respected them as a religious authority. In this way, some sheikhs were able to balance the social relations between Muslim and Christian residents. One of the legendary sheikhs, Naqshbandi Sheikh Fethullah, is seen among the Mardinites as a figure who promoted the interaction between Muslims and Syriac Christians. Even today, Syriac Christians mention this sheikh with respect and hang his picture on the wall of monasteries along with their past metropolitan bishops. His legendary status was mainly based on the time the *Aynwerd* (*Gülgöze*) siege, which started in 1915, lasted three years and has a prominent place in the

collective memory of the Syriacs. When almost all Kurdish tribes in Mardin and the soldiers of the local government entered Midyat to take control in 1915, the Syriacs escaped from the town and sheltered in the village of *Aynwerd* (*Gülgöze*). As soon as the tribes and soldiers surrounded this village, an armed struggle began between them and the Syriac residents. A solution for this conflict was not found until Sheikh Fethullah, a *Mhallami* Arab and member of the *Hamidi* family (Aydın et al., 2001) who is believed to be from the descendants of Prophet Muhammed, became involved in this matter. After negotiating with the Syriacs, the sheikh was able to get an official document that commanded the withdrawal of the tribes and the soldiers (Aydın et al., 2001).

The constructive influences in terms of social relations of the sheikhs in the area were interrupted after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, for the new government ordered traditional *madrasas* to be closed in 1924. However, many *madrasas* in the south of the country surreptitiously continued functioning until the 1970s (Bruinessen, 1999). Because the *Sufi* orders were also banned in Turkey, a number of Kurdish sheikhs fled to Syria, but maintained their relations with their followers who became citizens of Turkey. Even today, some Mardinites visit a sheikh in Syria after obtaining permission from the government of the city.

Today, the hinterland has a few local *madrasas* that are connected to some of the village mosques and directed by *mullas*, teachers, who do not have official permission to teach. These *madrasas* do not educate their students for official positions but to become *mullas* (*mele*, *mela*) serving the rural areas as local *imams* (Bruinessen, 1999). However, some *melles* seem to have currently supported cultural biases and religious conservatism among the rural

Mardinites, mainly Muslim Kurds, in contrast to the sheikhs in the past. Because of their effectiveness, the *Presidency of Religious Affairs*[7] in Turkey has recently incorporated some of these local imams into its organisation, even though it has also enhanced its efficiency in the area and increased the number of official imams and female and male preachers.

Another significant aspect of *madrasas* discussed by Bruinessen (1999) is that there is a link between the function of *madrasas* and the construction of the Kurdish identity. He claims 'the idea of a Kurdish "national" identity first emerged in the *madrasa* environment because the networks of *madrasa*s and *Sufi* orders have functioned as mechanisms of social integration, overcoming segmentary division' (Bruinessen, 1999). He furthers his claim saying 'the ban (of *madrasas*) may have strengthened the association of the *madrasas* with Kurdish identity, which was suppressed at the same time' (Bruinessen, 1999).

As is seen, van Bruinessen (1999) asserts that the environment of *madrasas* helped to produce the Kurdish identity as the sheikhs supported Kurdish nationalism. His argument is open to criticism for overestimating the effects of this institution and religious leaders on the ethnic demands of the Kurds. Firstly, there were many *madrasas* throughout the country, which were connected to each other and accepted all qualified students without considering their ethnic backgrounds. In addition, religious identity was effectively more important than ethnic identity for the Kurdish religious leaders at that time. Every Muslim group still accepted the superiority of the caliph as a tie between Muslims, even in the last period of the Ottoman State.

[7] 'The Presidency of Religious Affairs is one of the most specific institutions of Turkish modernity' (Subaşı, 2008, p. 264), which is found in article 136 of the constitution, is an official institution established in 1924 after the abolition of the caliphate. For further information see the special issue of the Muslim World (98(2-3), pp. 159-384).

Consequently, the effects of *madrasas* and sheikhs on the Kurdish identity need to be carefully analysed, for there was no demand for ethnic or linguistic nationalism at that time. The idea of nationalism among diverse religious groups in the area was not secular during the last period of the Ottoman State because these groups were still represented by a religious organisation, which brought people from different ethnic backgrounds together. Moreover, the secular nationalist tendencies among the diverse groups in Mardin were too new to lead to much discussion on ethnicity or ethnic demands in that period. However, the ethnic boundaries between diverse communities became explicit in the period of the Turkish Republic.

1.2.3 From religious community to ethnic minority

The Mardinite groups were recognised as religious communities under the rule of the Ottoman State, without considering their ethnic backgrounds. A religious community sometimes was composed of a few groups; for example, the Christian community included the Armenian Catholics, the Syriac Orthodox Christians and some of the Shamsies in the case of Mardin. The last group was attached to the Christian community because they were obligated to be officially included into either the Christian or Muslim communities by the central administration of the Ottoman State. This was because the State gave priority to categorising tax payers rather than taking census of its people considering religious or ethnic affiliations.

The groups in Mardin were called a *jamaat*, religious community, based on their sect while the Ottoman identity remained the umbrella for diverse nations. For this reason, the *jamaats* were officially classified as *millet*, nation. The term *millet* clearly referred to religious

affiliation not ethnic background until the 19th century (Özcoşar, 2008). This general classification may have helped reduce the tensions created by the differences in the area, for it collected a few groups together and treated them as a community. In this system, the *jamaats* were able to solve problems they encountered within their community; therefore, they were relatively autonomous and attached to a religious organisation. The minority groups of the Ottoman State could speak their native languages and continue producing their own culture, but they had no rights to be in the political arena. Therefore, the system of *millet* provided a relative cosmopolitan setting in the city of Mardin.

There were two main reasons for the transformation from religious communities of the Ottomans to ethnic minorities of the Turkish Republic. The first reason can be found in the circumstances of the 19th century, which was a milestone for minority groups under the rule of the Ottoman State. This occurred because of the activities of missionaries and colonialists in the area of the Middle East and other targeted lands. Even though the context of Mardin was not directly influenced by colonialism, it was deeply affected by missionary activities that continued from the 16th century to the end of the Ottoman period. However, the missions established in the south-east of the country in the second half of the 19th century had a significant impact on the uprising of nationalistic feelings not only among the Christian minorities, but also the other groups in the area.

A series of developments related to minority groups happened in the 19th century and led to the missions becoming more active in the region. These developments were related to two significant reforms made by the Ottoman State. The first called *Tanzimat* was the political reform enacted in 1839. The second reform related to non-Muslim groups, was *Islahat*

Fermanı (*the Royal Edict of Reform*) in 1856, which resulted from pressure from Great Britain, France and Russia. These reforms delivered some rights to minority groups, which allowed missionaries to open buildings, including schools, hospitals, pharmacies and churches, in the area.

As previously stated, the target group of the missions was the Armenian community of the Ottoman State who lived in strategically important and far-reaching areas at that time. Along with this group, the Syriac inhabitants of Mardin, who shared the same social setting and status as the Armenians, were affected by the activities of missionaries. The last mission related to the Syriac community was the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.* The Mardin station of the American Board was established in 1860, later opened a boarding high school for girls in 1869 and a high school for boys in 1890 (Yücel, 2005).

The official existence of missionaries in the context of Mardin created tensions not only between the Muslim and non-Muslim groups, but also among Christian groups (Özcoşar, 2008). One of the consequences of this external influence on the socio-political life of the city was that the sheikhs consolidated their powerful position in society, especially over the local administrations, and the Kurdish tribes who were afraid of losing their power. Another consequence of the existence of missionaries in Mardin was that they created the infrastructure for Syriac nationalism (Özcoşar, 2008). In fact, the struggles of the missions from different sects carved up the Syriac Orthodox community because some Orthodox Syriacs decided to be Catholic or Protestant. Since this change caused conflict between the Christian sects, the Syriac intellectuals tried to find a way to hold their community together. At this point, nationalistic feelings were seen as redemptive, but this short-term solution

brought new problems because it started an ongoing discussion about the ethnic origin of Syriac Christians.

A second aspect of the transformation from religious community to ethnic minority – in other words, the rising of ethnic and nationalistic feelings among the Mardinite groups from different ethnic and religious backgrounds – was the nation-building process of the new Turkish State. Aiming to establish a new nation based on only one ethnic identity, Turkish, the project of Turkification on multi-ethnic areas was begun soon after the Turkish Republic was established in 1923. As a result of this project, religious communities were divided into ethnic minorities against the new ethnic image of the State. Until that time, Mardin was composed of the *millets* of Muslim, Jewish and Armenian Christian, since religion was a common ground that gathers the followers of the same religion together. Under the rule of the new State, the society of Mardin separated into smaller groups such as Muslim Kurd, Muslim Arab, Muslim Turk, Syriac Christian, Armenian Christian, Muslim Chechen and Ezidi Kurds. Therefore, the Mardinite groups became ethno-religious groups instead of religious communities within the national context of Turkey.

In addition to the national identity of the Turkish Republic, its secularisation project also played a significant role in rising ethnic nationalism among its minority groups. Since then, the representation of religion in the public sphere has been a controversial topic in Turkey and every religious group has encountered various difficulties in relation to this. Although the social structure of the country reflects religious customs and traditions, the Turkish State also accepts a problematic understanding of laicism (Mert, 1994), which has created tensions within the society. As well, this understanding has been an obstacle for pious people from

diverse religious backgrounds becoming involved in the different spheres of socio-cultural life still expressing their religious identity. Consequently, the emphasis on the secularist nature of the Republic seems to have been one of the reasons why ethnic identities have come into greater prominence than religious identities in the country.

In the stage of the Republic, not only expressing ethnic identity but also the appearance of religious beliefs and symbols in public sphere has been challenged by secularist approaches. The struggles to constitute a secular Turkish identity as the umbrella for all ethnic and religious identities in Turkey have produced tensions between the State and its people. One of the unexpected consequences of this understanding is the conflict between the State and local groups, especially Kurds. Therefore, Turkish nationalism has controversially raised the ethnic consciousness of its minority groups, expressing Turkishness and eliminating the religious ties between the Muslim groups. This can be seen in the example of Kurdish secular nationalism, which has created not only social, political and economic problems for the State, but also contributed to the articulation of secular nationalism among the Syriac Christians and Mhallemi Arabs of Mardin in recent years.

1.2.4 The mobility of population and social change in Mardin

The diversity of the population of Mardin has been rapidly decreased by the mobility of its population from the last decade of the Ottoman State to the present day. The first substantial change in its population happened in 1915 with the relocation of its Armenian residents by command of the *İttihat and Terakki Cemiyeti*, the Committee of Union and Progress[8] (Lewy, 2011). This was followed by the movement of some prominent Arab families of Mardin to

[8] This nationalist committee was established by the contribution of *Jön* Turks, also known the Young Turks, in the early 20th century.

other cities of Turkey to weaken their local power, which was seen as a threat to the establishment of the new national context in the first decade of the Republic (Aydın et al., 2001). The loss of these urban residents in the context of Mardin was not compensated by the arrival of other inhabitants from its hinterland. In addition, the national-building process of the Turkish Republic led to the departure of other minority groups of Mardin to other countries. As a result of these demographic changes, the long-term balance between the Muslim and Christian populations dramatically altered.

Because of the geographical location of Mardin, the migration phenomenon is an inseparable part of its social history. Nonetheless, its migration experience under the rule of the new Turkish State was different, for it rapidly transformed the local context of the city. In fact, the demographic profile of the city has been irreversibly changed and this has significantly changed the social organisation of the city. Every group included in this research has experienced either internal or external migration.

However, the groups most affected by migration have been the Ezidis and the Syriac Christians. The Ezidis have gradually emigrated from the city to European countries, mostly Germany (Yalkut, 2006), as soon as they found a way to leave Turkey after the establishment of the Republic. There are several reasons for the Ezidi migration, but the most important one was related to the social conditions of their life in the city. The Ezidis lived in the hinterland suffered security problems and economic poverty. The second significant reason is the problem of recognition. The Ezidis were not recognised in the Ottoman period nor the Republic as a distinct religious group. Like the Syriac Christians, the Ezidis were not accepted as a minority group of the Turkish State Therefore, they have not had minority rights. The

ambiguous situation of this group in society seems to account for their preference for leaving. In a new country, they were able to express their religious identity and were included in its society. Nonetheless, the Mardinite Ezidis who were born in the city and live in diaspora want to return their homelands. This desire of the elderly Ezidis can be seen in their request to their families to arrange funeral services in Mardin, and this seems to have become a tradition of the Ezidis who were born in Turkey, but later immigrated (Yalkut, 2006).

Another group that has gradually left the city for another country is the Syriac Christians. The Syriac migration seems to have resulted in more significant consequences than the migration of the Ezidis. There were four major waves of population movements related to this group. The first wave started in the 19th century, mostly after the 1890s, and continued to the 1930s. In this first period, most Syriacs went to the United States with the help of missionaries (Akyüz, 2005). Because of compulsory military service and wealth tax being imposed in 1942, large numbers of Syriacs immigrated to Syria and a small number to Lebanon and Palestine up to the 1960s. A third wave occurred from the 1960s to 1975 for economic reasons and the difficulties dealing with the tribal nature of the social structure. There are some additional incidents that are seen as reasons for the Syriac migration; for instance, the Cyprus problem in 1974 that created tensions between the Muslim and Christian residents of Mardin. The social distance between the diverse groups of the city has been extended by an internal conflict between the State and the PKK, the most effective Kurdish terrorist group that was established around 1979 and still is active in south-east Turkey.

This conflict was another significant reason for the Syriac and Ezidi migrations, for it created security problems in the hinterland. For this reason, many Syriac Christians and Ezidis

emigrated to European countries and Australia from the 1980s to 2000s – the fourth major wave. In addition to the activities of the PKK, another group, Hezbollah[9], created a sense of insecurity in the villages and districts of Mardin. Even though it was planned as a direct threat to the PKK by the State, according to Çakır (2001), Hezbollah was out of their control and was responsible for many unsolved murders in the south-eastern region of the country. In Mardin, it is believed that a few Syriac and Armenian residents were killed by this extremist group in the 1990s. Its involvement in acts of violence in Midyat during that time seems to have negatively affected the relations of Muslims and Syriac Christians, causing a fear of the other. Nevertheless, there is an invisible side to the Syriac migration. The former residents who immigrated to European countries questioned whether staying in the city was reasonable for their relatives because their quality of life would be enhanced in their adopted country. Therefore, those who left Mardin influenced their family members or friends to leave Turkey.

Although the Syriac inhabitants of Mardin have largely immigrated to European countries or neighbouring Arab countries, such as Syria and Lebanon, some Syriacs preferred to live in Istanbul, the most crowded city of Turkey, for they readily adapted to its cosmopolitan structure. Their move to Istanbul started in the last decades of the Ottoman State, pursuing to be a separate religious community from the Armenian Patriarchate[10] (Özcoşar, 2008). Istanbul still has a small but powerful group of Syriac Christians – most of the goldsmiths in the Grand *Bazaar* who migrated from Mardin (Özmen, 2006).

Regarding the Kurds and Arabs, they have mainly migrated to the capital of Mardin or other cities of Turkey; however, a small amount of these groups' members left Turkey for a

[9] This militant group is unrelated to the Lebanese Shi'a group called Hezbollah.
[10] The Syriac community was accepted a separate *jemaat* in 1912.

European country. The rural Kurdish dwellers, in particular, have flowed into the capital of Mardin from its surroundings since the 1990s. Beside economic reasons, security problems were the major factor underlying this population mobility. The rural population of Mardin was in immediate danger because of the conflicts between the PKK and Turkish army forces.

Compared to the mobility of other groups, the population of the Mardinite Arabs has slightly been decreased by migration. However, the departure of the powerful wealthy Arab families from Mardin created significant consequences in terms of the socio-political balance in the city. In fact, these prominent Arab families were forced to leave for other cities of Turkey by the new State in the 1930s (Aydın et al., 2001). In the very early stages of the Republic, these families were seen as a threat to the new system because of their social and political status in Mardin society. The relocation of these Arab families brought irrevocable changes to the socio-cultural structure of the city. Their roles were taken over by other urban Muslim groups and Arabs who live in the rural parts of the city.

Consequently, mobility within Turkey and migration to other countries of the Mardinite groups changed the local context of Mardin within a few decades. This change has had a great impact upon the intercultural engagement of diverse components in the cultural fabric of the city. However, the Mardinites who live out of the local context have established transnational networks in recent years, and some have re-settled in the city. Since their re-emergence has resulted in some social, political and cultural changes, they have started contributing to the transformation of Mardin's society. These changes have affected the interaction of the diverse groups in the city in overcoming cultural biases produced by a lack of interaction or sometimes producing conflicts between the residents of Mardin (see Chapter 6).

1.2.5 The distinction between the urban (bajari) and the rural (gundi)

Before the new Turkish State, the region of Mardin was ruled by local administrations. The Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish tribes were active in the hinterland and some of them were nomadic; therefore, they did not stay within the region of Mardin during the whole year. However, they belonged to tribal unions such as the *Milli* confederation (Aydın et al., 2001). The capital of Mardin, on the other hand, was governed by a high class named *eşraf*, most of whom were wealthy Arab residents and bureaucrats of the city (Özcoşar, 2009). The central administration of the Ottoman State sent its own bureaucrats, but they engaged with this local structure after a short time (Aydın et al., 2001).

The collective memory of the Mardinites, thus, includes a spatial distinction because of two types of governmentality in their city: tribes in the hinterland and families in the capital of Mardin. This distinction was related to the participation in power relations in the local context. As a result, there was a balance between the urban and rural inhabitants. This power balance was changed by the reforms of the Turkish State to constitute a new national context. To strengthen the central administration and diminish the control of families and tribes over the region, the State took certain steps. In 1924, it cut the ties between the institution of *madrasa* and the local people. In 1928, a new alphabet was accepted in order to create a new national language. The wealthy families in the capital of Mardin remained powerful, so they were eventually forced to leave the city.

In the following years, the new language of the State, Turkish, remained a determiner of reform in the social and political relations of the Mardinites. The project of Turkification in multi-ethnic areas was based on this language reform. In the first years of the Republic, local

languages were prohibited in public areas of Mardin (Aydın et al., 2001) in order to establish a national identity as an umbrella over all ethnic identities in Turkey. The prohibition of speaking a local language was enforced by the mayor at the time. The officials fined the local people who spoke a language other than Turkish. Based on the narrations of the elderly Mardinites, this restriction created a silent city in which the residents communicated through gestures (Aydın et al., 2001). These reforms produced conflicts between the State and local groups of Mardin while they strengthened the distinction between urban (*bajari*) and rural (*gundi*), which also defined who were included and who were resistant to the new system.

This distinction expanded the spatial disengagement of the inhabitants of Mardin. As a consequence of the language barrier, the rural dwellers of Mardin became distanced from the 'cultural capital' of the city centre. The group most affected by this restriction was the Kurds, the largest rural community in the area. Even though this enforcement was not directly related to this group, it has been seen as one of the primary indicators that the Kurds have been suppressed by Arabs at the local level and Turks at the national level. Other residents of Mardin, the rural Arab, Syriac or Ezidi dwellers, faced the same problems as the Kurds. The majority of the rural dwellers of Mardin, who were not educated and could not speak Turkish, needed a mediator group; therefore, the wealthy Arab families of Mardin's capital who were not forced to leave the city by the State were able to protect their high status and used this situation to strengthen their power. As a result, the convictions of 'Arabs are urban' and 'Kurds are villagers' were constructed.

The different types of governmentality between the urban and rural contexts of the city created a symbolic boundary between the Mardinites, and this became more visible in the

national context of the Turkish Republic. This boundary is significant to understand the social organisation of Mardin and its relations with the national context because it divides the residents of Mardin into two general categories. The urban group of this classification often have negative attitudes to the rural group. For the former group, it is superior to live in the capital and have the patterns of city culture. This assumption is also linked to social and economic power and status, and constructs a symbolic class, *Mardinite*, which refers to urban dwellers. This distinction has its own local characteristics even though the urban-rural classification is also noticeable in other cities of Turkey.

The local terms *bajari* and *gundi* were coined by the Kurdish rural dwellers of Mardin to criticise the high status of the urban residents. Although these terms indicate only one aspect of social conflict in Mardin, it is significant to address in terms of referring to the discourse of victimhood, which affects the understanding of intercultural relations. Therefore, the implications of being a Mardinite are more complex than belonging to a geographical territory as it also includes social, political and cultural implications. The terms *bajari* and *gundi* refer to the superiority of Muslim Arab and Syriac Christian urban dwellers categorising these groups as *bajari* or *Mardinite.* A few Kurdish families who have lived in the centre and been able to benefit from the cultural capital of being *eşraf* are also accepted in this category. When the villager groups are examined, it is clear they are also non-homogeneous in terms of ethnic and religious affiliations. Therefore, Muslim Arabs and Kurds, Syriac Christians and Ezidis who live in rural areas share the same social category as *gundi*: villagers.

Consequently, the language reform of the new Turkish State seems to have revealed a symbolic boundary embedded in the collective memory of the inhabitants of Mardin. The

classification of urban-rural has been an expression of not only social hierarchy in the society of Mardin, but also whether the Mardinite groups have access to the cultural capital of the new nation. Along with social classes, this general division between the local people has created socio-cultural prejudices (see Chapter 5). Besides, this division is significant to see that the religious differences of the Mardinite groups are not a threat to their intercultural engagement.

1.2.6 The stages of social trauma in the society of Mardin

Even though the dominant discourse on the history and culture of Mardin hides some historical incidents or phases, they are retained in the collective memory of the residents.. The recent past of Mardin has had some traumatic stages which also reveal rapid transformation in the society of Mardin.

The first social trauma happened during the First World War in south-east Anatolia when the *İttihad and Terakki* Committee (ITC) decided to relocate the Armenian inhabitants who lived in this region. The Young Turks who were the inner circle of this committee are seen as responsible for this decision and its dramatic results. This decision was explicitly in favour of the Kurdish majority who shared the same social space as the Armenians in south-east Anatolia (Lewy, 2011). However, over time the Kurds became dissatisfied by the actions of this committee, which highlights the Turkish identity of the people with different ethnic and religious affiliations of the Ottoman State. Even though a few Kurdish intellectuals were involved in this committee, the political stance of the Young Turks can be seen as the first breaking point in the relations of Turks and Kurds.

Still, the religious tie between Muslim Kurds and Turks sustained their relations until the reforms of the new Turkish State to construct a new national context. The pious Kurdish people, particularly the Kurdish sheikhs, lost their trust in the new State because of its secularisation project, which prohibited *madrasa* education and the expression of religious beliefs in the public sphere. This project diminished the ties between the Kurds and Turks. Moreover, the emphasis of the new State on Turkish identity became a significant factor in raising the ethnic nationalism of minority groups of Mardin. As a result, the secularisation project of the Turkish State was the second stage that caused dramatic impacts upon the context of Mardin.

The coupt d'etat of the Turkish Army Forces on 12 September 1980 was another traumatic event not only for the social setting of Mardin, but also for the national context of Turkey. This military coup represented a significant failure in Turkish society in general and the society of Mardin in particular; for instance, local newspapers were suppressed and cinema halls were closed. However, the most significant result of this coup was the emergence of conflicts between the State and PKK around 1984, which reached a peak in the mid-1990s. The inhabitants in the hinterland suffered from this conflict so much that many had to leave their villages and find another settlement. As a result of this population mobility, the local context of Mardin was transformed and, most importantly, has not maintained its cultural and religious diversity. Therefore, the conflict between the State and PKK is the last traumatic stage that affected the social relations of the Mardinites.

The common ground effect of these traumatic events has been the out-migration of Mardinites from different communities and this raises issues about the diaspora. The religious minorities

of Mardin, Syriacs and Ezidis, became at first refugees to, and later the citizens of, European countries. They established networks with Muslim Arab and Kurdish Mardinites who are also the immigrants of their host countries. Their understanding of identity based on religion changed in the conditions of the new country, for they could not find a way to engage with the new context via religious affiliation. In the new context, cultural rights, ethnic background and identity, and minority rights were prominent matters. As a result, their new contexts led the Mardinites in diaspora to create a new discourse on religion and identity politics (see Chapter 6).

1.3 Ethno-religious groups as the subject of the research

The population of Mardin is composed of diverse ethno-religious identities. Today, it has a few Armenian Catholic, Chaldean and Chechen families, a few Ezidi villages and nomadic Gypsies in addition to its main groups: Muslim Arabs, Muslim Kurds and Syriac Christians, who are the subject of this research. The relations of the Ezidis with Muslim and Christian residents are also considered in this research to analyse the intercultural engagement in the city. Mardin has a Turkish population, but most Turkish residents were not born there. They settled in the city for reasons of education, occupation or official duties. It is also likely there are descendants of the Artukids, a Turkish dynasty that shaped the landscape of Mardin's capital, as the surnames of some Mardinites are *Artuklu* or *Artukoğulları*, sons of *Artuklu*. Further, the hinterland had the Turkmen nomadic groups, who would be either Arabicised or Kurdified, or have later settled in different cities of Anatolia. While a few of these residents claim they are Turks, others prefer to identify themselves as Arabs because they speak Arabic.

Mardin has a population of approximately 750,000; however, it is not possible to give an accurate number for each community in the total population as no census regarding ethnic or religious identities has been made. Regarding the capitals of Mardin and Midyat, on which this thesis primarily focuses, they have populations of 80,000 and 55,600, respectively, in round numbers. Compared with other districts of Mardin, Midyat has some similarities with the capital city in terms of its multi-lingual and religious population.

None of the ethno-religious groups of this research are seen as a minority, but as citizens of the Turkish Republic[11]. It seems that the Turkish State, which emphasises Turkishness, expects the religious ties between Arabs, Kurds and Turks to be a combining parameter; therefore, all Muslim groups are accepted as citizens of Turkey, and therefore implicitly Turkish[12]. Similarly, the Syriacs and Ezidis who have not officially been seen as minority groups of Turkey are recognised as citizens. The Syriacs of Mardin are very critical about this matter since they could neither demand minority rights nor be fully accepted as citizens. For example, they could not hold a position in the Turkish military even though they are obliged to do compulsory military service. The Ezidis too have never been seen either as a distinct religious group or a minority in the national context. Although these communities of Mardin

[11] The definition of the concepts of minority and minority rights in Turkey have been based on the Lausanne Treaty, which was signed between 'the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes on one side, and Turkey on the other' (Oran, 2007, p. 35). The Turkish delegate who signed this treaty did not accept the statement of 'racial, linguistic and religious minorities'; therefore, this statement was replaced with the term non-Muslim. Not all of the non-Muslim groups enjoyed the rights granted to minorities, only the three largest minority groups: Greeks (Rum), Armenians and Jews. Therefore, other groups, such as Syriacs, Chaldeans, Nestorians and Ezidis, have been left out of the treaty's protection (see for further details Oran, 2007).

[12] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of the secularisation project in the creation of a new State, promoted a historical thesis about the Turkish background of Anatolia, written in the 1930s. This thesis is based on the theory of Sun. According to this theory, contemporary Turks are the inheritors of the glories of the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks and the earliest Hittite civilisation in Anatolia. Consequently, the identity of 'Turk' became a central point in the creation of the new nation, accepting the other nations of Anatolia as Turks as well. For this reason, Arabic or Kurdish names of some cities, districts and villages were changed to the Turkish names.

have encountered difficulties because of their ambiguous citizenship status, the Turkish State has provided some rights to them; for example, they have the right to elect and be elected[13].

1.3.1 Mardinite Arabs as the representatives of Turks

The proportion of Mardinites who identify themselves as Arabs amount to approximately 40 per cent across the city as a whole, 49 per cent in the capital of Mardin, and 48 per cent in Midyat. All Arab residents of Mardin are Sunni Muslims and mainly follow the *Hanafi* school of thought[14]. In general, many Muslim Arabs in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat identify themselves as pious people. The Arab inhabitants have been highly visible and influential in the marketplace and political life of the city. For this reason, other ethno-religious groups often see them as 'the representatives of Turks' in the context of Mardin.

Mardin has the largest Arab population in Turkey. Yet, there are no specific studies on the Mardinite Arabs, though there are some discussions about their place of origin. The first Arab settlers came to this social setting in the time of the second Caliph Umar who conquered the surroundings of the city in the mid-7th century (Aydın et al., 2001). However, the Arabic *eşraf*, elites or prominent families, of Mardin could have come to its capital as a result of the Ottoman administrative structure. Another possibility is related to the connection of the city with the state of Mosul and the Arabian peninsula during the 19th century (Aydın et al., 2001). In this century, the Arab tribes were part of its social organisation until they were forced to settle in the hinterland or today's Arab countries, including Syria and Lebanon, in the early 20th century.

[13] In the eye of the law, Syriacs and Ezidis can be elected, but the social and political conditions of Turkey did not lead them to be elected as members of parliament until the 2011 election, when the Syriac community had a member elected.
[14] One of the four schools of mainstream Islamic jurisprudence.

The dominant patterns of Arabic culture in the capital of Mardin are still observable. However, they are under threat of transformation because of the entrance of Kurdish inhabitants from the villages. In understanding the prominence of Arabic socio-cultural patterns, a few factors should be considered. After its annexation to the Ottomans, Mardin had an urban class that included Armenian, Syriac, Arab and a few Kurdish families. Even though other groups lost their status, the Arabs of Mardin's capital have held high status in the society for over four centuries. Until the period of the Turkish Republic, Mardin was a trade centre with networks to the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, the merchants of Mardin had to speak Arabic as a trade language and, as a result, the Christian groups also became Arabic speakers, which lead the capital of Mardin to be easily Arabicised.

The first significant change in the positions of the urban Arabs of Mardin happened in the early years of the Turkish Republic. As previously indicated, the wealthy families were forced by the State to move from the city to lessen their political power (Aydın et al., 2001). After the departure of these families, the rest of the Mardinite Arabs could not protect their high status. Therefore, they negotiated with the urban Syriacs against the Kurdish residents about governing the city, and this resulted in mayors of the city in the time of the Turkish Republic being selected from the Arab community. Nonetheless, they could not protect their positions in the city council and the entrance of rural Kurdish dwellers into the capital in recent years seems to have reduced their superiority in the city hall of Mardin.

To maintain their previous social and political status, the Arab residents of Mardin sought ways to establish close relations with the new Turkish State; for example, they were among the first groups who embraced the Turkish identity. This point was revealed in their

conversations through expressions such as ‘we are Turks’ or ‘we are the citizens of Turkey’. Even some Arabs in the capital of Mardin expressed that they are Turks even if they are Arabic speakers. From their point of view, speaking Arabic does not mean they are a distinct ethnic group.

Alongside the urban Arabs of Mardin’s capital, Midyat has an Arab majority. In Midyat, Arabs identify themselves and are called by other groups as ‘Mhalmi’. The urban Arabs of Mardin’s capital also distinguish themselves from local Arabs. There are some claims on the ethnic background of the Mhallemis. The most common explanation of the origin of this group is that the Mhallemis are a mixed group of Turks and Arabs. Estel, the new part of Midyat, was composed of 100 neighbourhoods (*mahalle* in Turkish) in the past. Therefore, Mhalmi comes from the term *mahalle*. The second claim about this group’s background is raised by some Syriac Christians and Mhallemi Arabs who assert that a group of Syriac Christians was converted to Islam because of socio-political reasons approximately 300 years ago (İ. Çetin, 2007). Later, they forgot their ethnic origin because they started speaking Arabic after they accepted Islam, and therefore, identified themselves as ‘Arab’. This claim was asserted by Patriarch Ismail and accepted by many Syriacs (İ. Çetin, 2007). Another claim is based on the mobility of the Arab tribes in the region. The Mhallemis originally came from a powerful Arabic tribe, *Şeybani*, and scattered through different countries (Osman & İsmail, 2010). According to this claim, Mhallemis are not a local group, but part of the broader ethno-religious community. There was also a suggestion that ethnically the Mhallemis came from the Akkadians or Assyrians. A Mhallemi association in Midyat claimed the Mhallemis were descendants of the Akkadians at first, and later asserted they are originally Assyrians. This Mhallemi association organised a festival in Midyat in the summer

of 2011and at this festival, it was claimed the Mhallemis are a distinct ethnic group with their own mother language, Mhallemice, which is a local Arabic that includes some Syriac and Turkish vocabulary.

The distinction between urban and rural can readily be observed among the Arab community of Mardin. The Arabs in Mardin's capital see the Mhallemis as a rural group. The Mhallemis affirm this distinction by expressing they are Mhalmi or Midyatite Arab. Another difference between the Arabs of Mardin is that the Mhallemis seem to have been affected by the nationalistic discourses of the Kurds and Syriacs in Midyat. As an example of this recent development, the previously articulated festival can be given, as it was organised by the Midyatite Arabs with a few European Mhallemi associations in Estel.[15] The main goal of this festival was to express that the Mhallemis demand to be recognised as a distinct ethnic group and have their ethnic and cultural rights implicitly, like the Kurds.

1.3.2 Mardinite Kurds as the majority of Mardin society

The proportion of Mardinites who identify themselves as Kurds[16] may amount to approximately 58 per cent across the city as a whole and around 49 per cent in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat. The Mardinite Kurds are *Qurmanji*[17] speakers. The main income of the Kurdish inhabitants is still dependent on agriculture. However, they have recently entered into the trade and political life of the capital. In contrast to the Arab residents, most Kurds follow

[15] Estel is a part of Midyat where the majority of the Mhallemi Arabs live.
[16] Bruinessen prefers to call them'Kurdish speakers', since most Kurds would mention language and religion first when asked to specify what constitutes their identity. 'Most Kurds in Turkey have a strong awareness of belonging to a separate ethnic group, distinct, especially, from the Turks and from the Christian minorities living in their midst. There is, however, by no means unanimity among them as to what constitutes this ethnic identity and what the boundaries of their ethnic group are' (Bruinessen, 1989, p. 1).
[17] *Kurmanji* is an Iranian language that is grammatically quite different from Turkish. However, its vocabulary contains many loan-words from Arabic and Turkish (Bruinessen, 1989).

the *Shafi'i* school of thought[18] probably because they have lived in rural areas. Until the 1980s, most Kurdish residents of Mardin could be considered pious Muslims, but today a considerable number of young Mardinite Kurds are more secular than their parents. Among the Mardinite Kurds, sheikhs and *sayyids* are the important figures, even the secular Kurdish people show respect to those who are the family members of these religious people.

Except for a few families, the Kurds of Mardin mainly lived in rural areas that were under the control of Arabic and Kurdish tribes until a few decades ago. Before the Republic, this spatial distinction did not create difficulties for rural Kurds. Rather, they were more powerful than the urban dwellers because of their tribal affiliations. They protected their positions of ruling the hinterland until the social reforms of the new State. As a result of these reforms, their social and political positions were changed and they could no longer share power with the Arabs in the capital. As previously discussed, the Kurds are a group that has been affected most by discrimination in the city in respect to the urban-rural division.

In recent years, Mardinite Kurds have become a majority group in Mardin's capital. However, they still are the largest rural group when their population in the villages and districts of Mardin is considered. Since the 1990s, however, some Kurdish rural dwellers have moved from their villages and settled in *Yenişehir*, the newly established neighbourhood of Mardin's capital. Even though they could not settle in *Eskişehir*, the old settlement of the city, their current existence in the capital has generated a social transformation, and implicit tensions between the urban Arabs and the rural Kurds have surfaced.

[18] One of the schools of jurisprudence within the Sunni branch of Islam. It was named after Imam al-Shafi'i. The juridical opinions of al-Shafi'i and his students about the practice of Islam in daily life seem to satisfy the needs of the rural people more than *Hanafi* school.

In the centre of Midyat, the population of the Kurdish inhabitants has also increased because of internal migration. Today, most Midyatite Kurds live with the Syriacs in the old settlement of the district. Their first appearance in this part of Midyat goes back to the last decades of the 19th century when the urban Syriacs needed protection from the attacks of neighbouring Kurdish tribes. For this reason, two Kurdish tribes, *Mehmedo* and *Nehrozo*, were invited by the Syriac urban dwellers to settle in the capital and become their neighbours. Today, the number of the Midyatite Kurds is more than that of the Midyatite Syriacs.

The Kurdish residents of Mardin were sometimes criticised by the Arab and Syriac participants because of their ethnic and linguistic nationalism. In fact, many Mardinites believe all Kurds are nationalists, 'even the pious Kurds are politicised because of their nationalist approaches'. In the rise of ethnic nationalism and secular tendencies among the Mardinite Kurds, the role of the PKK, the Kurdistan Worker's Party, should be considered. The PKK has adopted a discourse that claims the religion of Islam is an obstacle that prevents the Kurdish people reaching their 'freedom'[19]. In addition, this Kurdish movement sees the religious ties between Kurds and Turks as a barrier for demanding their ethnic rights. More and more young Kurds have adopted this understanding and become more suspicious about the importance of religion in their lives. It is observable in the context of Mardin that the arguments of the PKK have changed the religious understanding of not only the secular Kurds, but also the pious Kurds who until now were more suspicious about the political

[19] The term freedom was frequently used by the nationalist Kurds who participated in this research. They also added that the Kurdish people could not establish a state, but have lived with other communities in the region for centuries. At this point, a discourse related to assimilation emerges; in other words, an understanding of victimhood. 'The Kurds are a nation which has suffered from subordination a lot'. The Kurdish local administrations were responsible for violence in the hinterland of Mardin; therefore, the Christian groups and Ezidis had to compromise with their social and political authority. In addition, the Kurds' demands to have more freedom seem to be narrowed by linguistic nationalism in the national context of Turkey.

discourse of the PKK[20]. Today, the Kurdish residents of Mardin seem to be more political and imprisoned by nationalistic demands, even though they criticise some unpleasant actions of the PKK. This political movement, on the other hand, has been affected by the Kurdish people's religious expectations, because many Kurds still cherish their religious beliefs and practices. At this point, a statement in circulation between Kurdish nationalists can be given as an example: 'It was very difficult to accept the lifestyle which Islam requires for the Kurdish people in the beginning, but, now, it is hard to withdraw them from Islam'.

A recent development in terms of inter-group relations that has been fostered by the nationalist Kurds is that they have improved their relations with the Syriacs and Ezidis in order to gain their support for the political demands of Kurds. One of the examples of this recent development was the Syriac candidate, Erol Dora, sponsored by the BDP, the Peace and Democracy Party[21], to the 2011 election.

1.3.3 Syriac Christians as agents of the dominant discourse

Mardin has the largest Syriac population in Turkey. The Syriac Christians of Mardin live in the centres of Mardin and Midyat, and some villages of the city. Today, the Syriac community represents not only the Syriac Orthodox Christians, but also the Armenian Catholic and Chaldean residents of Mardin[22].

[20] This point was raised by some Arab participants as well.
[21] The BDP has been in relation with the PKK. The recent relations between the Kurds and Syriacs of Mardin will be discussed in Chapter 6.
[22] The Armenian Catholics and Chaldeans attend the Sunday ceremony of the Syriac Orthodox Christians. In 2011, the Mardinite Chaldeans re-opened their church in the capital of Mardin, but they continue performing the Sunday ceremonies with the Syriac Orthodox residents. According to the 1928 census, the population of Chaldeans in the capital of Mardin was 304 (Deveci Bozkuş, 2012). This religious group left Mardin for Istanbul and other countries such as Iraq, France, India and the US in the first decades of the Republic. Economic and political instability were the major reasons for the Chaldeans leaving. Today, only two Chaldean families live in

Since there is no official census for the different religions in Turkey, it is not possible to give the exact number of Syriacs in Mardin[23]. According to Gabriyel Akyüz, the priest of the Kırklar Church, 50 Syriac families live in the capital of Mardin today. As suggested by a Syriac *melfono*, teacher, in Midyat, there are approximately 100 Syriac families in the capital of the district. In addition to the permanent residents, the diaspora Syriacs should also be considered, for they have started visiting the city regularly in recent years. Thus, the population of Syriacs in the city is doubled by their visits during the summer months. Alongside this unstable population of Mardinite Syriacs, some diaspora Syriacs have returned their villages and built new houses in a modern style.

Many Syriac Christians in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat are either silversmiths or goldsmiths. While the urban Syriacs earn income from trade, the rural Syriac dwellers' income depends on agriculture and stockbreeding. Even though the population of Syriacs in Mardin has dramatically dropped through migration over an 80 year period, they have been able to protect their position in the trade life of the city[24]. In recent years, however, the Muslim residents have been able to open silversmith shops in trade places of Mardin and Midyat because of changes in the market system, which no longer requires accreditation to be a craftsman.

Findings from the fieldwork suggest that the priests of the Syriac community tend to see all Syriacs as pious Christians. However, it was observed that many young Syriacs and other

Mardin, as stated by Gabriyel Akyüz, the priest of the Kırklar Church. For more information about Chaldeans see Albayrak (1997).

[23] Ozcosar (2008) states the population of the Syriac Orthodox residents of Mardin in 1840 was approximately 64,000. This number included urban and rural dwellers.

[24] The Christian craftsmen of Mardin did not accept Muslim children as apprentices. This attitude appeared to maintain the distribution of income based on ethnicity until the 2000s. The Mardinite Muslims could not learn how to make the local jewellery from the Syriacs, but in recent years workplaces were opened by the local government of Mardin.

Christians did not attend the ceremonies held in the Kırklar Church in Mardin's capital[25]. Some Christian participants expressed that they do not attend the Sunday ceremony every week, especially when the ceremony is performed in a village church[26]. Moreover, some Syriacs articulated that religion should remain in their private life and being Syriac does not mean they have to be a devout person.

In the representation of Mardin, the Syriac Christians are often used as authentic figures of its cultural and religious diversity and as examples of tolerance because of their continuous existence in the local context. Their religious symbols, especially churches, monasteries, their priest, Gabriyel Akyüz, and their *Metropolitan* (Bishop), Saliba Özmen, have been pictured on films that promote the city. Adopting the dominant discourse of the State, some Syriacs asserted they are the producers of Mardin's culture because they have been the craftsmen of the city. Some furthered their claims, saying they are the only group that has carried and reproduced the material culture of Mardin. This misapprehension of the Syriac community was supported by some Muslim residents. These Mardinites believed the Syriac community has been a part of the Mardinite elites who have lived in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat, even though the majority of the Syriac community lived in the hinterland of Mardin.

Saliba Özmen and Gabriyel Akyüz claim the Syriac people have not been eager to take a place in political matters because of their religious beliefs. In contrast to their articulation, the Ottoman records show that a few Syriac Christians were in the local government of Mardin. Additionally, the rural Syriac inhabitants had tribal affiliations and collaborated with the

[25] In the village of Anitli, the researcher of this study observed that young Syriacs of the village were present in the church and attended the evening prayer.
[26] As stated by Gabriyel Akyuz, the Syriac community performs the Sunday ceremony in a different church almost every week to prevent their churches from being closed.

powerful confederations of Kurdish and Arabic tribes (Özcoşar, 2008). After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, however, the Syriac community could protect neither its position in the bureaucratic life of the city nor in the tribal organisation of the rural areas. This does not mean they completely lost their effectiveness in the political life of the city since they have had a representative on the city council of Mardin.

It is obvious that the Syriac Christians do not want to be involved in any sort of political matters that can create a tension between their community and the Turkish State. Instead, they have improved their relations with the Arabs at the local level and with the Turkish at the national level. This strategy can be seen in their preference for speaking Arabic and Turkish instead of their native language, Syriac which is a dialect of Aramaic. The Syriacs of Midyat, on the other hand, have resisted protecting their powerful social status in the capital of the district using their own language as well as Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish. The Midyatite Syriac Christians stated they are different from the Syriacs of Mardin's capital as they have protected their language and resisted being Arabicised. That Syriacs in Midyat are more politicised than those of Mardin's capital was also observed in the field when the researcher of this study attempted to interview the religious people of Midyat.

The Syriac Christians who were born in Mardin or Midyat and immigrated to other countries have been very effective in the internal matters of the Syriac community and their relations with other communities. The return of these Syriacs to the local context has had a significant impact upon their communities' approaches to the position of their religion in their lives and to the expression of their ethnic identities. The diaspora Syriacs have organised their fellow

community members in Midyat and changed their understanding about their collective memory (see Chapter 6).

1.3.4 The Ezidis as a marginal community of Mardin

The Ezidis[27] is a distinct religious community. Ezidism, the religious beliefs of this community, is known as a 'secret religion', for the Ezidis believe they should not reveal their religious beliefs to others[28]. 'Many Ezidis believe that (Y)Ezidism is the most ancient Middle Eastern religion, one whose origins are lost in antiquity' (Açıkyıldız, 2010, p. 35). This helps in understanding why there is much speculation about the Ezidis, who believe Adi' b. Musafir established this religious system in the valley of Lalish in Iraq a very long time ago (Guest, 1987).

The Ezidis are known as devil worshippers or worshippers of Satan by their Muslim and Christian neighbours. In fact, they have a very different religious system from Abrahamic religions. Even though the Ezidis believe in one God, Yazda (which is derived from the Old Iranian yazata (modern Persian īzed or yazdān)), they worship many yazatas, the most important being Malak Ṭawus, which 'stands on candelabra in the Yezidis' main sanctuary in Lalish (northeast of Mosul, Iraq, in the Shaikhan district, near the Sinjār Mountains and west of their central area)' (Brill Online, 2011). There is a pilgrimage every year in September in Lalish. This pilgrimage is named after Adi' b. Musafir, who is buried there, a sufi whom the Ezidis revere as a great saint because Malak Ṭawus or Yezid reappeared in him (Brill Online,

[27] In general, the terms Yezidi or Yazidi are used to identify this group. However, they call themselves Ezidi, Izid or Izdi (Açıkyıldız, 2010). Considering their choice, this research prefers the term Ezidi.
[28] For this reason, they did not let the researcher investigate their sacred texts for a long time. The Ezidis have two sacred texts: Mishef-a Resh (the Black Book) and Kiteb el-Cilwe (the Book of the Revelation). For further information see (Açıkyıldız, 2010)) .

2011). The figure of Malak Tawus,29 Angel Peacock, has a place in the core of this religious system. The Ezidis highly respect this angel, Satan, because of its role in the creation of the world (Taşğın, 2005). For this reason, they abstain from using pejorative words to identify this angel.

Ezidism includes many syncretic religious practices that are most probably taken by neighbouring religious traditions.

> The Yezidis continue the syncretism of antiquity. In addition to their old Iranian or Zoroastrian legacy, we see among them a mixture of popular beliefs (burial customs, dream oracles, dances), Jewish features (Dietary Laws), Christian (mostly Nestorian) features (a kind of Eucharist, church weddings, the drinking of wine, infant baptism), Gnostic elements (the transmigration of souls), and Islamic features (the principle of possessing a book, with a "Book of Revelation" and a "Black Book," as well as the veneration of sufi-sheikhs, circumcision, fasting, sacrifice, pilgrimages, and burial inscriptions) (Brill Online, 2011).

Also, there are similarities between Ezidis and other marginalised communities, Al-Haqq, Alawis, Shamsies, Arab Nusayris and Druze, in northern Mesopotamia[30]. For instance, Ezidis pray standing against the Sun at sunrise and sunset in Mardin. This practice may come from the Shamsies who lived in the same region with the Ezidis. Because of its syncretic components and secrecy, it is hard to fully understand this religious tradition. However, the Ezidis in diaspora have established networks on the internet that reveal different aspects of Ezidisim over the last decades (Langer, 2010).

[29] For more information see (Asatrian & Arakelova, 2003).
[30] For further information about the shared features between these groups see Langer (2010) and Arakelova (2004).

Today, this religious community lives in Iraq, south-east Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Syria and recently in some European countries, though mostly in Germany (Açıkyıldız, 2010; Guest, 1987; Lescot, 2001; Yalkut, 2006). The district of Viranşehir has the largest Ezidi population in Turkey. The Ezidis of Turkey lived in the cities of Urfa, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Batman, Kars, Erzurum, Tunceli, Hakkari ve Antep in the past; nowadays only Mardin, Urfa, Diyarbakır and Batman have a small Ezidi population. Mardin has a very small Ezidi population in its hinterland, mostly in a few villages of Midyat and Nusaybin. Today, all the Mardinite Ezidis earn income from agriculture and stockbreeding. In addition, the Ezidi community is financially supported by their family members in diaspora.

The smallest religious community, the Ezidis, have remained marginal and an underclass in the hierarchy of Mardin society. It is hard to give an accurate number of the Ezidi population; however, in Mardin an estimate would be a little more than 100 in total[31]. Like the Syriacs, the Ezidi community has a changeable population as, in the summer months, Ezidis from European countries are regular visitors to the city. There is no evidence that shows their existence in the capital of Mardin; however, some participants indicated a few Ezidi families had lived in the centre of Midyat and a famous musician Ezidi family lived in the centre of Nusaybin, a district of Mardin. Nonetheless, the Ezidis share a context with their Muslim and Christian neighbours in the villages of Mardin. Also, they still encounter other religious groups in the *bazaar* of Midyat when they are present to buy or sell a product. Since their situation in a Muslim-Christian context highlights issues of inclusion and exclusion, this

[31] The number of this group in the total population in the Ottoman period was also not known because they hid from officials who wanted to record them as tax payers. Cuinet, a voyager who visited the city in the 19th century, gave an estimated population. According to him, Mardin had 1,500 Ezidis in total (see Özcoşar (2008)). However, this number is not likely to be exact for this religious community since many Ezidis sheltered in the mountains.

group will be considered in analysing the fact of engagement in the case of Mardin, which is unique in terms of having Ezidi, Muslim and Christian populations living together.

While members of other groups have been labelled as either urban (*bajari*) or rural (*gundi*), all Ezidis have been placed in the category of rural. There are a number of reasons for the isolation of the Ezidis from the urban space of the city. The leading one is that they are a closed group who are not eager to intermingle with others[32]. However, they developed close relations with Kurdish tribes for security and protection. Secondly, most Ezidis were not educated due to the strict rules of their religious caste system[33]. In this system, only one group, sheikhs, are allowed to be educated (Lescot, 2001). Also, they did not officially exist within the wider community until the late 19th century. The Ottoman State did not recognise the Ezidis as a separate religious community, but recorded them as a deviant sect of Islam (Aydın et al., 2001). Because of this understanding, their religious identity was not recognised until *Tanzimat*, the political reforms made by the Ottoman State in 1839 (Aydın et al., 2001). However, the situation of the Ezidis remained the same in the period of the Turkish Republic and they were not accepted as a religious or ethnic group. Even today, the classification of their religion on their identification cards is marked and symbolised with the letter 'x', unknown or dot (.)[34]. These symbols reveal the uncertain situation of the Ezidis in the national context of the Turkish Republic, even though they are an inseparable component of Mardin's culture. As a result, their ambiguous situation in society has clearly led to many misunderstandings about this community among the residents of Mardin.

[32] Their two sacred books could not be examined by the researchers until the Ezidis in Germany let other people read these texts.
[33] Today the young Ezidis attend the official school of the Turkish Republic.
[34] According to two elderly Ezidi participants, their religion was written on their identification cards before the 12 September 1980 military coup.

The Ezidis migrated together with the Armenian inhabitants of eastern Anatolia to Armenia after 1915 (Gökçen, 2010). Later, the Ezidis gradually immigrated to European countries from the 1980s to the 2000s. This flow of migration continued until 300-400 Ezidis remained in Turkey. The main reason of their migration from Mardin was the conflicts between the State and the PKK, and gradually the emigrated group convinced others from their families and relatives to move out of Mardin. Thus, many Ezidis left Turkey for a more comfortable life in Germany.

Even though many Ezidi villages were ruined after their departure, the Ezidi cemeteries have been well-kept because the elderly Ezidis in European countries, mostly in Germany, want to be buried in the cemetery of their villages in Mardin. Another aspect of some Ezidi villages is that they have the picture of Jesus or some other Christian symbols on the walls of houses. This is because the elderly Ezidis, after their community members left Mardin, came together and settled in Syriac villages, which were empty because of the departure of residents in the 1970s and the 1980s (Gökçen, 2010).

In recent years, the ethnic origin of the Ezidis has become a prominent issue. This is because the Kurdish nationalists accept this community as their relatives. Since the Ezidis of Turkey are Kurdish speakers, the Arabs and Syriacs of Mardin believe the Ezidis are Kurdish. This might also be because they have mostly shared a social setting with the Kurdish tribes within Mardin. For example, *Şerkiyan* and *Dinnan* are two tribes in Mardin that belonged to the confederation of the Kurdish tribes (Özcoşar, 2009). However, not all Ezidis accept this ethnic identification. The Ezidis of Baghdad persistently claim they are not Kurd because they

are Arabic speakers. Moreover, Gökçen (2010) states they never answer questions asked in Kurdish even if they speak the language very well.

The discussion on the ethnic origin of the Ezidis seems to divide their community in diaspora into two groups, especially in Germany. Some believe they are Kurds, while others insist on being seen as only a religious community. Those who highlight their ethnic identity have some associations in Europe that have connections with the PKK (Yalkut, 2006). Despite the debates on their ethnic origin, the later Ezidis continue to identify themselves by their religious identity and ignore the statements of the Kurdish nationalists who assert the Muslim Kurds were the adherents of Ezidism in the past. As with the Syriacs in diaspora, the Ezidis in Europe continue to visit Mardin and financially support their community. However, they do not seem to be as effective, in respect of their local community, as the diaspora Syriacs.

CHAPTER 2

SHARING CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews social and political discussions related to sharing cultural and religious diversity within a social context. To identify the multicultural experience in Turkey, multicultural and intercultural theories are examined. Later, some outcomes of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism are highlighted. In doing so, the chapter indicates that religion is considered a contributing factor in intercultural relations; however, it is not a primary subject in the main discussions of these theories. Similarly, the significance of religion has been underlined in the articulation of multiculturalism in Turkey, but the contribution of religion in intercultural relations is still undetermined.

Analysing the main streams of sharing cultural and religious diversity provides an outlook to examine the case of Mardin, which is a subject for the multiculturality of Turkey. Religion appears a vital factor in promoting harmony in Mardin society. However, this discourse remains very ambiguous because of the policies of the Turkish State toward religious beliefs and practices. After examining the theories in relation to sharing cultural and religious diversity, the chapter summarises some postgraduate works and academic sources on Mardin's society, history and culture to indicate that the role of religion in the social and cultural interaction of Mardinites has not been fully investigated.

To identify the position of Mardin's context in recent debates on cultural and religious diversity and to show the limitations of the discursive multiculturalism of the Turkish State in analysing the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites, the following section introduces

some recent theoretical debates on sharing diversity in a national context, after indicating a new paradigm that celebrates cultural and religious differences.

2.2 Celebrating cultural and religious diversity

In the major paradigms of the 19th century, sociological and anthropological approaches were mainly shaped by an understanding that classifies differences between people, cultures, religions, traditions or customs, and labels them either modern or pre-modern/savage. In a very broad sense, the underlying reason for these struggles was to understand the differences of non-Western societies, positioning them at previous stages that Western societies had already experienced. For this reason, the differences between Western and non-Western societies or religions and cultures were seen as challenging by social scientists of the 19th century.

In this historical stage, many third world countries became colonies of European states; as a result, their social contexts were transformed by the actions and policies of the occupying country. Unexpectedly, people from Western colonies entered into the contexts of the ruling countries as immigrants in the 20th century and their entrance has had continuing impacts upon those social contexts. Therefore, many Western societies have, in turn, experienced a new kind of diversification with the influx of immigrants from non-Western societies. The existence of 'new immigrants' in the context of the receiving countries has brought with it many problems, such as assimilation, integration, minority rights and cultural or religious representations.

To deal with social and political problems related to their immigrant groups, Western nation-states have taken many steps in their policies. In the new millennium, differences have been more glorified; therefore, the struggles for understanding the other people, culture or religion, instead of classifying them ‘pre-modern or savage’ have become more desirable. As a part of this development, seeking ways to establish dialogue between cultures or religions have been on the agenda of policymakers, activists and academics. One example of this new paradigm was the selection of 2008 as the European year of intercultural dialogue. In addition, the emergence of intercultural or inter-faith/religious centres can be seen as evidence for the celebration of differences and appreciation of the 'other'. Moreover, ‘topics such as culture, identity, religious faith which used to be subordinate to political and military strategy now define priorities on the international political agenda’ (Beck, 2004, p. 432).

After the limits/problems of modernism, which desires similarity between people, cultures or contexts, accepting differences has become a motto of policymakers, academics and even ordinary citizens. Within this paradigm shift, it is clear that rapid diversification has been an inescapable factor for today’s nation-states. This shift has seen the end of the modernist era, which resulted in globalisation and, thus transformed many localities. For this reason, some scholars, including Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, have contributed to the birth of postmodernism, which accepts the differences eroded by modernism. The debates between the advocators of modernism and postmodernism have not ended, but acceptance of the other and their differences in the context of Western societies has become a key political subject. Therefore, ‘[we] have come to such a point in the moral history of the world that we are obliged to think about such diversity rather differently than we have been used to thinking about it’ (Geertz, 1986, p. 272). Using ‘second modernity’ instead of postmodernity, Beck

(1992) offers realistic cosmopolitanism as a response to the fundamental question of the present historical phase: 'How ought societies to handle "otherness" and "boundaries" during the present crisis of global interdependency?' (Beck, 2004, p. 430).

In the first half of the 20th century, the nation-building processes of states were criticised because they did not give much space for ethno-religious differences in their national contexts. By the turn of the 21st century, nation-states were forced to deal with rapid social, economic and demographic changes in their societies. Therefore, it has become an obligation for states to protect their cultural and religious differences through the promotion of dialogue between their diverse ethno-religious groups. An aspect of these recent changes has been issues relating to the co-existence of differences, which has taken a key position in the international agenda.

1.3.5 Sharing diversity within a context

Many Western societies have experienced a new kind of diversification in their contexts, which is the result of a set of local, national and transnational developments. The management of this diversity at all levels of society has become a prominent matter for nation-states since it requires establishing good relations between communities from different backgrounds and promoting active governance of difference by the state and its agents. 'Along with the promotion of toleration and engagement between communities, it also requires clear policies of integration and the construction of a sense of common ground across differences' (Nye, 2007, p. 118).

Western societies have had to confront post-migration ethnic diversity. Migration influxes for more than a hundred years are the main reason of this recent 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Since it requires a set of political and social arrangements, migration, which means population exchanges between nation-states, is extremely undesirable while mobility, which refers to population flows within nation-states, is highly desirable (Beck, 2000). This is also because cultural diversity can lead to cultural conflict within a society, particularly in a context where such diversity also involves differences of power, income, wealth, education and access to resources (Hesse, 2000). In relation to this diversity, particularly in Western Europe and North America, many of the contemporary debates deal with how common ground can be found and developed between people who have different languages, identities, dress codes and values (Nye, 2007). As a result, a few theories or ways of thinking have been offered to overcome the problems of this recent development.

1.3.5.1 Multiculturalism and interculturalism as responses to the diversification of national context

One of the key responses to recent super-diversity experienced by Western nation-states has been multiculturalism, in terms of promoting a state policy that is accepted by some European countries, the US, Canada and Australia, and a way of thinking that emerged in countries like Canada and Australia in the 1960s and 1970s as an application of 'liberal values' to extend individual freedoms and substantiate the promise of equal citizenship. In Britain and the US, on the other hand, this policy was initially limited to the field of education. Still, education has clearly become a very significant place for the development of multicultural debates. As Nye (2007, p. 119) states, this is because 'the implementation of governance and state management requires an education system that positively contributes to all sectors of society'.

According to Hall (2000), the term multicultural when used adjectivally 'describes the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining some of their 'original' identity' (p. 209). As a noun, he sees, multiculturalism as describing 'the strategies and policies adopted to govern and manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throw up' (Hall, 2000, p. 209).

As a policy and a new concept relating to social order, multiculturalism has been linked with the demographic changes that have happened, especially in Western societies (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Therefore, the discussions on multiculturalism have been mostly associated with the immigration experiences of Western nation-states. The entrance of diverse groups into Western contexts prompted a set of changes in public policy that are the response of policymakers with various strategies for diversity management (Vertovec, 2007). Through the establishment of community associations and places of worship, well-organised communities have taken a key role in this development. As is seen, there is an inseparable link between the fact of migration and debates on multiculturalism in terms of policy and public understanding.

Multiculturalist responses to a new type of cultural diversity in Western contexts have developed along with the rapid and unavoidable changes in the 20th century through globalisation, fast technological changes, the rapid spread of ideas and new media at the same time as immigration influxes. Multicultural studies focus on these changes to govern differences in a society, promote harmonious relations between different groups and analyse how this rapid diversification should be perceived by the states. In this sense, there is a common use of multiculturalism to summarise a state of social organisation or a particular

social context. Used in this way, ‘multiculturalism describes a context where there is some level of perceived or recognised diversity’ (Nye, 2007, p. 112). To manage and govern multicultural contexts composed of diverse groups and communities, today’s nation-states have to ensure respect for differences across society as well as a sense of common ground. This is a necessity not only for ‘minority or migrant groups, but also for majority groups; therefore, multiculturalism is always an issue for the whole of society’ (Nye, 2007, p. 110).

There is no agreement about the definition of multiculturalism. In fact, the term has had different implications and meanings depending on its social, political and disciplinary location. Also, there is a dilemma in the usage of the word multiculturalism since the fact of pluralism or diversity in any given context, and a moral stance that cultural diversity is a desirable feature of a given context, have been identified as multicultural experiences (Meer & Modood, 2011) . Considering this dilemma, Parekh (2006) asserts that multiculturalism can be seen ‘neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor as a philosophical theory of man and the world, but as perspective on human life’. Similarly, Nye (2007, p. 109) suggests that multiculturalism should be seen not only as an ideology or a social programme, but also a term that refers to ‘the complex range of issues associated with cultural and religious diversity in society, and the social management of the challenges and opportunities such diversity offers’.

However, the claims of post-migration groups have directed the dominant meaning of multiculturalism in politics (Meer & Modood, 2011). The essential issues that multiculturalism seeks to address are the rights of ethnic and national minorities, group representation, and the political claims-making of new social movements, which are also the

problem of political theory and practice (Kelly, 2002). It can be said that the overall goal of multicultural policies is the promotion of tolerance and respect for collective identities (Vertovec, 2007). As a result, nation-states have supported community associations and their cultural activities that, at the same time, enable states to monitor diversity in the workplace, encourage positive images in the media and other public spaces, and modify public services in order to accommodate 'culture-based differences of value, language and social practice' (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1039).

In general terms, multiculturalism is understood as the recognition of different cultures or cultural identities in a multi-ethnic society. According to the European Commission's report, a *multiethnic* or *multicultural* society refers to 'two or more sub-populations maintaining different cultures [that] are populous and concentrated enough to form and institutionalise multi-generational cultural communities, which maintain cultural identities of their own but does not prevent interaction' (Wiesand, Heiskanen, Mitchell, Cliche, & Fischer, 2008, pp. 13-14).

For Charles Taylor (1994), the main interest of 20th century multiculturalism is the demand for recognition of cultural identity. Focusing on the 18th and 19th century shifts in European elite thinking, he explores this agenda and concludes that multiculturalism is related to the problem of recognition. He believes people need others in order to be recognised and for constructing their identities. He states:

> In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition... This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of

> understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression… We define our identity always in a dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us … my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others (pp. 32-34).

In the same manner, Parekh (2006) states:

> Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment. The value of other cultures is independent of whether or not they are options for us (p. 167).

The emphasis on identity and difference seems to have framed the theoretical structure of discussions around multiculturalism (Goldberg, 1994, p. 12). According to Fay (1996), 'identity and difference' form basic categories of multicultural analysis because they are not antagonistic categories. They are mutually necessary for each other and dialectically interrelated, epistemologically and ontologically. For self-understanding, it is necessary to understand the other. To be an x (a male or a Muslim) is precisely not to be a y (a female) or z (a Christian). 'Only through interaction with others do I learn what is distinctive and characteristic about myself' (p. 229).

In particular, self-awareness requires the presence of and interaction with others. The need for recognition arises out of relations with others. This means we are necessarily connected to others as persons. Every person, 'self', lives in a social world that has a common system of symbols and patterns of interaction that let people recognise and respond to each other

because ‘the self is an essentially social entity’ (Fay, 1996, p. 47). Therefore, human agents need others for recognition in the social order, but this is not enough to bring all components of culture together or establish the engagement of cultural structures. Even though recognition would be a step to a multicultural or multi-ethnic context, it does not represent the whole picture, because it does not address how cultural differences are protected. In Taylor’s (1999) analysis, this approach simplifies the issue of culture while it complicates the issue of recognition. In simple terms, multiculturalism as a recognition of cultural identity does not clarify the inter-relation of a person’s multi-identities or the relationship between local, national and international structures related to immigration phenomena.

The problem of recognition leads to social and political rights of diverse groups in a national context. Due to significant flows of transnational migrants, nation-states have temporary residents; a number of these have become citizens of the country in which they have settled and others may have a settled status, but have not taken up full citizenship (Nye, 2007). There is also distinction between those who have full citizenship. As Atıkcan (2006) states, the term denizens is used to describe a group whose members are no longer ‘regular foreign citizens,’ but are also ‘not naturalised citizens of the host state’, and thus are ‘foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status in the host state’ (p. 7). Therefore, ‘denizens enjoy almost full social, economic and civil citizenship rights whereas they only have limited access to political rights’ (p.7). Still, conceptions of citizenship can frequently ignore the sensibilities of minorities, which can be embedded in their social, cultural and political differences (May, Modood, & Squires, 2004). For this reason, socio-political hierarchy between the residents of the states is certainly the case that many major urban centres deal with as a predominant issue of multiculturalism.

In addition to political recognition, multiculturalism tends to overcome the problem of assimilation, which threatens diverse religious and cultural identities in a national context, willing to absorb them into the national identity. Although the main intention of multiculturalism is to promote the co-existence of differences rejecting assimilation, there are many suspicions about its responses for the protection of different identities that are in relation with a national identity. One of its offers, an alternative analogy, is a mixed salad, instead of the metaphor of melting pot (Hirschman, 1983), and a cultural or ethnic mosaic is used in Canada (Kymlicka, 1995). These analogies stress that the integration of many different cultures should be seen like salad ingredients or mosaic pieces that do not merge into a single homogeneous culture. However, these metaphors are still problematic, for they have limitations because they assume 'a static, merely oppositional conception of the relation of self and other' in much the same way as the analogy of melting pot (Fay, 1996, p. 233). In addition, multiculturalism shares the same schematic conception of society and does not confront the issues of assimilationism in terms of majority and minority (Council of Europe, 2008). Moreover, multiculturalist theories seem to have failed to deal with difference and sameness together; for example, liberal multiculturalism stresses sameness while pluralist multiculturalism, which has become the mainstream articulation of multiculturalism, emphasises difference (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997).

Yet, there are criticisms about its arguments for the active government of super-diversity because it has been selective in dealing with differences in context. Multicultural debates seem to have largely ignored some groups, such as women and sexual minorities, despite claiming to deal with all groups marked by 'difference' (Young, 1990). Moreover, multiculturalism has been questioned for fostering 'communal segregation and mutual

incomprehension', as well as contributing to 'the undermining of the rights of individuals within minority communities' (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 19). The position of religion in multiculturalist approaches is controversial since they sometimes overemphasise its role in a multicultural scene (Baumann, 1999) or miss its significance as a social factor that is strongly related to culture (Dawson, 1948). This point clearly refers to a secularist bias that favours ethnicity and problematises religion.

There is a need for a stable multicultural society to develop a common sense of belonging among its citizens and Parekh (2006) argues 'the sense of belonging cannot be ethnic or based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics, for a multicultural society is too diverse for that, but political in nature and based on a shared commitment to the political community' (p. 341). A society may be multicultural even if differences are not recognised, but this recognition can be an important basis for dealing with and managing differences. This obviously involves a need for gaining knowledge about others' differences in a multicultural context (Fopp, 2008). However, this need should be supported by toleration, because it may lead to negative consequences, such as social distance, even if toleration has positive and negative implications. Since toleration of diversity is of great importance in a multicultural context, there must be mutual tolerance between minority and majority groups to achieve successful cultural engagement. Beyond the toleration of difference, there must also be a further step involving engagement across differences. This process, the recognition of the other, the toleration of difference and engagement, is described by some scholars as critical multiculturalism (Baumann, 1999; Goldberg, 1994; Turner, 1993).

> there must be engagement between groups and individuals, across the cultures, religions and values that separate them, and that engagement must be based on knowledge of each

> other, tolerance and mutual respect for the differences, along with acknowledgement of some common group to which all belong (Nye, 2007, p. 114).

In terms of recognition, the relation between nationalism and multiculturalism should be considered. The strategy of multiculturalism for dealing with 'otherness' results in a contradiction, even though it locates respect for cultural difference within a national context, for national homogeneity is required and challenged (Hedetoft, 2003). According to Beck (2004), multiculturalism is trapped in the epistemology of nationhood and its tendency toward essentialist definitions of identity. For this reason, it celebrates 'diversity among identities lacking in ambivalence, complexity, or contingency' (p. 446). Reproducing nationalism *internally*, multiculturalism views groups that the nation would assimilate as nationalities themselves. For multiculturalists, 'individuals are epiphenomenal, conceived as members of territorial, ethnic, and political units, which then engage in 'dialogue' with one another 'across frontiers'' (Beck, 2004, p. 447).

As articulated by Keith (2005), it seems 'the cities of the 21st century will increasingly be characterised by the challenges of multiculturalism' (p. 1). Apparently, multiculturalism as an ideal tends to bring people to an equal level in socio-political life; however, it fails to address the rights of individuals and the recognition of cultural diversity at the same time. In dealing with the problems of multiculturalism, some scholars propose the concept of 'interculturalism,' which intends to incorporate the best sides of multiculturalism and assimilationism. Including recognition of cultural diversity and focus on the individual, it aims to establish dialogue on the basis of equal dignity and shared values in order to promote integration and social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2008).

The idea of interculturalism has more commonly featured in some European countries, especially in Dutch and German accounts of integration in addition to Spanish and Greek discussions of migrant diversity in the area of education (Meer & Modood, 2011). It seems this approach has been supported by the European Union, expressing the need for dialogue between people and cultures. Interculturalism tends to accept the differences in a society and seeks ways to open shared areas for different identities. As a philosophy, it proposes it is necessary to practice dialogue between cultures and reflect upon it to build individuals' identity within difference (Ibanez & Saenz, 2006) on the basis that cultures are 'dynamic identities which are constituted while opening themselves differently to difference' (p. 15).

There is a close connection between the concept of interculturalism and the related idea of intercultural dialogue (Emerson et al., 2011; Gagnon & Iacovino, 2006; Gundara, 2000; Gundara & Jacobs, 2000; Ibanez & Saenz, 2006; Kohls & Knight, 1994; Kymlicka, 2003; Powell & Sze, 2004), and this is clearly raised in the reports of the European Commission.

> *Interculturalism* arises via dialogue between two or more culturally different sides and could be considered as a political end achieved through the creation of a shared space. This does not arise organically of its own accord, but is the product of a conversation involving two or more and is created out of a genuine interaction of varied cultural elements resulting in new terms of engagement (Wiesand et al., 2008, p. 10).

A prominent symbolic example of this connection between interculturalism and intercultural dialogue is the designation of 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue by the European Commission. The objective of this designation was to encourage all ethno-religious groups living in Europe to explore the benefits of their rich cultural heritage and the opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions. As Smith (2004) characterises, the

models of inter-religious dialogue based on the North American context also encourage religious groups to focus on commonalities, in a way that seeks to eschew differences in order to elevate mutuality and sharing.

Considering the multi-directional manner of culture, interculturalim is understood as an interactive and dynamic cultural exchange in contrast to multiculturalism.

> Multiculturalism tends to preserve a cultural heritage, while interculturalism acknowledges and enables cultures to have currency, to be exchanged, to circulate, to be modified and evolve (Powell & Sze, 2004).
>
> Multiculturalism (like assimilationism) is understood as a specific policy approach, whereas the terms of cultural diversity and multiculturality denote the empirical fact that different cultures exist and may interact within a given space and social organisation (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 11)

While some scholars treat interculturalism as a new theory or way of thinking, there is a tendency to see interculturalism as complementary to multiculturalism among the multiculturalist scholars, as indicated by Meer and Modood (2011); for instance, Lentin (2005) suggests interculturalism is an updated version of multiculturalism. However, Meer and Modood (2011) assert 'multiculturalism presently surpasses interculturalism as a political orientation that is able to recognise that social life consists of individuals and groups, and that both need to be provided for in the formal and informal distribution of powers, as well as reflected in an ethical conception of citizenship, and not just an instrumental one' (p. 118).

Nonetheless, a multicultural context refers to a situation where people from different ethno-religious backgrounds can live together without interacting with each other and still

demanding equality. An intercultural paradigm, on the other hand, demands interaction between diverse communities and people to evoke ideas of peace and solidarity. 'The prefix 'inter' of the term highlights the connection rather than opting for the term 'multi' which indicates multiplicity, without any reference to the interconnection between the different parts' (Silvestri, 2007). According to its advocators, interculturalism not only accepts the differences, but also focuses on the interconnections between them.

Wood, Landry, and Bloomfield (2006) assert that communication is the defining characteristic of interculturalism and the central means through which 'an intercultural approach aims to facilitate dialogue, exchange and reciprocal understanding between people of different backgrounds' (p. 9). Behind multiculturalism is the belief in tolerance between cultures, but this does not mean 'multicultural places are open places. Interculturalism, on the other hand, requires openness as a prerequisite and, while openness in itself is not the guarantee of interculturalism, it provides the setting for interculturalism to develop' (p. 7). However, Meer and Modood (2011) disagree with placing dialogue and communication at the centre of interculturalism, claiming these notions are also essential to multiculturalism, whether at a philosophical or political level.

Unlike multicultural concerns, an intercultural approach seems to demand that culture and religion protect differences. This theory requires the *dialogue* of different components in a cultural text. From the perspective of this approach, *intercultural dialogue* is 'a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect' (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 17). It also is a political

strategy or instrument to promote cultural diversity or foster social cohesion (Wiesand et al., 2008). The central goal of interculturalism, then, is to establish dialogue between cultures, groups or individuals.

An interculturalist approach seems more concerned than multiculturalist approaches to discuss the role of religion in cultural interaction since it highlights its importance to intercultural dialogue, as indicated in the report of Council of Europe (2008). For this reason, interculturalism seems to have the potential to support religion as 'a social fact' and benefit from it to establish social cohesion. However, the role of religion in the engagement of diverse cultural components is still ambiguous and needs to be further discussed, because the emphasis on culture is too dominant to see its importance in intercultural engagement.

Finally, intercultural dialogue can be seen as 'a mechanism to constantly achieve a new identity balance, responding to new openings and experiences and adding new layers to identity without relinquishing one's roots' (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 18). Therefore, interculturalism can support new approaches for the co-existence of difference in respect of the dialogue and engagement of cultures, and be a focus on the relationship between self and other.

While multiculturalism specifically focuses on the relations between host countries and their immigrant groups, interculturalism attempts to promote interactions between the minority groups of a nation-state and their relations within the national context. However, both multiculturalism and interculturalism have mainly considered the experiences of Western societies and ignored the relations of immigrants with their native country and communities.

These transnational linkages at national and local levels have led to other theoretical discussions involving cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, which broadens an analysis of diversity and identity.

1.3.5.2 Cosmopolitanism and transnationalism as responses to established networks between nation-states

Another way of dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity in a social context is cosmopolitanism. It is a theoretical perspective that sees 'the shift in outlook from methodological nationalism to methodological cosmopolitanism' in social sciences (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 7). In a broad sense, cosmopolitanism means the recognition of otherness, external and internal, to any society. In a cosmopolitan society, 'differences are accepted without being ranged in a hierarchy or dissolved into universality' (Beck, 2004, p. 438).

Vertovec and Cohen (2002) view or invoke cosmopolitanism as:

> (a) a socio-cultural condition; (b) a kind of philosophy or world-view; (c) a political project towards building transnational institutions; (d) a political project for recognizing multiple identities; (e) an attitudinal or dispositional orientation; and/or (f) a mode of practice or competence (p. 9).

Realistic cosmopolitanism, as defined by Beck (2004), is not an attempt to envisage the end of nation-states. Rather it assumes 'nation-states will continue to thrive or will be transformed into transnational states' (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p. 4). To overcome the problems of ethnocentric nationalism and particularist multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism offers middle-path alternatives. For this reason, realistic cosmopolitanism can be seen as a summation or synthesis of universalism, relativism, nationalism and ethnicism (Beck, 2004). 'These

strategies for dealing with diversity do not exclude but actually presuppose one another; they are mutually correcting, limiting, and protecting' (p. 438). Some processes and conditions such as globalisation, nationalism, migration, multiculturalism and feminism, have reawakened cosmopolitanism, which asks two basic questions: 'Can we live peacefully with one another? What do we share, collectively, as human beings?' (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002, p. 1).

Focusing on social experience within the context of urban life (Sennett, 2002), cosmopolitanism is also concerned with transnational links between people, communities, cultures and states. In relation to cosmopolitan approaches, transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding contemporary migrant practices across the multi-disciplinary field of migration studies in recent years. An increasing number of researchers have developed keen interests in the transnational aspects of migrant phenomena (Levitt, 2001; Levitt, DeWind, & Vertovec, 2003; Portes, 2001). Research into the early sociology of migration in the 1920s-1930s has generally focussed on 'the integration or disintegration of migrants, ignoring their place of immigration' (Vertovec, 2001, p. 574). However, there is recent interest in migration studies that deal with 'the attachments migrants maintain to families, communities, traditions and causes outside the boundaries of the nation-state to which they have moved' (Vertovec, 2011, p. 574).

> While, a decade ago, disagreements about the frames for understanding (im)migrant experience where largely contained within the dominant models of bipolar landscapes and localized identities, they now focus much more widely on the relationship between these models and the alternative images of transnational social spaces and multi-local affiliations (Rouse, 1995, p. 355).

Today's links between people and societies are different from earlier forms, so the current transnational approach deals with the consequences of new forms. Because of the rapid development of travel and communication technologies, the migrant groups of Western societies have been able to re-construct and strengthen their relations with their native countries. In addition, shifting political and economic circumstances in sending and receiving countries have transformed the nature of contemporary transnationalism among migrants in recent years. 'These have affected a range of developments such as migrants' capacity for political organisation in relation to both sending and receiving contexts, sending countries' more positive views of their emigrants, and the impact of migrant remittances on local economies and labour markets' (Vertovec, 2011, p. 574).

With the help of cheaper and more efficient modes of communication and transportation, migrants have transnationally maintained their connections with their native countries, being both 'here' and 'there' (Vertovec, 2001). Therefore, these recent changes in immigrant experience enable talk about 'transnational communities'. Such types of migrant community, according to Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999), comprise:

> dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these network, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives, participants are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both (p. 812).

The transnational connections of immigrant groups have considerable impacts upon migrants' families and communities as well as the dual contexts in which they variably dwell (Vertovec, 2001).

> The money migrants send not only critically supports families, but may progressively rework gender relations, support education and the acquisition of professional skills and facilitate local community development through new health clinics, water systems, places of worship and sports facilities. Many migrant communities maintain intense linkages and exchanges between sending and receiving contexts including marriage alliances, religious activity, media and commodity consumption. As a result, transnational connections affect migrants as never before with regard to practices of construction, maintaining and negotiating collective identities (p. 575).

Therefore, transnational relations not only have economic and socio-cultural consequences, but also political impacts on the native and host countries because it requires re-questioning citizenship and homeland politics that led to the migration. Moreover, the functions of the nation-state have been tested by global flows and cross-border networks represented by the transnational migrant communities.

Literature on transnationalism generally underscores the fact that large numbers of people now live in the social worlds of two or more nation-states. Hannerz (1996), for instance, discusses people who live in diverse 'habitats of meaning' that are not territorially restricted. The experiences gathered in these multiple habitats accumulate to comprise people's cultural repertories, which in turn influence the construction of multiple identities. Each habitat or locality represents a range of identity-conditioning factors, including histories, local belonging or exclusion, and class or ethnic distinctions.

Multiple contexts, therefore, create a situation that is identified as 'translocality' (Appadurai, 1995). In these contexts, social identities are constructed, negotiated and reproduced through a complex set of conditions. 'These identities play out and position individuals in the course of their everyday lives within and across each of their places of attachment or perceived

belonging. Transnational(ised) identities may also, indeed, form the basis of homeland and receiving country-focused political engagement' (Vertovec, 2001). Through re-shaping local identities, transnational experiences lead to a more cosmopolitan sense of participation and belonging. According to Robins and Aksoy (2001), transnationalism presents possibilities of *unfixing* and new, cosmopolitan perspectives on culture and belonging.

The transnational flow of images, practices, discourses and perspectives can have profound effects on people's identities vis-à-vis local and global settings (Caglar, 2001; Golbert, 2001; Hansing, 2001). As Çağlar (2001) points out, people who embody transnationalism 'weave their collective identities out of multiple affiliations and positioning and link their cross-cutting belongings with complex attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, peoples, places and traditions beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-states' (p. 610).

Each form of migration in non-industrial societies has had an impact upon local communities and wider societies (Vertovec, 2007a).

> The diverse migration settings themselves, where modes of migrant transnationalism are negotiated within or alongside everyday interactions and cross-cutting ties between a number of groups – often other immigrants, remains seriously understudied (Vertovec, 2007, p. 966).

The first decade of the 21st century has seemingly witnessed rapid and significant development in the ways in which plural societies deal with a new kind of diversification. However, there has been an observable retreat in dealing with multicultural citizenship at the political level during the last decade (Brubaker, 2001; Joppke, 2004). Multiculturalism as a public policy has suffered considerable political damage; for instance, the argument of

multiculturalism in remaking of public identities in order to achieve an equality of citizenship, without being individualistic or demanding assimilation (Modood, 2005), has not been embraced as broadly as it once might have been. A number of competing political orientations have been included in the debates on multiculturalism to promote unity and recognise diversity at the same time.

What is unprecedented in the rapid diversification of a national context is that immigrant groups have maintained their identities, activities and connections with their communities in their native countries (Vertovec, 2007b). Transnational communities have stayed in contact with families, organisations and communities in their places of origin and elsewhere in the diaspora through use of changing technologies and reduced telecommunication and travel costs (Vertovec, 2004b). The transnational links between people or nation-states have been more visible by the increasing value of remittances sent from host countries, the growing capacity of international phone calls between the host and native countries (Vertovec, 2004a), the frequency of transnational marriage practices and the extent of engagement by various diasporas in the development of their respective homelands (Van Hear, Pieke, & Vertovec, 2004). Through these transnational links between immigrant communities, local and national structures have been substantially transformed.

1.3.6 Implications for this research

As previously discussed, the Turkish State has not had a multicultural policy. However, there is growing interest within Turkish academia to discuss multiculturalism to determine the state of its multi-ethnic and religious context. What is problematic in this interest is that

discussions on the multiculturality of Turkey are not based on theoretical premises. Rather, they are the reflections of multicultural approaches on Western societies.

The local context of Mardin has not experienced recent 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007); rather, it has lost its diversity because of out-migration. Its residents from different communities have immigrated to European countries and Australia. Besides, its ethnic and religious groups are not immigrants or denizens, but citizens of the Turkish Republic. The Mardinite groups, Muslim Kurds, Muslim Arabs, Syriac Christians and Ezidis, who are the subject of this thesis, are not recognised as minority groups, but identified as the citizens of Turkey. However, the Mardinites who immigrated to European countries have become transnational communities who have dual lives in the national context of a host country and the local context of Mardin. This is a consequence of the re-established connections of the Mardinites in Europe with their communities who still live in the city of Mardin, and with their 'homelands' by the help of recent national and international developments. For this reason, the issues that transnationalism deals with are significant to analyse the effects of the Mardinites in diaspora on the context of Mardin.

Mardin's multiculturality is not a recent phenomenon, but an outcome of the region in which it is located, and the long-term cultural interaction of its diverse communities. Therefore, the applicability of multicultural and intercultural approaches to the context of Mardin is controversial. However, the Turkish Government's attempts as a co-sponsor of the AoC and demands for being a member of the EU have linked the State with the intercultural approach promoted by the Council of Europe. On one hand, the government has supported the activities of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the national context. The Mardinites in diaspora,

on the other hand, have fostered discussions about ethnicity, minority rights, ethnic identity and the position of religion in their communities. As a result, the Turkish State has been forced to more clearly express its openness to ethnic and religious identities in the national context.

When the tendencies of theoretical debates about sharing diversity are examined, it can be seen that they mostly focus on the context of Western countries and their experiences. Therefore, the social settings of cities like Mardin, whose multiculturality was constructed historically, are different from those that are under academic investigations. Nevertheless, recent debates on religious and cultural diversity are of significance for identifying the discursive multiculturalism of the Turkish State, and to position the local context of Mardin as a counter example to the Western contexts. Also, a few concepts, such as recognition, transnational community, diaspora and tolerance that are derived from recent debates on diversity in a national context, are helpful in the analysis of intercultural engagement in Mardin.

The society of Mardin is in transition, and what makes the transition of this city important and interesting are the multiple variables that directly connect the local context to national and global contexts. This is the case when Mardin is analysed through the interrelationship of the certain variables, such as its history, governmentality, changing demographic profile, multi-faced social relations, multiple cultural faces, and its economic and political structures.

Finally, the usage of diverse components refers to agency and structure in the case of Mardin, aiming to see the interaction between the Mardinite groups and their ethno-religious

structures. Mutual interaction between people and cultures is an inseparable aspect of intercultural engagement, which is the main concept of this thesis. For this reason, it is significant to find out in which places interaction, and thus engagement, have been supported by religion in the cultural text of Mardin.

1.4 Identifying the gap within the literature on Mardin

In contrast to the recent promotion of its cultural and religious heritage, there is a lack of interest in the cultural interaction of the Mardinite groups. Instead of investigating inter-group relations, researchers are mainly interested in studying one specific community and mostly the Syriac or the Ezidi community is chosen, though a few studies have analysed inter-group relations.

The literature on the culture and history of Mardin can be divided into two categories. The first category includes postgraduate theses undertaken in Turkish universities. One of the most cited doctoral dissertations is the published thesis of Alioğlu (2003), which provides information about the interlocked stone houses and neighbourhoods in the old settlement of Mardin's capital. There are also a few postgraduate studies that focus on the interaction of the Mardinite groups (Erol, 2008; Sarı, 2010). In her doctoral thesis, Erol (2008) investigates the cultural interaction between Muslim and Christian communities in the capital of Mardin. However, the small number of participants and relatively short time spent in field research make it difficult to rely on the conclusions drawn. In his published doctoral dissertation, Sarı (2010) discusses interculturality in Mardin in terms of culture, identity and politics. Various examples are chosen from his interviews to cast light on the cultural relations among the residents of Mardin's capital, and Sarı's analyses and findings contribute to understanding the

intercultural relations of the Muslim and Christian communities. Sarı (2010) indicates the significance of religion in establishing close relations among the residents of Mardin, but he pays more attention to the relations between culture, policy and identity. However, his thesis does not discuss the effects of the dominant discourse of the State on the representation of Mardin, or the rapid transformation of Mardin's society under the rule of the Turkish Republic. Regarding the studies on the interaction of diverse groups in Mardin, it can be said that women's life in the city and the situation of the Ezidis in society have been neglected and, as such, it forms an important area to investigate. It is also important to see that these dissertations on Mardin pay little attention to the relations between local and national structures, and to their interaction with transnational developments.

Two master's theses analyse the relations of ethno-religious groups in Midyat (Nas, 2003; Çetin, 2007) and, in his published thesis, Çetin (2007) provides some important findings that help in the analysis of cultural interactions of Mardinite groups in the district of Midyat. According to the results of Çetin's surveys, religion is a prominent fact in the socio-cultural life of the Midyatites, and 85.2 per cent of his total respondents think religion is a 'very important factor' in their life (p. 168). Although Çetin (2007) indicates the importance of religion to the residents of Midyat, the relationship between culture and religion and its effects on the construction of identities still need to be investigated.

There have been a significant number of postgraduate theses conducted in Turkish universities that specifically focus either on the Syriac Christian community (Ayduslu, 2005; Özcosar, 2008; Özmen, 2006; Öztemiz, 2007; Bozok, 2009) or the Ezidi community (Suvari, 2002; Abca, 2006; Aydın, 2007; Öz, 2007), whereas there is no specific research on the

Muslim Arabs and Kurds of Mardin. However, Kurdish identity and ethnicity has been a popular subject for academic research in Turkey; in contrast, the Mhallemi Arabs of Midyat have yet not been studied.

In his published doctoral dissertation, Özcosar (2008) explores the community of the Mardinite Syriacs under the rule of the Ottoman State in the 19th century. Based on Ottoman records, he provides significant information about not only the Syriac community but the social and political construction of Mardin in this century. In addition, his work enables researchers to analyse the relations of the Mardinite Syriacs, highlighting their social status and contributions to social, political and cultural life in Mardin. Another important doctoral thesis about the Syriac community is entitled *Ethno-cultural Boundaries*: *Case of Syrians of Tur Abdin* written by Özmen (2006). He examines the Syriac community of Mardin in relation to the other main groups and explains the religious identity and rituals of Syriac Christians while he discusses ethnic-cultural boundaries among the diverse groups of Mardin.

There are several postgraduate theses on the Ezidis in Turkey. One of these studies discusses ethnicity, religion and identity in the case of the Ezidis (Suvari, 2002). Suvari indicates the discussions on the Ezidi identity, but does not explain the construction of Ezidi identity in relation to the Muslim and Christian contexts within which this religious group lives. The most detailed thesis on the Ezidis in Mardin, *Mardin Yezidileri, Inanç, Sosyal Hayat ve Coğrafi Dağılım* [*Yezidies of Mardin, Belief, Social Life and Geographic Distribution*] is presented as a master's thesis (Öz, 2007). Examining their religious and social organisation, Öz (2007) investigates Ezidis' relations with their neighbours in two districts of Mardin –

Midyat and Nusaybin – and points to some significant results that could lead to further investigation.

In addition, the master's thesis of Yalkut (2006) is relevant as it is based on findings collected from the Ezidi residents of Turkey and Germany. Entitled *Melek Tavus'un Halkı*: *Yezidiler* [*The People of the Angel Tawus*: *The Yezidis*], her thesis deals with the Ezidi identity and diaspora together with religious and social changes among the Ezidi community. She also indicates the difficulties that the Ezidis encounter in south-east Turkey and underscores how difficult it is to be an Ezidi within a Christian-Muslim context, especially as part of a minority group. Bearing in mind the general reluctance of this religious community to talk about their daily and religious lives, this study can be considered a very valuable contribution to the field.

The second category of studies on Mardin's society and history consists of reference books. The most comprehensive academic research on the historical and cultural background of Mardin written by four Turkish anthropologists is *Mardin*: *Aşiret, Cemaat, Devlet* [*Mardin*: *Tribe, Community, and State*] (Aydın et al., 2001). In this voluminous book, the anthropologists examine, in detail, the history of Mardin from pre-historic times to the period of the Republic of Turkey until the 1970s. They examine the cultural and religious heritage of Mardin and historical events based on oral history supported by textual references and the Ottoman *şer'iye* records, which were taken about legal affairs that occurred between the inhabitants of Mardin. Briefly, this source enables researchers to find supportive evidence related to inter-group relations of Mardinite groups.

In addition to these academic studies, there are relevant translated books in the scope of the project at Mardin's İhtisas Library. With the financial assistance of the European Union, the local government of Mardin and newly established Artuklu University in the city promoted the translations of the Ottoman *şer'iye*, juridical, records. The library published these records in hard and soft copy after they were translated into Turkish (Kankal et al., 2007). These records form a basis for new research because they include various cases that illustrate the socio-cultural life of the former residents and the background of the cultural structures of Mardin under the rule of the Ottoman State. In addition to this project, the library has published a series of articles about Mardin's history, culture, religious communities, economy, demographics and architecture (Özcoşar, 2007a; Özcoşar, 2007a, 2007b) . Other important publications of this library are conference papers that have been presented at national and international conferences on Mardin's history and society. For example, the 1st International Symposium of Mardin History was held in Mardin in 2006 and the papers presented at this conference were published by the library (Özcosar & Gunes, 2006b).

As has been indicated, there is little research that focuses on the interaction of Mardinite groups. Also, the role of religion in the intercultural engagement of the diverse components in Mardin has not been investigated. Even though the dominant discourse on Mardin's history and culture has claimed Mardin has a unique context in terms of its religious differences and religious tolerance, there is reluctance to underline the fact of religion in the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites. For this reason, this thesis intends to discuss the contribution of religion to the social relations of Mardin, considering the transformation of Mardin's society within the national context of the Turkish Republic.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

Using a qualitative approach, this thesis focuses on religion and its role in the intercultural engagement of diverse components – people, culture, structure – in Mardin. This chapter explains the research design adopted for the fieldwork in Mardin and the nature of the analysis of the collected data. The chapter first presents an outline of the theoretical framework, and then articulates the research methodology that was adopted. Later, the methods that were applied in collecting the data and how the participants were selected are discussed and, finally, the ethical issues related to conducting fieldwork in the context of Mardin and analysing the data are discussed.

3.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides an overarching standpoint and focus for the researcher. It justifies the structure for implementing it and offers a lens through which the conduct of the research is viewed. The theoretical framework emerges from the articulation of the research questions, derived from a more complex understanding of the research problem, and consequently guides the research process.

Table 1 provides an overview of the four sections of the research design. The first section is focused on epistemology and explains why the paradigm of constructionism was chosen to underpin the study and interpretivism chosen to facilitate analysis. In the second section, symbolic interactionism is discussed as an appropriate perspective for this research. The third section offers the rationale for using ethnography as the research methodology. In the fourth

section, a number of data gathering strategies are explained. This section also identifies how participants were chosen for the study and how data was collected. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethical issues that were considered during the data collection and underpin the project.

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Interpretivism; symbolic interactionism
Research methodology	Ethnography
Data gathering strategies	Participant observation, semi-structured interview, collecting local handmade products and taking photographs, and conversation/document analysis

Table 1: Research design

Before discussing the design of the research in detail, the difference between theological and religious studies needs to be identified to locate the nature of this research in terms of methodological approaches. Theology attempts to interpret the intentions of a supernatural force, whereas religious studies aim to study religion from an external, neutral standpoint. While theologians allow themselves to be part of the data, scholars of religion seek ways to understand the data from outside (Smart, 1983). Moreover, religious studies, as Smart (1983) points out, must be interreligious and cross-cultural, and constituted by multidisciplinary approaches. Religious studies draw on multiple disciplines and their methodologies including anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy and linguistics to illuminate their various dynamics. They are also seen as sub-branches of social sciences identified with different aspects of religion; for instance, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion and

philosophy of religion. This doctoral dissertation positions itself in religious studies and adopts an interdisciplinary approach.

3.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with explaining the nature and origin of knowledge in order to understand and explain how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Because this thesis explores intercultural engagement in Mardin from the perspective of the Mardinites, constructionism was chosen as an appropriate epistemological stance. According to a constructionist understanding, 'meaning is not discovered, but constructed' by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Therefore, meaning related to the same phenomenon can be constructed in different ways by different people (Crotty, 1998). This understanding of knowledge provides a standpoint from which to analyse many approaches that have emerged among the Mardinites, even though they share the same socio-cultural context.

Constructionist inquiry seeks to 'understand the complex world of lived experience from the view point of those who live it' (Schwandt, 2000, p. 118). Therefore, it is expected the participants may have different meanings for the same phenomenon or situation. In addition to this, the researcher then re-constructs the meanings taken from the collected data and observation process.

3.2.2 Theoretical perspective

As a socio-cultural analysis on the intercultural engagement of diverse components in a particular area, this research benefits from both the sociology and anthropology of religion. It

also takes its theoretical impetus from a methodology of social sciences known as *interactionism.*

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective adopted within this thesis. Interactionism is generally paired with the term *symbolic* because social life is expressed through symbols and the main symbolic system is language. Symbolic interactionism is a social-psychological approach developed by Mead (1934) and later developed further by Blumer (1969). With the contributions of Blumer, this approach gained a new importance for social analysis. Blumer (1969) claims symbolic interactionism is based on three simple premises:

> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them … The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

Its fundamental concern, as Blumer (1969) indicates, is the relationship between individual conduct and forms of social organisation. 'This perspective asks how selves emerge out of social structure and social situations' (Denzin, 1969, p. 922). Interactionism is simultaneously interpretive, analytic, structural and interactional; therefore, it 'is both a theory of experience and a theory of social structure' (Denzin, 1992, p. 3).

As is seen from Denzin's explanations, interactionism seeks a compromise between agency and structure, an issue that has been a controversial in social sciences (Musolf, 2003), and in doing so Denzin (1992) also identifies another type of interactionism, *interpretive*

interactionism. According to this approach, society is 'to be something that is lived in the here and now, in the face-to-face and mediated interactions that connect persons to one another' (p. 22) and to be written about by focusing on "how people are constrained by the constructions they build and inherit from the past' (p. 23).

Symbolic interactionists see society as an ongoing process of symbolic interaction because human beings continuously interpret and respond to signals or messages appearing in a social context (Dillon, 2010). In other words, this approach focuses primarily on the micro-level processes and outcomes of everyday, face-to-face interaction regarding the exchange of symbols inherant in the current relations and interpretive processes that portray social interaction (Dillon, 2010). In this process, social actors define and re-define the situations or symbols. Consequently, meanings that are derived from social interaction by social actors can vary across time and from one social context to another (Dillon, 2010).

Bearing in mind that meaning is diversely constructed by agents, a multicultural approach, as discussed by Fay (1996), is drawn on to support the general framework of this research because it is linked to interactionism and its principles. In an effort to explain the concept of multicultural social analysis, Fay (1996, p. 230) highlighted the following points:

1. In understanding others social scientists must try to understand them in their own terms; but they must also use categories which go beyond those employed by those being examined.
2. The interviews, participant observations, and other ethnographic techniques by which social scientists observe others are social interactions which precipitate out certain forms of behaviour. In this way social scientists are not mere observers of totally independent objects, but active shapers of that which they study.

3. The same is true even when no physical interaction occurs between interpreter and interpreted. Meaning itself is dyadic either because the meaning of an intentional act, text, relation, or product is in part actualized in the process of interpretation itself, or because the rendering of others' intentions requires translating them into the interpreter's terms. Social scientific interpreters are thus actively engaged in that which they study even when what they study occurred long ago.
4. The relation of social scientists and those under analysis is dynamic and continuing; but every change in these conceptions produces changes in the way others are interpreted, triggering new forms of understanding. This interactive process is ongoing, a continual round of ramifying changes in comprehension.

In light of these points, the analysis applied in this research adopts an approach that accepts the claim that 'social science must be reflexive' (Fay, 1996, p. 230). This approach involves the dualistic categories of relativism and multiculturalism; 'self' vs. 'other'; 'us' vs. 'them'; 'sameness' vs. 'difference'; 'assimilation' vs. 'separatism'; and 'insider' vs. 'outsider'. It also brings a dialectical mode of thinking instead of dichotomical thinking. 'In place of difference it emphasises interchange; in place of integrity it emphasises openness and interaction; in place of resistance it emphasises learning' (Fay, 196, p. 7). This brings a multicultural approach involving the conception 'interactionism', to social science and this aims to provide a new conception of multiculturalism (Fay, 1996). Fay explains this concept:

> *Interactionism* is both a view of human history and culture, and an ethic recommending a certain attitude and response to multicultural exchange. As a view of human history and culture interactionism conceives of the relation of the self and the other are essentially distinct and fixed, or that a particular identity means utter difference from that which it is not. Instead it insists that the identity of the self is intimately bound up with the identity of the other (and vice-versa), that self and other are constantly in flux, and that they are both similar as well as different. Consequently, interactionism focuses on the points of contact between different groups, especially on those bridgeheads which serve as the basis for exchange.

Undoubtedly, interactionism looks for new forms of identity 'not *beyond* cultural and social differences but *within* them (Fay, 1996, p. 243)'. It views cultural and social exchange as a process guided by 'self-challenge, learning, and consequent growth,' which does not require the 'obliteration of difference (as in assimilationism) or its continuation (as in separatism)' (Fay, p. 243).

> Interactionism doesn't envision the transcendence of difference (something it thinks is impossible in any case). Nor does it envision the safe-guarding of the 'essential' or 'pure'. Instead it envisions and encourages a dynamic commingling in which parties constantly change (Fay, p. 243).

By reason of the fact that the principal lesson of an interactionist ethic, according to Fay (1996), is to 'engage, learn from, adapt- or perish...' (p. 234), a multicultural approach should consider both self and other. However, the most critical area within the dualism of the philosophy of social sciences is the discussions of the relation between self and other, and the related topic of the relation between sameness and difference. Within the critical intersubjective approach of the social sciences, understanding others is deeply interrelated with understanding ourselves. 'Changes in our understanding of others lead to changes in our self-understanding, and changes in our self-understanding lead to changes in our understanding of others' (Fay, 1996, p. 229). As a result, the way we live is altered by changes in self-understanding.

A multicultural approach emphasises the dialogical and dynamic character of the relation of self and other, and the way this interaction contributes to the shaping of identity. Thus, a multicultural analysis provides an appreciation of both self and other, rather than ignoring differences or highlighting sameness.

Finally, interactionism provides two key concepts for dealing with social interaction: recruitability (Kegan, 1982) and engagement (Fay, 1996). In general terms, the first concept is related to the individual, while the second one is related to the social. In terms of this study's goals, the notion of engagement is significant and deliberate, even though the study continues to seek a balance between agency and structure. Fay (1996) claims the best concept to describe multiculturalism is engagement since it overcomes the problems of dealing with discussions on respect and recognition. Thus, the notion of engagement is applied to analysing the intercultural relations of the Mardinites. The term is also applied to improving understanding of the nature of religious, cultural or ethnic differences, in respect of both self and other, and agency and structure since the mere recognition of differences in a diverse context is not enough to establish close relations between people or cultures.

3.3 Research methodology

Research methodology helps the researcher determine the process of data gathering, choose methods and shape the use of the methods chosen. The methodology most suitable for this doctoral dissertation is ethnography, because the data collection of the research is mainly based on fieldwork, which focuses on the relations of four ethno-religious groups in contrast to the general tendency of ethnographic studies.

Ethnographic studies usually deal with an entire cultural group through participant observation, where the researcher is immersed in the daily lives of the people and observes and interviews a group who agree to participate in the study (Creswell, 2007). It has become, however, a recent tendency to study the relations between a number of groups that share the same socio-cultural context (as an example see Baumann, 1996).

Ethnography is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system (Creswell, 1998) through the researcher examining a particular group to learn their patterns of behaviour, customs and ways of life (Harris, 1968). The roots of ethnography are found in cultural anthropology from the early 20th century anthropologists, such as Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Mead, and their studies of comparative cultures (Creswell, 1998). As a methodology, it has its own methods for data collection, and a major one is participant observation, which 'has traditionally been accorded pride of place' (Crotty, 1998). The ethnographic inquiry adopted by symbolic interactionists and adapted to its own purposes, seeks to reveal meanings and perceptions taken from the conversations and cultural patterns of people who participate in the research and by 'viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or 'culture'' (Crotty, 1998, p. 7).

3.4 The working design

Drawing upon this theoretical framework, the thesis involves an interactionist approach, positioning itself within an interpretive standpoint that relies on a multicultural approach that leads to the notion of engagement.

Taking its impetus from interactionism, the research used semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation to identify selected characteristics of the socio-cultural relations of the Mardinite groups that are key to the construction of intercultural engagement in the context of Mardin. It also determines the points of differentiation and integration in socio-cultural life.

The interviews and participant observations took place during field research that was conducted in the area of Mardin in 2009 and 2011. The interviews were semi-*structured* to allow participants some flexibility in their responses. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and photographs of some participants and places were taken to visually enrich the study. The researcher resided in the city from October to the end of December in 2009 and from mid-April to mid-October in 2011 to collect the data and understand the social context of the city. During these periods, the researcher attended some events organised by the residents of Mardin in order to observe their socio-cultural relations to supplement the interview data provided by the Mardinites who agreed to participate in the research.

3.4.1 Selection of groups

Today, the society of Mardin consists of Muslim Kurds, Muslim Arabs, Muslim Turks, Syriac Christians, Catholic Armenians, Chaldeans, Chechens, Ezidis and nomadic Gypsies. However, this thesis focuses on the three main groups: Muslim Kurds, Muslim Arabs and Syriac Christians. In addition to these groups, the Ezidis are included in the scope of the thesis since their existence in a Muslim-Christian context is significant, even though the population of this group is slightly low.

Muslim Arabs and Kurds make up a significant percentage of the total population of Mardin. Until a few decades ago, the Kurdish residents mostly lived in the hinterland; nonetheless, the number of Muslim Kurds is almost equal to that of Muslim Arabs in the capital of Mardin after recent demographic changes. The third group, in terms of numbers, is the Syriac Christians, although their population has dramatically decreased in the city. They were included in the research because they are the only Christian population available for

investigation. In addition, they are significant figures in advertisements of Mardin to outsiders as promoted by the State and the local government of Mardin.

Fieldwork was conducted in the capital of Mardin and its district, Midyat, after approval was received from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Before interviewing participants, a letter that highlighted the aims and purposes of the research and the rights of participants, endorsed by the Ethics Committee, was given to participants, and each was asked to sign two copies of the consent form. Those who agreed to sign the forms retained one and returned the other to the researcher. The interviews, depending on the conditions of time and place, took approximately one hour.

3.4.2 Selection of participants

Female and male residents were spread across the four groups, and approximately 200 people were invited to participate in this study. Only a few people refused this invitation. Interestingly, almost all were urban Arabs. This is significant since it provided the researcher with some initial insight into the positions of the Mardinite Arabs in the society of Mardin and their adaptation of the dominant discourse of the State.

Because of their dominant roles in society, the number of the male participants was higher than that of the female participants. In spite of this, the researcher tried to reach the female participants insofar as circumstances permitted because it was expected the female Mardinites would play a significant role in the intercultural engagement of the diverse groups in Mardin. In addition, it was important that the selection of participants was balanced according to the size of each group within the total population.. Thus, the number of the Kurdish and Arabic

participants was expected to be higher than the Syriac Christian and the Ezidi participants, and this was the case.

At first, the researcher interviewed the Mardinites who had been previously identified, and then with the help of these participants, some of whom were religious leaders, the researcher was able to reach other residents who agreed to be interviewed. In addition to this, some government institutions were visited and, with their permission and help, the researcher interviewed some civil servants who had knowledge of people from different backgrounds. Therefore, drawing upon the technique of a snowball (Sarantakos, 2005), the former participants were used to assist in finding other participants.

3.4.3 Selection of interview and observation techniques

Field research provides a researcher with an opportunity to get close to socio-cultural reality and check on their cultural biases, though there remains a risk of misunderstanding. Considering this point, the people who agreed to participate in this research were interviewed during the field research in Mardin. The research primarily used the technique of snowball (or chain sampling) for the selection of participants.

> In this approach, the researcher chooses a few respondents, using accidental sampling or any other method, and asks them to recommend other people who meet the criteria of the research and who might be willing to participate in the project. This process is continued with the new respondents until saturation –that is, until no more substantial information can be acquired through additional respondents –or until no more respondents are available (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 165).

The process also benefitted from accidental sampling where the researcher *accidentally* comes into contact with people (Sarantakos, 2005) and invites them to participate in the study.

In the first stage, the researcher arranged meetings with some previously identified people; for instance, a Syriac priest and religious educator, the governor and *mufti* of Mardin and a few teachers who live in Mardin with whom the researcher had contact before going into the field. In the second stage, the researcher interviewed people who were selected through suggestions from the first group and this process continued until the researcher had collected enough data to allow an in-depth analysis that would result in valuable insights and conclusions. During both fieldwork periods, the researcher also invited people who she accidentally encountered and who showed interest in the study.

Participant observation also plays a significant place in ethnographic studies. Through this method, the researcher participates in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people to learn their 'cultural patterns' (Benedict, 1961) and the explicit and implicit aspects of their socio-cultural life (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). As a participant observer, the researcher stayed in Mardin from October to December in 2009 and from mid-April to October in 2011 to gain knowledge about the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites and to interview the participants. As a result, the researcher had extended visits to Mardin that allowed more observation and participation in the life of the different groups.

3.4.4 Collection of the data

The interviews conducted during the field research were recorded using a digital recorder. However, some interviews could not be recorded because the participants did not feel

comfortable with having their conversations recorded or, in some situations, the researcher thought that using a recorder would have an inhibiting effect on the participants, and thereby restrict them from expressing their genuine beliefs. Except for a few, the interviews were in Turkish. The researcher needed a translator to communicate with only a few elderly Ezidis because they had some difficulty speaking Turkish even when they could understand it in ordinary conversation.

The interviews of this research were semi-structured, which means the researcher and interviewee have some flexibility to probe for details or discuss issues. Some were group interviews, which involved a number of people, but the emphasis was always on questions and responses between the researcher and participants (Morgan, 1997).

Before commencing the interviews, the questions were prepared and divided into two general categories. The first category had questions for each participant. For instance, 'What do you think about cultural diversity in your city?' The second category had questions that were specific to each group, drawing attention to the position of that group in the society of Mardin and the issues explicitly related to them. For instance, 'Do you worship in your churches? Have you ever experienced disrespectful attitudes in your worship in the church?' or 'Have Christians or Muslims acted negatively towards you because of your religious identity?'

The records were numbered and indexed using keywords related to the main foci of the thesis to analyse the data; for example, religious festivals, religious identity, cultural interaction, interreligious marriage and diaspora**.** In addition to this, the notes that were taken during the fieldwork were used as an additional source in interpreting data.

Another form of analysis that was used in this thesis was text analysis. This involved reviews of other postgraduate theses and works on the culture of Mardin and the relations of the Mardinite groups to further its findings and interpretations. Finally, the researcher collected some samples of cultural products, such as handmade crafts produced and sold by the local people of Mardin, in order to determine some of the symbolic meanings these products might reveal about the culture of Mardin. Further, photographs were taken that reflect the cultural heritage of the city in order to enrich the presentation of the thesis.

3.5 Ethical issues

Since this research explores the role of religion in the intercultural relations of the Mardinite groups, ethical dilemmas, which may emerge not only in regard to the collection of data but also in the interpretation of findings, should be considered.

In the first stage of the fieldwork conducted in 2009, the researcher sometimes had difficulties explaining to participants why they were being asked to sign a consent form. Some participants were worried about providing a signed document, because it might be used as proof of their interview and used against them. When they signed the consent forms, they asked the researcher not to record their conversation or, if the interview was recorded, they chose not to sign the form, but kept the letter and form signed by the researcher and her co-supervisor, Dr Marian deSouza.

The reactions of the interviewees clearly showed that the recording of interviews did not create tension. It was asking for a signed document that was problematic, even if one copy of this document was retained by the participant. Hence, in the second stage of fieldwork in

2011, the researcher only showed the documents to the participants and explained their rights. At all times, the researcher followed the demands of the participants when they did not want to sign the forms or have their conversations recorded.

In addition to the concerns of the participants, the conditions of Mardin society required the researcher to be sensitive about group relations, and ethnic and religious identities. This made the researcher very determined not to express her own ideas and convictions, given this vulnerability of the participants in the multi-ethnic context of Mardin. In some interviews, the participants addressed questions to the researcher to get her opinion or to learn other groups' approaches about them. Such questions were not answered; rather, the nature of the research was reiterated.

Another challenging point in the field was the ethno-religious background of the researcher. As a Muslim Turk, the researcher had to explain her intentions to some participants who were in doubt about the goals of the research and at the same time not allow the discussion to become distracted by her ethnic origin or religious beliefs. However, the researcher and her invitation to the research were welcomed by most of Mardinites. Additionally, some participants indicated they recognised the researcher as outside the context of Turkey, in other words, more objective because she was doing a PhD at an Australian university.

Participation in this research was voluntary and this was clearly stated in the *Information Letter to Participants*. The researcher upheld and did not invade the rights and privacy of the participants during the study. The interview process was responsibly conducted at all times and the data was recorded accurately only after the participants had given their consent. The

researcher made sure she showed respect and behaved honestly to all participants throughout the field research, the collection of data and the process of data analysis.

4 CHAPTER 4

ENGAGEMENT OF DIVERSE COMPONENTS IN THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF MARDIN

Mardin
An enchanting city with her cultural wealth
and architectural heritage passed down through thousands of years,
A rich history blending religions, sects, customs and traditions,
An open air museum of stunning beauty
extending down from the hill, on which it was founded,
Mardin, a timeless poetic city
created by the delicate spirit of
the mason's hands that gave form to its stones…
(Taşer, 2007, p. 1)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of religion in the engagement of diverse components in the case of Mardin. The city has been a representative model of discursive multiculturalism in Turkey since the dominant discourse presented it as the the city of tolerance. To support this presentation, the State and local governments have used some slogans that highlight the multiculturality of the city. These slogans appear in the conversations of the Mardinites with people from 'out of' the context of Mardin. At first sight, it seems the residents have fully adopted the dominant discourse. However, the Mardinites have their own understanding about their interaction with others and their city, and this demotic discourse needs to be analysed.

Related to this recent understanding of the Mardinites about their city, Çağlar (2007) claims they believe their city is unique and, more importantly, there is no similar city in the world. Çağlar (2007, p. 1071) puts this belief into perspective stating:

> Mardin has a unique character but it is not very different from many other cities in underscoring their cultural diversity as part of their local assets in order to increase their competitiveness within the global economy.

One can accept the uniqueness of Mardin since its context is different from that of other cities that have also underscored their cultural diversity; on the other hand, it is not the only example of long-term co-existence of diverse religions and cultures. Still, the point articulated by Çağlar (2007) should be borne in mind in analysing the demotic discourse. Economic reasons are determinant in the adaptation of the dominant discourse by the Mardinites. Undoubtedly, the positive picture of the city can attract tourists; therefore, silversmiths and goldsmiths in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat can benefit from 'cultural and religious tourism'.

> ... no matter where they are and how they ended up in the places they are now, Syriacs are going back to Mardin nowadays. They are building houses and investing in Mardin. They are returning... Why shouldn't they? Is there any other place like Mardin in the world? Where will you find a place like Mardin in the world with such an old civilization and history? Tell me one other place with such a rich cultural and religious heritage and diversity? You cannot find. (Christian Syriac shop owner, Vienna (Çaglar, 2007, pp. 1070-1071))

Bearing the dominant and local discourses in mind, this chapter aims to analyse the socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites and indicate the role of religion in constructing and maintaining social cohesion in Mardin society. Even though the slogans of the dominant discourse describing Mardin and Midyat indicate the religious diversity of the city, the role of religion has remained a neglected aspect of the socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites. Before analysing this neglected fact in the current relations of Mardinites, this chapter looks at the background of the social organisation of the city through the example of neighbourhoods in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat, and their *bazaar*s. After providing background

information related to the interaction of the former Mardinites, this chapter deals with some examples of the close socio-cultural relations of the residents. Some of these examples, such as sharing the grief of neighbours and celebrating the religious days and feasts of neighbours, were also given by participants to support their demotic discourse on the culture of tolerance in Mardin. Later, the chapter brings other examples that were either implicit in the narrations of Mardinites or still observable in the city. In the last section, other shared cultural elements produced by long-term close relations, such as sharing local languages and having body tattoos, are discussed, as is the role of religious people in the local context and their contribution to social cohesion. Before analysing the examples of socio-cultural interaction in Mardin, the following section provides some background information about the physical structure of the city and the social life of Mardinites.

4.2 Spatial engagement of diverse components of Mardin

The capital of Mardin has a unique physical outlook, for its historical architecture has been preserved. Like many other Anatolian cities, its old settlement was established next to a castle known as the 'Eagle's Nest' due to its protected position, where it stands on the hill that dominates the city[35]. Constructed with salient stonework, the castle is 1200m above the plain and has a width of between 30 and 150m (Alioğlu, 2003). The historical settlement of Mardin's capital is composed of interlocked neighbourhoods that were surrounded with a rampart called '*beden*,' which means body[36]. By the 19th century, only remnants of the castle and rampart remained.

However, the neighbourhoods of its old settlement, which are composed of traditional stone houses, have been mostly protected. In fact, the old settlement remained substantially the

[35] The castle of Mardin is famous for being unconquerable for it stood for centuries despite many attacks throughout history (Alioğlu, 2003; Aydın et al., 2001).
[36] United with a rampart, the composition of this historical settlement was clustered together and became a self-sufficent social organism.

same until the first decades of the 20th century. The first permanent change that transformed the whole outlook of Mardin's capital was made by the Germans who came to the city to build the railway in 1914-1915. Because of the narrow roads, they needed a street across the city, so they demolished some houses and a part of the *Patriye* Church to extend the street (Aydın et al., 2001), which was named *Birinci Cadde*, the first street.

In the old settlement of Mardin, called *Eski Sehir* (Old City), the stone houses were built close to the hill on which the city was founded. Since 1979, this part of the city has been under restoration, for it was declared a protected site. Looking up from the main street of the capital or newly established settlement, it seems as if the houses are piled on top of one another but they are organised on parallel lines and separated by narrow stepped streets (Alioğlu, 2003). It appears as if the roof of any given house is the terrace of the house above, but none of them are in the shadow of each other, nor do they block each other's windows. Thus, all the stone houses have a brilliant view looking south towards Mesopotamia. The streets are interconnected with passages known as *abbara*, allowing a practical shortcut to upper streets without having to walk all around the city (Taşer, 2007).

Eski Mardin (Old Mardin), which is positioned on the slope of a hill looking south to the Mesopotamian plain, had the houses of wealthy Christian, Armenian, Shamsie, Jewish, Arab, Turk and Kurd families (Göyünç, 1991). Thus, Syriac Orthodox Christians, Syriac Catholics, Cheldanians, Muslims, Jews and Shamsies shared a context that is frequently expressed by the dominant discourse on the culture of Mardin. Today it houses Muslim Arabs, Kurds and Turks along with the Syriac Orthodox Christians, and a few Armenian and Chaldean families.

In the capital of Mardin, the population balance between Muslim and Christian communities remained the same until the beginning of the 20th century. After this century, the Muslim

population grew rapidly while the Christian population strikingly decreased (Aydın et al., 2001; Özcoşar, 2008). Even though there were some conflicts related to sharing the social and economic status between the city dwellers and the powerful local governmentalities, such as *aghas* and *begs*, it can be said that the balance in the portions of population enabled the urban residents to construct intimate relations with others.

Bearing the fact of population in mind, it can be asserted that spatial closeness was another factor in the close socio-cultural relations of the inhabitants of Mardin. For this reason, the old settlement at the core of Mardin can be seen as a symbolic expression of engagement of diverse components. The physical structure of this part of the city would be a result of security reasons considering the historical importance of the city and its position on the Silk Road. In fact, there were many attacks on the capital of Mardin throughout its history from surrounding seigniories at first, and from local tribes later. Whatever the reason behind this composition of the old settlement, it seems it gives an understanding of social cohesion to its residents.

The spatial closeness of Mardinites from different ethnic and religious background is one aspect of the fact of intercultural engagement in Mardin. The engagement of the stone houses was provided with narrow roads and *abbaras*, which are the passages under the houses to help people to reach the upper sides of the historical settlement. Thereby, *abbaras* can be seen as another expression of engagement between the residents from different backgrounds of the city, for these passages were not the property of the house owners, but seen as public areas. As a result, the physical structure of the city resulted in social and legal responsibilities between the residents.

It can be said that, today, *Eski Mardin* (Old Mardin) still reflects the historical and traditional fabric of Mardin, having a fascinating outlook because of these interconnected stone houses. Therefore, the old protected site of Mardin can be seen as a symbolic expression of the engagement of diverse components within the city. For this reason, the chapter firstly examines the historical background of Mardin's neighbourhoods from the Ottoman period to present times, before discussing the current social and cultural relations in the city. In doing so, it also aims to enable a comparison between the previous and current relations of Mardinites.

4.2.1 Interlocked neighbourhoods of Mardin

The smallest unit of the Ottoman settlements and political organisation was the *mahalle*, neighbourhood. The *mahalle* occupied a significant place in the social, political and economic organisation of cities in the period of the Ottoman State; therefore, the composition of a *mahalle* gives the details of social life of the Ottoman cities and, thus, provides information about the social history of the cities (Özcoşar, 2008).

In the 16th century, when Mardin became a part of the Ottoman State, there were nine neighbourhoods in the capital city. These neighbourhoods were *Bab-ı Cedid*, *Zarraka*, *Kissis*, *Bab'ul-Hammara*, *Kolasiye*, *Şemsiyye*, *Zeytun*, *Kamil* and *Bimaristan*, and *Yahudiyyan* (Göyünç, 1991). Until the 19th century, the names or numbers of neighbourhoods were changed a few times, but these changes were not considerable. At the beginning of this century, the number of neighbourhoods in the capital of Mardin was 13, and this composition of the settlement did not change much until the 20th century. Besides, the architectural style of neighbourhoods at the core of Mardin's capital had been protected from the period of the Artukids to the end of the 19th century (Aydın et al., 2001). As Ünsal (1999) asserts, the *sui*

generis cosmopolitan cultural structure of Mardin has, therefore, existed until today along with its landscape.

Based on the Ottoman *tahrir* records[37], it can be said that every neighbourhood of the old settlement was shared by the different religious groups until the end of the Ottoman State. Except *Şemsiyye* and *Yahudiyyan*, seven other neighbourhoods consisted of Muslim and Christian inhabitants (Göyünç, 1991; Özcoşar, 2008; Aydın et al., 2001). Therefore, there was no ghetto in the city because of its ethnic and religious diversity. Rather, all ethnic and religious groups lived side by side, being the neighbours of other communities.

> It is not possible to classify the neighbourhoods of Mardin as 'Muslim neighbourhoods', 'non-Muslim neighbourhoods', and 'mixed neighbourhoods' like the standard classification repeated in the researches regarding the Ottoman cities. Even though the portions of Muslim/non-Muslim populations within one neighbourhood were variable, only a Muslim or only a Christian neighbourhood was not in Mardin (Özcoşar, 2008, p. 273).

From the *tahrir* records of the Ottoman State, it is understood that Mardin had a small Jewish population in addition to its Muslim and Christian inhabitants. According to Özcoşar (2008), the neighbourhood of *Bab'ul Cedid* contained the majority of Jewish residents in the 19th century. Even today there is a fountain named *Yahudi Çeşmesi* (*Jewish Fountain*), which is seen as evidence of the existence of Mardinite Jews in this neighbourhood (Aydın et al., 2001; Göyünç, 1991).

Another group whose members clustered together was the Shamsies. According to the Ottoman records, there was a neighbourhood that took its name from this religious group, named *Shamsiyye*. As stated by Göyünç (1991), there was a Muslim minority in this

[37] After the annexation of Mardin by the Ottomans, the adult male residents from every religious community were recorded as tax payers. These records are named *tahrir*.

neighbourhood in the 16th century *tahrir* records. In time, this Shamsie neighbourhood was collapsed by the *mahalle* of *Bab-ı Savur* (Göyünç, 1991). In addition to the physical changes as a result of Muslim population growth, the Shamsies had to be officially involved in either Muslim or Christian *millet* because of the classification system of tax payers made by the central administration of the Ottoman State (Aydın et al., 2011; Özcoşar, 2008). For this reason, this neighbourhood disappeared in the late 19th century Ottoman records.

As for the settlement of Midyat, it was the centre of the Christian population from different churches and sects until the 19th century. Considering today's usage '*kent*' in the sense of both city and town among the residents to identify Midyat, it can be said that Midyat was seen as an independent settlement from the capital of Mardin[38]. It was in the heart of the area named *Tur Abdin*, the mountain of the servants of God (Erpolat, 2003). As a capital of *Tur Abdin*, Midyat has been a significant place in terms of trade and religious relations.

Even though Midyat does not have a castle like the capital of Mardin, its stone houses and *abbaras* show similarities with those of *Eskisehir*. However, the capital of Midyat only housed Syriacs until the 18th century. Having close relations with the centre of Midyat, there were many Christian rural settlements; some of which combined Christian and Muslim inhabitants. In 1785, two Muslim Kurdish families, *Nehrozo* and *Mehmedo*, were invited to settle in the centre by the urban Syriacs of Midyat due to the need for protection from the neighbouring tribes (Aydın et al., 2001). As a result of this demographic change, the centre of Midyat became a multi-ethnic and religious context later than that of the capital of Mardin.

[38] Midyaties have had their own understanding of inside and outside. For them, their district is different from the capital of Marin. This point is apparent in their request to see Midyat as a province. See: http://yenisafak.com.tr/gundem-haber/midyat-il-olmayi-hak-ediyor-22.10.2012-417641

Before giving details about the current social organisation of Mardin's and Midyat's capitals, the following section demonstrates the close relations of the former Mardinites as illustrated by the Ottoman records, travel books and the narrations of the current residents.

4.2.1.1 The examples of socio-cultural interaction of the former Mardinites

It would be hard to find out reliable information about the former Mardinites' social and cultural life if there were not the Ottoman juridical and *tahrir* records, for they include various examples of neighbourhood relations between diverse religious groups in Mardin (Göyünç, 1991; Özcoşar, 2008).

Based on the information given in the Ottoman records, it can be asserted there was no conflict because of any religious distinction between Mardinites who lived in the same neighbourhood or in the houses separated from each other with a shared wall (Özcoşar, 2008). Even though the matters in the Ottoman juridical records are mainly associated with the spatial closeness of the stone houses in *Eskisehir*, Old City, they also enabled researchers to analyse the neighbourhood relations of the residents.

The most common problems brought by the residents of Mardin to the courts were related to borders and height of the houses or walls of yards[39]. This problem occurred because of the understanding of *mahremiyet*, privacy. According to this understanding, the yard or rooms of houses must not be seen from other houses. In Mardin, every religious community had to follow this rule; therefore, there was no religious discrimination between the communities seeking their social and juridical rights. For instance, a Christian resident could easily make a

[39] See for further information: (Kankal, Özcoşar, Güneş, & Günay, 2006; Kankal, Özcoşar, Güneş, & Gürhan, 2007a, 2007b; Özcoşar, 2008; Özcoşar, Güneş, & Bozkurt, 2007; Özcoşar, Güneş, & Dinç, 2006, 2007; Taş, Özcoşar, Güneş, & Gürhan, 2006). Within the scope of the project of Mardin İhtisas Library, all these books were published with the financial assistance of the European Union.

complaint about his Muslim neighbour if he crossed the determined borders while constructing, renovating or altering a house.

When the records are analysed, it is seen that a Muslim could produce a Christian witness to the court about a disagreement between themself and their Muslim neighbour or vice versa. Sometimes a non-Muslim resident deputed a Muslim to handle the case on their behalf; for example, a non-Muslim woman deputed a Muslim to the case between her and another non-Muslim. Similarly, a Muslim woman who did not receive her property after her divorce deputed a Syriac Orthodox man for this case. Consequently, as Özcosar (2008) claims, there was no religious bigotry among Mardin's diverse religious communities in the 19th century. One of the interesting anecdotes is that a non-Muslim thief who stole soap from a Muslim resident was informed on by non-Muslims.

According to Participant 47 (Muslim Kurd, 36, male, academic), who is a historian, social psychology is important to understand the relations of the former Mardinites. To explain this approach, he illustrated two cases from the Ottoman juridical records. The first example was a Muslim woman who visited a court and made a complaint about her Christian neighbour because the Christian woman put up a wall in front of the house of the Muslim woman and blocked her view. The court examined the claim and decided to pull down the wall. The second example given by Participant 47 was a lawsuit about the murder of a Muslim villager. A Christian resident killed the villager because he mowed the grass (most probably for his animals) in front of the Christian man's house. At the end of the lawsuit, the court decided the defendant to pay *diyet*, blood money, to the family of the murdered Muslim man.

For Participant 47, these examples show that the Christian residents were powerful in social and cultural life; therefore, Muslims visited the courts instead of asking for help from *aghas*,

the powerful chiefs of the tribes. Based on these cases, he indicated there was a power balance between Christians and Muslims. Still, this claim does not explain why Muslim families, who had close relations with the tribes, for instance the *Milli* tribe, did not use their affiliations with *aghas* against the Christian residents. Instead, they visited the official institutions to solve their problems with their Christian neighbours.

Another source of information about the former residents' interaction is a specific genre called as *seyahatnames*, travel books, written by foreign travellers[40]. Along with the distinctiveness and population of groups, these *seyehatnames* give information about the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Mardin. One of the significant pieces of information given by the travellers is that non-Muslims could ride a horse in Mardin, and this did not create a tension between the people (Özcoşar, 2008). This anecdote about the non-Muslim groups of Mardin is important because there were specific rules about wearing clothes, shoes and riding horses for non-Muslim groups in the period of the Ottoman State. They had to wear different clothes from Muslim residents and were not permitted to ride a horse because it signified a high social status. However, the non-Muslim residents of Mardin did not follow some of these rules according to the travellers. Another example given by the travellers related to the social life in Mardin and was that Muslims and non-Muslims greeted each other saying *salamun alaikum* and, in response, *alaikum selam* (Aydın 2001; Alioğlu, 2003; Özcoşar, 2008). This example is mostly cited in research as a statement of the close past relations of the former inhabitants to indicate the culture of tolerance in Mardin. It can be seen as a symbolic expression of the close social relations of Mardinites[41].

[40] For further information about some travellers, such as GA Oliver, A Dubre, McD Kinneir, JS Buckingham and H Sothgate, see Aydin et al., 2001. Apart from Oliver, these travellers visited Mardin in the 19th century.
[41] Mardinites still use this greeting in their daily conversations. This example will be discussed in the interaction of ethno-religious groups in the *bazaar*.

In addition to the Ottoman records and the travel books, the current residents of Mardin articulated plenty of stories about the interaction of the former residents. Their stories generally referred to the experiences of their family elders with other groups. As narrated by Mardinites, Muslims and Christians lived in the same yard of big houses a few decades ago, and their neighbourhood relations were very close, for they saw each other every day and had a chance to learn the differences and similarities between their religious faiths and cultures. In their interaction, language would be prominent since they generally spoke Arabic in their daily interaction and trade dealings.

There is another aspect to the spatial closeness of the stone houses in the capital. The composition of neighbourhoods seems to let female Mardinites from different religious communities establish a female culture, whose effects can still be seen in current social relations. Considering the traditional patterns of Mardin society, it is predictable that Mardinite women spent most of their time at their homes. Whether or not they lived in the same backyard, Muslim and Christian women spent their time together cooking, preparing food for winter and enjoying tasks together, as will be discussed in the section *Women's life in Mardin*.

Consequently, the organisation of Mardin's stone houses and composition of its neighbourhoods seem to help the former residents establish social cohesion and improve their interaction with others from various ethnic and religious communities. After the current social settings of Mardin's and Midyat's capitals are examined, the interactions of the female relations in the private sphere and the male residents in the *bazaar* will be analysed.

4.2.2 Today's neighbourhoods of the capitals of Mardin and Midyat

Today Mardin has 14 neighbourhoods in the historical part of its capital. Attached to this historical settlement, there are six neighbourhoods that are newly established in the outskirts down the *Birinci Cadde*, First Street, of the capital. Besides these neighbourhoods, there is another new neighbourhood named *Yenişehir* (*New City*), which is situated in the flat plain of the capital. Even though *Yenişehir* has spread to a large area in the plain, it is accepted as one neighbourhood. The expansion of the capital through its villages and the district of *Kızıltepe* continues; therefore, it can be predicted that the capital will gradually integrate with nearby settlements.

It can be asserted that the capital has witnessed rapid and unplanned growth in its settlement after becoming a city of the Turkish Republic. The squatter settlement attached to *Eskisehir* and the largest neighbourhood, *Yenişehir*, were built up because of the huge population flows from the hinterland into the capital from the 1990s onwards. When the long-term stability of the city centre in terms of its settlement is considered, the social and cultural problems caused by this rapid transformation in the local context can be understood. In addition, this transformation can be seen as a threat to the intercultural engagement of diverse components in Mardin.

Today, Muslim Arabs and Syriacs constitute the majority of inhabitants in the historical settlement; even though, some Arab and Syriac families sold their stone houses and moved into new and comfortable apartment buildings. The newcomer Kurdish residents, on the other hand, have mostly settled in the outskirts of the old settlement and *Yenişehir*. In contrast to the private stone houses in *Eskisehir*, the inhabitants of *Yenişehir* became the occupants of apartments. Still, Muslims and Christians are neighbours, and they continue their neighbourhood relations in this new settlement. Yet, this new social context affects

neighbourhood relations in general, for the traditional lifestyle of Mardinites has changed. Because of *apartman kültürü*, which is a usage in Turkish to identify the dilemma of living closer in terms of space but being away with regard to communication, the occupants have faced difficulties in carrying on their local customs in the new social context.

Like the capital of Mardin, Midyat's centre has experienced rapid development in its settlement. Today, Midyat has a new part, *Estel*, inhabited by mostly the Mhallemi Arabs. In fact, *Estel* was a separate Mhallemi village until a few decades ago. Because of the growing Muslim population and inner migration, the Mhallemi Arabs built new houses throughout the centre of Midyat; as a result, this Mhallemi village became an inseparable part of Midyat. After this development, it was accepted as a new neighbourhood of the district. In addition, the Kurdish population in the centre of historical Midyat has grown especially after the departure of the Syriacs for European countries. Therefore, the new picture of Midyat seems to be divided into two main parts. The main side of its context where silversmith shops are located has been shared by the Syriac and Muslim Kurdish residents, whereas the Mhallemi Arabs mostly live on the other side of Midyat known *Estel*. Still, there is no religious or ethnic ghetto in Midyat similar to the capital of Mardin. However, the close relations of the former residents in the capital of Midyat have been affected by the entrance of the newcomers into its local context. For this reason, this recent change should be considered along with ethnic and religious factors in the struggle for understanding the relations of Midyatites.

Among Midyatites, the usage of the 'real Midyat' refers to the capital, whose population is mainly made up of the Syriac and Kurdish residents. In the conversations and narrations of Midyatites, *Estel* is represented as an unwanted guest of the district. However, the interactions of the inhabitants – Arabs, Kurds, Ezidis and Syriacs – have continued, for they encounter each other in the *bazaar*, the marketplace in the centre of the district. In the capital of Mardin,

the *bazaar* also has a similar function. The Mardinites who live in the capital and its hinterland have maintained their social and cultural relations in the marketplace. Thereby, it can be said that every community in Mardin is in communication with others in the *bazaar*, where they trade every day. For this reason, the trade dealings of Mardinite groups will be analysed after giving some details about the close networks between the female residents in Mardin.

4.2.2.1 Women's life in Mardin

In terms of gender roles, Mardin can be considered a traditional society. Mardinite men spend most of their time with other groups in the *bazaar* or other social institutions, while many Mardinite women stay at home. As previously indicated, the structure of the stone houses and interlocked neighbourhoods seems to provide an opportunity for the female residents from different backgrounds to come together and create a female culture. Based on the narrations of the participants, it can be asserted that this culture was most obvious up until the 1980s when the social degeneration in the local context of Mardin reached its peak, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Although women's lives in Mardin are in transition, their relations can be seen as one of the signifiers of close cultural interaction in Mardin. Since there are no economic or social forces driving this interaction, the female residents' sharing enables an examination of Mardin culture and society from a different perspective. Undoubtedly, the close relations of Mardinite women were more observable when Mardin still had its cultural and religious diversity; however, there is evidence to suggest this female culture still exists in Mardin's social life. Having stayed in the private sphere, Mardinite women have had a common ground with women from different religious and ethnic background in sharing traditional patterns and

social restrictions. Therefore, it can be stressed that the transformation in female relations has been slower than that of the male residents.

Traces of this female culture can be followed in the narrations of Mardinite women who witnessed the close relations of the former residents and, thus, have passed this culture on to the younger generation.

> Before buying this house [a traditional stone house], my mother-in-law had Christian neighbours. They lived in their [Christian] neighbourhood and their houses were side by side. They got along well with one another. They attended each other's weddings. When they made bulgur [boiled and pounded wheat], they were coming together. They were cooking together and they came to each other's assistance. I came to this neighbourhood [as a daughter-in-law to live with her husband's family]. While we were preparing *erişte* [homemade noodle that is cut into small pieces] to add bulgur, our neighbours came to help. When we bought bulgur, all our neighbours came to help. Meanwhile, my mother-in-law was cooking bulgur and served all of our neighbours. How is the taste of our bulgur? When they were making cheese or opening the can of cheese, it was given to the neighbours first … Whatever they [Muslim and Christian women] prepared [food] for winter, they served and shared with one another. (Participant 75 (Muslim Albanian, 68, female, housewife))

Participant 82 (Syriac Christian, female, 65, housewife) narrated her friendship with Muslim female neighbours in her youth.

> On Sundays, we do not do housework because it is religious holiday for us. When I was young, my Muslim friends joined us on Sundays and we spent time together. We still see each other.

A few Syriac women shared their close relations with their Muslim neighbours after a Sunday ceremony in the Kırklar Church in the capital of Mardin.

> We have neighbourhood relations. I am going to my [Muslim] friends' houses. They are coming to my house. We are celebrating one another's religious festivals. (Participant 73 (Syriac Christian, 53, female, teacher))

> I live in *Yenişehir* now. In the whole apartment block, we are the only Christian family. We [Christians] do not harm anybody. They [Muslim neighbours] do not harm us. They show great respect to us. (Participant 80 (Syriac Christian, 65, female, housewife))

> My situation is the same. There are sixteen flats in my apartment block [in *Yenişehir*]. I am the only Christian [in the building]. With everybody, love, respect, fondness… If I were not at home one day, my Muslim neighbours ask me 'where were you yesterday? Where did you go? You went this summer, you went and cut my head [meaning 'I missed you a lot and worried about you']. What happened to you?' We are visiting each other. (Participant 105 (Syriac Christian, 67, female, housewife))

However, neighbourhood relations among Mardinite women have been affected by changes in the local context. The main reason of the transformation in female culture is the rapid demographic changes. Along with the inner migration, the departure of urban families for other cities of Turkey or European countries seems to have transformed the close interaction of Mardinite women. However, social changes in general have had more of an impact than ethno-religious boundaries in the relations of Mardinite women.

As it is understood from the statements of the female participants, women had more chances to come together with their Muslim or Christian neighbours until a few decades ago because of spatial closeness. Still, their interaction continues, but its form has been changed. This point can be seen in the example of *kadın günü*, home visit, which is a popular female activity in Turkey. On this occasion, a group of women visit the house of their friend or neighbour on a pre-planned day to spend time together eating homemade foods and drinking tea. As it is understood from the statements of the participants, Mardinite women from different backgrounds invite each other for this occasion.

> My cousin was attending a *kadın günü*. They went to a Syriac woman's house. She cooked entirely Mardin cuisine. It is very difficult to prepare our local foods. But she cooked all of them [for her guests] (Participant 64 (Muslim Arab, 29, female, teacher)).

Another example of this female culture is the public baths of Mardin. According to Islamic law, Muslim and non-Muslim women cannot be together in a public bath. However, some Muslim women have shared the public baths with female Christians in the capital of Mardin. This may be because of the lack of knowledge about the ruling. But, equally, it may be the result of long standing close relations between the female residents. In any case, it refers to the fact that Muslim and Christian women have crossed their religious boundaries.

As a part of the Christian community, Armenian Catholic women have close relations with female Syriacs. In their interaction, the Sunday ceremony of Orthodox Syriacs plays a role, for the Armenian residents also attend these ceremonies. Therefore, Christian women see each other on Sundays and have a chance to spend time in the backyard of the Kırklar Church after the ceremony. Additionally, Armenian women have close friends from Muslim groups. During a participant observation in an Armenian house, the neighbourhood relations of the Muslim and Armenian women were observed. Before breakfast, a Muslim Arab neighbour visited the host to chat and drink 'morning coffee'. During the day, the Armenian host needed a few ingredients while she was preparing a local meal. She sent her daughter to ask for these materials from the Muslim Arab neighbour. As many participants articulated, Muslim and Christian women can visit each other without invitation and ask for assistance or for something they need without hesitation. As a result, it can be claimed that the female residents, who are mostly urban dwellers, have continued their neighbourhood relations with women from different religious communities.

The female-male relations in Mardin have been in transition, yet many Mardinite women seem to stay at home while their husbands participate in the economic life of the city. This fact can be observed in the limited participation of Mardinite women in the economic life of the city where gender roles are very apparent. Although Muslim Arab and Kurdish female residents have recently been present in public areas of Mardin as civil servants or workers in shops, Syriac and Armenian women generally are not a part of *bazaar* life or the State offices. The exception to this fact is a Syriac female teacher who works for a primary school in the capital of Mardin[42] and a few young Syriac females who started working in the shops of silversmiths in Midyat after 2010. Still, the visibility of women in *bazaars* is misleading, for most of them are foreigners or temporary residents.

Women's life in Mardin gives an opportunity to see the socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites from a different angle. The previously constructed female culture of Mardin, which keeps the bonds of diverse groups together, can be seen as an example of cultural engagement in the city, for there are no economic or political obligations to be in communication with women from other groups. As indicated before, the daily interaction of ethno-religious groups in Mardin, especially among the male residents, can be observable in *bazaars* where members of every community are present.

4.2.2.2 The interaction of ethno-religious groups in the bazaar

Situated on the Silk Road, Mardin had been one of the trade centres of the Mesopotamian area from the 4th century to the 20th century (Oktem, 2005). After the establishment of the nation-states and changes in the market system, it seems to have lost its previous connections with other regions. Still, its location reveals that Mardinites have had a chance to encounter others from different cultures and religions. Even though the city's trade dealings have diminished in

[42] She is the only Syriac teacher in Mardin.

importance compared with the past, its income still depends on trade and agriculture. For this reason, the residents have been in communication with other groups in the marketplace.

The common trade place of the capitals of Mardin and Midyat is called the *bazaar*, the marketplace. The *bazaar* of Mardin or Midyat, where the shops of silversmiths and goldsmiths are mainly located, is not simply a trading area, but also a place where intercultural communication and interaction takes place. As a result, continuous trade relations between ethno-religious groups in Mardin can be seen as one of the dimensions of intercultural engagement in the city.

The social interaction of Mardinites can be observed in this trading place, since every group is present to sell or buy a product. Therefore, encountering the other in socio-economic life is inevitable. At this point, it can be thought that Mardinites have had to maintain their relations with others because of economic reasons. Along with this reason, there are other examples that show the inhabitants of Mardin and Midyat have improved their social relations with other groups in the marketplace. Therefore, the context of the *bazaar* is a way to examine the acceptance of religious and cultural diversity by the residents of Mardin.

Daily and social life in the *bazaar* of Mardin and Midyat give an opportunity to observe the socio-cultural interaction of the groups. There is a concrete example of the communication of Mardinites that is observable in the trade area. The residents greet each other with a common expression '*assalam alaikum*,' which means 'peace be on you', although this expression echoes an Islamic lifestyle. As a way of communication, greeting with this expression can be seen as a symbol of mutual participation in social interaction. Further, this type of greeting refers not only to the traditional aspects of Mardin society, but also the common culture of the city.

As previously pointed out, Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Mardin used this greeting in their social and economic life so much so that travellers noticed their interaction. Today, the residents continue using this expression along with *merhaba*[43], hello. It can be quickly noticed that Mardinites from different religious backgrounds greet their neighbours, friends, sellers or buyers in the *bazaar* with this expression before starting a conversation. Therefore, it is not surprising to see a Syriac Christian or Ezidi use this expression when they salute Muslims. Moreover, there is no hesitation in greeting non-Muslim groups using this expression. The Muslim majority would be the reason for choosing this greeting, but there are some examples that show it is a product of long-term cultural interaction in the area. For instance, a Muslim visitor of Kırklar Church said to the priest 'I bring you the greetings of (x)'. The priest responded to his words saying '*wa alaikum salam*'. Because of its long term visibility in daily communication, the usage of *assalam alaikum* can be seen as a characteristic of Mardin culture[44].

As a centre of communication between the groups, the *bazaar* in the context of Mardin can be divided into two parts. The first part of the *bazaar* is permanent, mainly composed of silversmiths, goldsmiths and other shops to supply the needs of Mardinites. The second part of the *bazaar* is temporary, functioning a few days a week. Sometimes the villagers are in this temporary *bazaar* to sell their yoghurt, butter or fruits and vegetables to the city dwellers. Some of these villagers are Ezidis who come to sell their products, such as yoghurt or cheese, and buy their needs. Midyatites know that Tuesdays are when they run into Ezidis in Midyat.

[43] The term *merhaba* is originally an Arabic expression. Therefore, this usage also refers to the common culture of Mardinites, even if using *merhaba* is generally accepted as a secular type of greeting.
[44] According to Participant 6, there is a similar expression '*şlomo hlaykun*' in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic.

In the past, this temporary *bazaar* was very functional before today's market system[45]. Still, the interaction of four ethno-religious groups can be observed in the marketplace of Midyat.

In the previous social settings of Mardin and Midyat, craftsmen and goldsmiths mostly were from non-Muslim groups[46]. Today, there are Muslim shop owners, so the buyers can decide which ethnic or religious group to deal with. However, the ethnic or religious background of a shop owner does not seem to play a significant role in trade dealings in Mardin.

> Most of the goldsmiths are Syriacs. I mean Christians. There are also Muslims [goldsmiths]. Muslims [residents] are generally purchasing from Syriacs. They are dealing very well … I do not personally know a Syriac, but we [her family] are shopping from a [Syriac] goldsmith (Participant 64 (Muslim Arab, 29, female, teacher)).

Participant 129 (Syriac Christian, 45, male, self-employed) is one of the Syriacs who returned from Europe and built a house in the village of *El-Beğendi*. He shared his memories about trade relations with Muslim Mhallemis. Before leaving for Sweden, the Syriac villagers went to Estel, which was a village at that time, to buy their needs instead of going to Midyat where there were Christian shop owners.

> We were not going to Midyat passing Estel to buy our needs. Estel was closer than Midyat to our village. We were dealing with Mhallemis. We never thought we should purchase our needs from the Syriacs because we are Christians. I made close Muslim friends [as a result of trade relations] and I am still seeing them.

Participant 111 (Syriac Christian, 43, male, self-employed) narrated the past relations between his village, *Yemişli* (*Enhıl*) and Estel. In his words, 'our village is Syriac [mostly made up by the Syriac residents] … but we had close relations with Estel'. As Participant 111 expressed,

[45] Mardin has faced a rapid growth in its market. Within a few years, many shopping centres have been built in *Yenişehir* whereas Midyat has not been subject to the changes created by the market system.
[46] Inside the millet system, non-Muslim groups had their own economic niches and experienced real prosperity.

the distance between *Yemişli* and Estel is the same as that between *Yemişli* and Midyat's capital. Instead of going to the capital, the Syriac villagers made close relations with Mhallemis and purchased the goods of Muslim Arabs. This example clarifies that spatial closeness between Muslim and Christians is significant in constructing social and economic relations; at the same time, it shows ethnic or religious affiliations are not very decisive in their commerce dealings.

In some cases, buyers purchase products from the Christian shop owners without knowing their religious identity. Sometimes they hesitate to continue visiting these shops when they find out with whom they deal.

> I was having dealings with a shop owner, but I did not know his religious identity. Later, I learnt he is a Christian. I thought I should buy the stuff from a Muslim shop owner. After a while, I realised that the Syriac Christian seller is more trustful. I changed my mind. I said to myself business ethics is more important than being a Muslim or a Christian (Participant 67 (Muslim Arab, 44, female, teacher)).

Based on the statements of the participants who have trade relations with other groups, it can be asserted that the ethnic or religious background seems not to be as important in the preference of choosing a seller in Mardin. Rather, established close relations are the most important considerations in commerce dealings between parties from different religious or ethnic groups.

A few Syriac shop owners in Midyat articulated that religious identity is influential in choosing a seller. However, they indicated spatial affiliations to explain their thoughts rather than ethnic or religious bonds. It should be kept in mind that Christians have been troubled by the existence of Muslim shop owners in the context of the *bazaar* since they lost their priority

in commerce dealings[47]. Muslim villagers were the customers of Christian craftsmen until a few decades ago.

> Muslim villagers say why have dealings with somebody else if I have my villager or my relative [as a shop owner]. Eighty per cent of Muslims say why have dealings with Syriacs if Muslims have [the same product] (Participant 8 (Syriac Christian, 39, male, self-employed)).

In addition to the preferences of buyers, the shop owners also have good relations with their customers from other communities. This can be because their incomes depend on customer satisfaction and demand; as a result, they have to be nice to people who are members of other groups in the interests of their business. For this reason, it can be claimed the economic structure of the *bazaar* has not led to ethnic discrimination in the local context. Therefore, it is observable that a Muslim or Ezidi goes to a Syriac Christian's shop to buy a product, or a Syriac or a Muslim purchase the goods of Ezidis. In addition to this, shop owners have good relations with one another; for instance, a shop owner can ask his neighbours to look after his shop for a while without hesitation.

Besides the preferences of residents in choosing a seller and the mutual relations in the *bazaar*, the dominant role of the male residents in the marketplace should be indicated since there is a rapid change related to the visibility of Syriac women in public areas. In contrast to the sensibilities and fears of the Syriac community about the possibilities of inter-religious marriage, since 2010 a few Syriac young females have started working in the Syriac silversmith shops selling local jewellery. Considering the attitudes of the Syriacs to protect

[47] As an anecdote, the Christian craftsmen of Mardin resisted having a Muslim apprentice for a long time, because they were afraid of losing their position in the economic life of the city. Their disturbance on this matter is very apparent in their statements. This point can be also followed in the words of a priest who gives information about their culture to Muslim tourists. 'We have a wine tradition of 5000 years. We make wine. Our Muslim brothers do not. They don't. [he continued laughing] They do not learn [how wine is made]'. In short, there is conflict of interest between Mardinite groups except Ezidis.

their ‘daughters’, the visibility of Syriac females as workers in the marketplace can be perceived as a rapid and recent change in the cultural text of Midyat.

Another aspect of transformation in the economic life of Mardin is that it has become a place that movie makers choose. *Berivan* was the first TV series that was made in Mardin. Later, the series of *Sıla* was televised and followed by national audiences with great interest. Sıla was the main female character of the series and she wore local jewellery produced using a technique known as *telkari*. After being televised in this series, local *telkari* jewellery became very popular among the female audience in Turkey. The sellers enjoy selling these local products to domestic tourists, even though they are worried about the representation of their city. Like *Sıla*, the recently screened TV series mainly focus on tribal relations in Mardin, exaggerating some aspects of Mardin society and fostering an image of the city that is opposed to the dominant and demotic discourses.

As a result, it can be said that the residents of Mardin have maintained their social and economic relations in the *bazaar*. Even if trade relations are based on mutual necessities, their approaches to choosing the seller or trusting the ‘other’ show their interaction in the marketplace signifies more. Instead of considering their religious or ethnic affiliations, the ethno-religious groups of Mardin have crossed their religious or cultural boundaries because of economic reasons, yet their choices in commerce dealings show that ethnicity or religion is not a decisive factor in the marketplace.

4.3 Socio-cultural interaction of ethno-religious groups in Mardin

This section aims to put forth the understandings of Mardinites on their cultural interaction in the local context. As previously articulated, Mardinites have engaged with the dominant discourse, which represents Mardin as a city of tolerance and its culture as one of tolerance.

However, the residents' demotic discourse has another perspective that reflects their understanding about their socio-cultural interactions.

This demotic discourse has a few aspects that are illustrated in the narrations of the residents. First of all, the visits of condolence to the family of a deceased person are seen as an example of the close relations of Mardinite groups. It is observable in the city that the residents visit their neighbours from different religious backgrounds to offer their condolences when they lose a family member. Other examples that were given by the participants related to sharing the happiness of their neighbours; for instance, they celebrate religious festivals and days of other groups or they attend the wedding ceremonies of their neighbours.

The main point of these examples that the residents of Mardin used to explain their cultural interaction is there is a mutual respect between the diverse groups in Mardin. According to Mardinites, this respect can be clearly seen in the relations of Muslims and non-Muslims in the month of Ramadan. During this month, non-Muslim groups do not eat or drink in front of their Muslim neighbours. Giving these examples, the residents of Mardin also consider themselves as having a multi-ethnic city that is an example of tolerance and social cohesion.

Sharing grief or considering the religious sensibilities of neighbours from different ethno-religious groups can be seen as an expression of the cultural interaction of Mardinites, for there are some specific ceremonies and rituals to share the sorrow of neighbours or show genuine respect. Through these ceremonies and rituals, the engagement of diverse cultural components in the local context is affirmed. The residents attend these ceremonies to support their neighbours or practice some rituals for the sake of their neighbours; therefore, these activities are significant social gatherings, producing and promoting social cohesion in the city.

As examples of socio-cultural interaction, these social gatherings have some significant dimensions. First of all, they are related to the main passages of life; for example, the first prominent social gathering in the social life of Mardinites is the funeral service. It can be said that the death of a loved one plays a role in Mardin society as a tie between the resident, and helps them to socialise and construct intimate relations. Another dimension of social gatherings in sharing grief or the celebration of religious days is that they sustain ethical obligations, which are supported by each community in the city. At the least, representatives from the communities, generally religious leaders, pay a visit to the families to share their grief or prominent people of other communities celebrate their religious festivals.

However, it should be added that these networks of social relations have been dissolving as a result of the decreasing population of non-Muslim groups in Mardin. In the past, these social gatherings were well-attended by neighbours from different religious backgrounds; however, the sympathy of Mardinites to others can still be observed, especially when a Mardinite loses a family member.

4.3.1 Sharing the grief of neighbours and the rituals related to the end of life

Sharing the grief of neighbours is seen as a social responsibility by the Mardinite groups. They visit their Muslim, Christian or Ezidi neighbours to express their condolences when a member of their family has passed away. It is accepted as a social and ethical obligation to visit the family of the deceased among Mardinites.

This fact is apparent in the responses of Mardinites when they are asked about their relations with other groups. The participants of this study mostly indicated their visits to their Muslim or Christian neighbours to express condolences.

> We are attending their [other communities] funeral services.
> We are expressing our condolence when they have lost a relative.

In addition, the ceremonies related to a funeral are among the most prominent intercultural activities of Mardin, for sharing other groups' grief is a way to show sympathy and respect. Mardinites have very well-organised ceremonies related to funeral services. Mardin society, thus, has some social rituals in regard to the end of life. On one hand, funeral services are held in either a church or a mosque, where Muslims and Christians who have close relations with the family of the deceased attend these religious ceremonies. On the other hand, the main involvement of others happens after a religious funeral service. The neighbours start visiting the family who is present either at their home or in the place of condolence after the religious ceremony. These visits are named *hatır* or *devir*, which mean respect or one's sake and period or circle respectively, and generally last three days. Sometimes, however, *hatır* visits can last more than a month depending on the deceased's social or religious position in society. Consequently, repeating social rituals related to the end of life helps Mardinites improve their social and cultural relations with other communities.

4.3.1.1 The places of condolence

After religious funeral services in a mosque or a church, the family of the deceased congregate in a place to accept the condolences of neighbours if their house is not convenient to have plenty of visitors. These are called 'the places of condolence' among Mardinites who need to have a separate place for this gathering. Apparently, the places of condolence serve as examples of the importance given to the sharing of the grief of neighbours in Mardin. By necessity, these places have newly appeared in the context Mardin's capital, and are generally constructed next to mosques in order to serve Muslim residents. Although Christians mostly use their churches as a condolence place, they can also rent these separate places.

In the rural areas of Mardin, the residents have needed large areas to accept their visitors because of the number of attendants at the condolence ceremony. The tradition of the 'condolence tent', thus, is a product of the rural dwellers. This organisation for accepting condolences can sometimes be very expensive. Still, Muslim residents in the hinterland of Mardin try to continue this tradition. Big tents are set up in an open area to welcome numerous visitors from other districts or villages of Mardin. The family members of the deceased are present in the tent to accept their friends' and neighbours' sympathies.

In the places of condolence, some rituals are performed. The younger members of the family or community serve a meal of condolence to visitors when they come to express their sadness. After the meal, a bitter coffee named *mırra* is served to the visitors. Serving *mırra* is a distinctive ritual of condolence visits in the surroundings of Mardin while it is not very common in the place of condolences in the capital.

Another ritual for expressing condolence is to recite a surah from the Quran for the deceased person. For Muslims, it is a religious tradition to read surah *Fatiha* when visiting the family of the deceased. Muslim visitors can read this surah on their own. But, the Syriac Christians ask the imam or another person who can read this surah on behalf of them when they visit a Muslim family who has lost a family member. This request of Syriacs is seen by Muslim Mardinites as a way of showing respect. This example was also given by Christian participants to indicate their close socio-cultural relations with Muslim groups.

> They [Syriac Christians] ask from the imam to recite Fatiha or a person who can read this surah when they make a condolence visit.
> We [Syriac Christians] ask from the imam or a person who is present there to read Fatiha upon the deceased.

.Based on the narrations of Muslim and Christian participants, it can be said that the Syriac residents are familiar with their Muslim neighbours' religious rituals. Moreover, some Christians, like Ammo Mihail, read surah Fatiha when they make a condolence visit to their Muslim neighbours. This awareness of other's religious practices can be seen as a result of the long-term close relations between these religious groups; still, it is dramatic to disclose the engagement of diverse religious communities in Mardin.

In terms of visits for expressing condolence, religious leaders have some responsibilities as representatives of their communities. Sometimes the priests or imams make a visit to the family of the deceased on behalf of their religious community. As an example, the headman of Anıtlı village[48] could not participate in this study because of this responsibility. On the day arranged for the interview, he had to leave the village to attend two funeral services. On the same day, he visited the districts of Midyat and Nusaybin to express condolence on behalf of his community to Syriac and Muslim families who had lost a family member.

4.3.1.2 The culture of mırra

Mardinites serve a bitter coffee when accepting the condolences of their neighbours. This coffee known as *mırra* has a long history in the south-eastern region of Turkey. The term *mırra* is derived from the term of *murr* in Arabic, which means bitter. This strong coffee is an important part of social life, for it is a ceremonial drink served at formal social gatherings, weddings, circumcision celebrations, religious feast days and in the homes of the bereaved when offering condolences.

[48] The village of Anıtlı has a church named the Virgin Mary and it is a very significant place for Syriac Christians. All Syriacs come together to celebrate one of their feasts in July in this village. A remarkable anecdote from this village is that today a very old woman is the only Muslim resident of this village, living with the support of her Syriac neighbours.

Mardinites also use this coffee as a kind of social ritual in Mardin. The rural dwellers continue serving *mırra* when their neighbours or friends pay a visit of condolence; on the other hand, urban dwellers seem to dispense with this ritual because its preparation takes time.

As a ceremonial drink, *mırra* has a symbolic meaning of sharing grief and showing sympathy to people who are deeply in sorrow. Its symbolic meanings are sometimes explained by Mardinites who serve this coffee to foreigners. The first point related to this coffee, which is noticed by a foreigner, is its taste, which is very bitter and strong like the sadness that death creates. Thus, through drinking this coffee, visitors can symbolically show their willingness to share the sorrow of the bereaved family. No matter how bitter it is, the visitors must drink *mırra* if it is served when they make a visit to a place of condolence. This ritual is necessary to show their sympathy is genuine. If a visitor does not drink the coffee, it is seen as disrespectful behaviour. Drinking *mırra* would be very difficult for the visitors, especially for those who have not drunk it before. However, they have to force themselves to drink it just as the family has to accept the absence of their loved member. Consequently, this bitter coffee is seen as a symbolic way of sharing the grief of neighbours in Mardin.

4.3.1.3 The bread of life: Kıliçe

Kıliçe is small, sweet and cinnamon *çörek*, bread roll, delivered by Mardinites to guests in some social gatherings. This bread is also known as 'the bread of life' among the residents of Mardin. There is some evidence to accept this bread roll as one of the symbols of Syriac tradition, for the Syriacs use it in their religious ceremonies[49]. *Kıliçe* is used in Syriac marriage ceremonies as a symbol of the unity of family. The priest divides it into two equal pieces in the ceremony and gives them to the new couple as a reminder of the life that will be

[49] *Kıliçe* is not the same as bread that is used in the Eucharistic Liturgy. It can be seen as a cultural product of the Mardinite Syriacs.

shared by the groom and the bride, and the unity of family[50]. In addition, the most remarkable emblem regarding this bread roll is the cross on it.

However, this bread roll is a part of some social gatherings in Mardin. Muslims and Syriacs distribute this bread to their guests after the ceremonies for weddings, funerals or *mawlid*, which is a Muslim ceremony held after some occasions like funerals. Compared to the Syriac's *kıliçe*, the Muslims' bread is bigger, but it sometimes has a cross similar to that which the Syriac neighbours put on it. The cross on *kıliçe* applied by Muslims may be because of a desire for abundance; some Muslim participants expressed that their grandmothers put a cross on dough, which was prepared for cooking bread. Still, this ritual can be seen as an example of the long-standing close relations between Muslim and Christian residents.

After religious ceremonies, Mardinites deliver this bread to the people who are present. Like other Anatolian people, Mardinites accept bread as a sacred object. Therefore, this understanding of the Muslim residents can be effective in the acceptance of this ceremonial bread of Syriacs. However, continuing to put the cross on *kıliçe* can be accepted as an expression of cultural interaction between Muslims and Christians in Mardin. Like *mırra*, this bread also has a symbolic representation of the engagement of cultural components in the local context. It has a special taste because of the spices added to its dough. In a similar way to this bread, the society of Mardin has a unique structure that is composed of various cultural layers.

[50] Eroğlu and Sarıca (2012) indicate this bread roll in their article as a ritual of Syriac wedding ceremonies in Midyat.

4.3.2 Celebrating the religious days and festivals of neighbours

Sharing the happiness of neighbours is another aspect of intercultural engagement in Mardin. The Mardinites who participated in this study generally articulated the celebration of neighbours' religious festivals and days as an indicator of mutual respect. Based on the statements of the participants, it can be said that Mardinites place importance on celebrating the religious feast days of other religious groups, and attending their religious ceremonies to show their respect. The participants of this study generally used the month of Ramadan and the Easter feast as examples of socio-cultural interaction of diverse groups in Mardin.

4.3.2.1 The month of Ramadan

Ramadan is the holiest month of the Islamic calendar, which is based on the movements of the moon. One of the five pillars of Islam is to fast in this month. For this reason, pious Muslims refrain from drinking, eating, smoking and sexual relations during the daylight hours from dawn to sunset in Ramadan. It is apparent that this month is highly significant to Muslims even if they do not practice religion in their daily life; for instance, Muslims who do not fast in this month in Turkey consider the religious sensibilities of the people who are fasting and try to participate in social events that are organised in this month.

The month of Ramadan occupied an important place in the narrations of Mardinites who were interviewed. It was generally mentioned as an illustration of religious tolerance between the diverse religious groups of Mardin. Syriac Christians and Ezidis are aware of when Ramadan comes, and of what this month means and requires for Muslims. However, awareness about this month by non-Muslim groups may not be an illustration of religious tolerance considering that Muslims are the majority group in the city. Nevertheless, the close relations of the rural Mardinites support the view that the awareness of the Christians and Ezidis is not only because they are in the minority, but is also about considering their Muslim neighbours.

In some districts or villages of Mardin, the population of Syriac Christians outnumber that of Muslim groups. Still, Syriacs show the same respect to their neighbours during this month by not drinking, eating or smoking in open places where the people who are fasting can see them. Not only Muslims but also Christians in Mardin recount that Syriac Christians have been very thoughtful to their Muslim neighbours in this month. Moreover, some Syriac participants added that their religious sensibilities towards Muslims' religious days should be seen as a genuine attitude.

According to Participant 35 (Muslim Kurd, 52, male, civil servant), Syriac Christians are very careful in regard to the sensibilities of Muslims in the month of Ramadan, so much so that they sometimes are more respectful than Muslims who are not fasting. After he underlined his opinion repeating that 'there is no doubt about this issue', Participant 35 furthered his explanation:

> They, I mean, who are shopkeepers, warn their apprentices. Do not eat and drink anything outside since Muslims are fasting. It is Ramadan.

This statement can be followed in the childhood memories of some Syriac Mardinites. When they were apprentices in workplaces, their Christian *ustas*, adepts, advised them to consider their Muslim neighbours during Ramadan. They stated they were eating or drinking where nobody could see them. Most Syriacs still follow the advice of their *ustas*, not drinking, eating or even smoking in open areas. Frankly, the Syriac residents do not see this consideration of others as a kind of oppression by majority groups, except a few who mostly are politicised Syriacs of Midyat, as will be discussed in Chapter 6 in the section 'the collective memory of the Mardinite groups'.

Still, Midyatite Muslims thought their Syriac neighbours are very thoughtful in the month of Ramadan. Participant 72 (Muslim Arab, 46, female, self-employed) who is the owner of a handcraft workplace in Midyat expressed that 'when Ramadan comes, when we are fasting, they [Syriac shopkeepers] do not order meals and eat as well'. She then referred to her Syriac neighbours who are siblings, one is a lawyer and other two are silversmiths, saying they do not order meals in the holy month of Muslims because they are respectful to their Muslim neighbours' religious beliefs.

Participant 70 (Muslim Kurds, 25, female, unemployed) who lives in the capital of Midyat also gave Ramadan as an example of religious tolerance while she was talking about close relations between Muslims and Syriac Christians.

> Our house's owner is Syriac. They are living in Germany. We are still talking on the phone. My uncle is in France. He is visiting them and they are visiting my uncle. They are visiting here [Midyat] in the summertime. They, in fact, miss their houses. Last year, they came here in Ramadan. They wanted to visit their house. They took photos and videotaped it. We were in the month of Ramadan. We wanted to serve something but they refused. They said 'You are in Ramadan. You are fasting. How can we eat something in front of you?' They were seeing this [eating or drinking something] as disrespectful.

However, some criticism was raised in the answers of some Syriacs in Midyat about the stories of religious tolerance that happened in the month of Ramadan. According to them, religious tolerance in the example of Ramadan must be mutual; for instance, Muslims should ask their non-Muslim guests if they want to drink or eat something even if the hosts are fasting, for they have to show respect to other religious groups as well. After making this point, Participant 6 (Syriac Christian, 38, male, works for a church) shared an example story that happened in Ramadan. With a few foreign guests, an Ezidi who is a member of

parliament from Germany visited the governor of Mardin. The governor did not offer a drink to them. After the conversation ends, the Ezidi guest said:

> Your attitude toward us is not acceptable. You did not ask if we want to drink something. You should do that. We know it is Ramadan. If you asked, we would say 'we do not want to drink anything in front of you because it is Ramadan' (as narrated by Participant 6)

Yet, the majority of the participants expressed that Syriac Christians and Ezidis show consideration to the religious sensibilities of Muslims in Ramadan, for their respect is genuine, not because Muslims are the majority in the city.

4.3.2.2 The Easter feast

The most well-known Syriac feast in Mardin is Easter. Even though Syriac Christians have many religious festivals and days during the year, Muslim and Ezidi residents are much more aware of the Easter feast and the rituals related to it. In fact, this feast has a significant place in the childhood memories of most Mardinites from different religious communities.

The most significant symbol of this religious feast is the red Easter egg, which symbolises the blood of Jesus Christ as well as the resurrection in the springtime. In the feast time, Syriac children deliver these special red eggs to their Muslim friends, or Muslim children visit their Syriac neighbours to collect these eggs. For Muslim and Syriac children, collecting these Easter eggs is a kind of game. After collecting the eggs, they come together and play egg tapping. In fact, egg tapping is not only a game for children, but also adults in Mardin. At Easter time, there are many stories in circulation about the strategies of playing egg tapping or who is the winner among the adult residents. One of these stories recollected by Participant 35 (Muslim Kurd, 52, male, civil servant) happened between the *Metropolitan* (Bishop) and the *mufti* of Mardin in the official celebration of Easter in 2011.

The importance of this feast among the Syriac community was observable in the celebrations in 2011. As outlined in Chapter 1, the Syriac Christians who immigrated to European countries have been returning to Mardin within the scope of the Return Project since 2002. One of the outcomes of this project was the celebration of Easter in 2011. With a huge participation of diaspora Syriacs, two Easter celebrations were held in the capitals. The celebration in the capital of Mardin was performed in Kırklar Church with the attendance of the governor and *mufti* of Mardin to the religious ceremony with some other Muslim guests. The second celebration in Midyat was organised by *Syriac Universal Alliance*, which is one of the Syriac non-governmental organisations in European countries, and its religious ceremony was conducted with the participation of the governor of Midyat and Midyatite Muslim neighbours.

Although the celebration in Mardin was more official than that of Midyat, the latter had some political implications. Many Syriacs from European countries and the representatives of Syriac associations in European countries were present at the celebration in the capital of Midyat. One of the messages given by diaspora Syriacs was the call for Syriacs who migrated from Mardin to other countries to return to their 'homes'. At the same time, this organisation was a testimony of transnational connections of Syriac community, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Apart from the implicit meanings of the 2011 Easter celebration in Midyat, the interest and participation of Muslim residents in both ceremonies are significant to understanding the intercultural engagement in Mardin. As stated by Gabriyel Akyüz, the priest of Kırklar Church in the capital of Mardin, some Muslim residents also attended the Friday ceremony before the official and popular celebrations. In addition, many Muslims paid a visit to Kırklar Church to celebrate the feast of Gabriyel Akyüz and, thus, the whole Syriac community.

> Our Muslim neighbours visited us to celebrate our Easter. We had prepared 300 special meals for our guests. But they were inadequate to serve our guests.

Echoing the example given by the priest of Kırklar Church, Participant 91 (Mhallemi, 44, male, teacher), who was born in the village of Söğütlü in Midyat, shared his childhood memories related to the Friday celebration as a part of the Easter feast. He recollected that day as *Meryem Cuması*, the Mary Friday. On this day, Muslim villagers, as stated by Participant 91, went to wilderness areas to have picnics with their Christian neighbours. This activity continued until a religious person, most probably a local *imam*, said to the Muslims that this feast is part of Christian culture. Participant 91 is a pious person, worshipping five times a day; nonetheless, he said 'I wish we had not left this activity' at the end of his recollection.

As seen in the statements of Muslim and Christian Mardinites about the Easter feast, religious and cultural sharings between diverse groups raise consciousness about the other. Besides, their participation in religious activities helps them construct close relations.

4.3.3 Considering the religious sensibilities of neighbours

In the narrations of Mardinites, another aspect of the engagement of diverse components in Mardin was raised. The participants frequently underlined that Mardinites somehow consider the religious sensibilities of their neighbours from different religious communities. This point is clearly one aspect of demotic discourse related to tolerance experienced in the local context apart from the tolerance approach of the dominant discourse.

4.3.3.1 Showing respect to the religious symbols and matters of others

As an aspect of the intercultural engagement in Mardin, showing respect to religious symbols and matters of others is mostly expressed by the participants as:

> We are going to mosque. They are going to church.
> We are going to church. They are going to mosque.

Muslims and Christians referred to the religious places as a distinguishing identifier between the communities. The sentences articulated above were used by some participants of this study to indicate that religious beliefs are distinctive elements between Mardinite groups. According to them, being respectful to the members of other faiths is the first step of communication. As a result of this understanding, it can be said that Mardinites are aware of the necessity of being respectful to others in intercultural relations before expecting respect from others.

> I am saying to my Muslim neighbours. I have respect for your beliefs. Be respectful of my belief so we can be close friends. (Participant 80 (Syriac Christian, 65, female, housewife))

> In the beginning, I am saying we have Jesus, you have Mohammed. We should not be judgemental about religious beliefs. (Participant 105 (Syriac Christian, 67, female, housewife))

Similarly, some Muslim participants highlighted the necessity of mutual respect as a rule of intimate relations before starting a conversation with others. This point is remarkable since they remind their neighbours at the beginning of their sensitive religious matters, for this is an initial condition for their communication.

In terms of prominent religious symbols, such as the mosque, peacock, church or the cross, Mardinites seem to be at peace with the symbols of other religions. Neither Muslims nor Christians reflect any negative attitude toward seeing the religious symbols of others in their daily lives. In addition, the Ezidi symbols, such as the peacock, seem to be accepted as a part of Mardin's culture by the people from other religious communities.

In contrast to Muslims' experience in the context of Western societies, Christians ring their church bell in Mardin. This does not create a tension between Muslims and Christians. When the Muslim participants were asked if they have ever been bothered by hearing church bells, they clearly expressed they have not. Moreover, Mardinites see the existence of churches and the symbolic call of church bells as part of the rights of Christian groups.

As a noteworthy consideration of Syriacs to their Muslim neighbours, the mosque that was constructed by Syriac Christians in the centre of Midyat was illustrated by some Syriac participants. In the 18th century, the Syriacs invited two well-known Kurdish families, *Nehrozo* and *Mehmedo*, to settle in the capital of Midyat to protect them from other Kurdish tribes. After the settlement of these tribes, Syriacs noticed that their Muslim neighbours needed a mosque for their prayers and some other religious activities. For this reason, they built a mosque for the Muslim residents of Midyat. This mosque can still be seen as a symbol of close socio-cultural relations in the district since it was built by the Syriac Midyatites for their Muslim neighbours.

The Ezidis' religious sensibilities are also taken into consideration by their neighbours from different religious communities. Some Muslim participants articulated that they do not use the terms of Satan or devil in front of Ezidis, for Ezidis are offended by hearing these pejorative words. Instead, Ezidis use the term *Melek-e Tawus*, the Angel Peacock, which is a very important religious figure in Ezidi religion. Considering their religious sensibilities, Muslims, therefore, are very careful when Ezidis are present. Muslim participants' reference to this sensibility of Ezidis also shows they have some knowledge about the beliefs of their neighbours. This awareness would be because they have shared the local contexts of Mardin and Midyat for a long time.

The acceptance of religious symbols of others can be seen in the handcrafts produced by the inhabitants of Mardin and Midyat. The basic symbols of Muslims, Christians and Ezidis have been used in some handmade products, such as jewellery and clothes, to represent Mardin to domestic and foreign tourists. In these handcrafts, the pictures or shapes of mosques, churches and peacocks are drawn together as a symbol of the co-existence of these three religious belief systems in the city.

Apart from showing respect for the religious symbols and matters of other groups, Mardinites are also familiar with the food restrictions of their neighbours from different religious background. Since these restrictions bring out religious sensibilities about eating or sharing food of and with others, some examples of Mardinites' considerations of their neighbours are discussed in the following section.

4.3.3.2 Sharing food with neighbours

Food is not only nourishment for human beings, but a religious and cultural product as well. This point can be seen in the religious/cultural restrictions and rituals related to preparing and consuming food in every culture. Therefore, food is an analytical tool to understand the intercultural engagement of diverse structures in Mardin.

It is surely beyond doubt that food is one of the remarkable aspects of Mardin's culture. In fact, it is an inseparable part of social and religious gatherings, such as funerals and wedding ceremonies in the city. There are some special meals or drinks that are served to guests in these ceremonies. Serving food is also an expression of Mardinites' hospitality. Every group in Mardin wants to show their readiness to welcome their guest by preparing a special meal from Mardin cuisine. Therefore, food is a tool to construct close relations with others in the society of Mardin.

At this point, it should be added that every group in Mardin has some cultural prejudices in eating the meal of their neighbours, as will be discussed in Chapter 5; on the other hand, Mardinites consider their neighbours' religious sensibilities related to consuming food. They show respect to the preferences of their neighbours, and this point is important to see their close interaction.

In addition to its cultural aspects, preparing for or sharing food with neighbours from different religious groups is a way to understand the close relations of Mardinites. The most important point related to food in intercultural interaction is that Mardinites are familiar with the religious rules and restrictions of their neighbours about consuming food. For instance, the most well-known restriction that every group knows is that Muslims cannot eat meat if the animal was not slaughtered in the name of Allah, and if Islamic rules were not followed during slaughtering. Syriacs and Ezidis are very careful about this rule, considering their neighbours' religious sensibilities.

Apart from the slaughtering process, Muslims cannot eat some animals specified in the Qur'an. The most well-known prohibited animal is pig. Neither Syriacs nor Ezidis consume pork in Mardin. In fact, it is not a part of Mardin cuisine. In addition, butchers in the city centres are Muslims. Therefore, whether a meal is halal or not in terms of the slaughtering process is not a problem in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat.

In the hinterland, however, villagers sometimes butcher the animal on their own. Therefore, this point gives an opportunity to examine the perceptions and practices of the rural dwellers from different backgrounds. There are many stories about the considerations of Syriacs and Ezidis toward their Muslim neighbours' religious rules related to consuming meat.

Seen as a deviant (sometimes Islamic) group, the Ezidis' sincere attitudes toward the religious sensibilities of their Muslim neighbours are considerable. There are many examples narrated by Muslims and Ezidis that show the Ezidis are very thoughtful about the slaughtering process. In many stories, they do not slaughter the animal until they find a Muslim man who accepts this task. Otherwise, they cannot serve a meal including meat to their Muslim guest because the slaughtering process is not Islamic.

This consideration of Ezidis appears in the narrations of the participants who have had close relations with this religious group. For instance, Abdurrahim İnanç, the *mufti* of Midyat, shared a story about the Ezidis' genuine attitude. He has maintained close relations with Mir Tahsin, who is a prominent Ezidi leader in Iraq. This Ezidi leader visits the *mufti* when he comes to Midyat.

> He is insightful. For instance, when we went [to visit them], either he asks one of our friends or calls a Muslim to butcher the animal. In the room we stay, they make ready a *seccade* [prayer rug] … they bring an unused *seccade*. They do not want us to be offended with anything.

Another participant shared a similar story about considering the religious sensibility of Muslim neighbours.

> The chief of an Ezidi village waited for a Muslim visitor to slaughter his calf. Thus, he will offer his meal to Muslim guests. Months rolled by but they had not Muslim visitor. Around November, he still could not find a person to butcher the animal. But he must find somebody. It is the time to slaughter. After November, the meat of the calf is not tasty. One day he heard a Muslim man had visited our village. As soon as he heard this, the chief immediately run and asked him to slaughter the animal. The man said he cannot because he faints when he sees blood. But he did not want to miss this chance. Finally they found a solution. They tied the man's eyes. Somebody [Ezidi] held his hand and cut

> the animal's throat. Indeed, an Ezidi did but the Muslim man held the knife. (Participant 85 (Muslim Kurd, 47, male, self-employed))

Similar stories to the one narrated by Participant 85 were also articulated by the participants from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. These stories show the Ezidi residents of Mardin sometime pushed the limits of the Islamic slaughtering process. The underlying reason for their action is clearly based on respect for the religious rules and sensibilities of their Muslim neighbours. The trust issue in these examples can be seen as another aspect of intercultural engagement in Mardin, for there is mutual trust between Ezidis and Muslims. Ezidis could say they found a Muslim man and he slaughtered the animal even if they did not. Since there is no way to determine who slaughtered the animal, it can be said that both parties trust the words of each other.

As for Syriacs' attitudes to this topic, they also consider the food restrictions of their Muslim neighbours. In the capital of Mardin, they buy meat from Muslim butcher shops. Therefore, there is no problem between Muslims and Syriacs in terms of halal meat. Like the examples given about the consideration of Ezidis, Syriacs in rural areas find a Muslim man to butcher their animals before serving the meat to Muslim visitors. Sometimes the guests ask who slaughtered the animal to determine if the meat is halal or not. This question has been recently seen as an expression of suppression applied to the former Syriac residents by the Muslim majority groups in the city. This challenge articulated by some middle aged Syriacs in Midyat will be examined in Chapter 5.

In terms of food restriction, Ezidis have some religious rules as well; for instance, they cannot eat lettuce. This rule is sometimes referred to by other religious groups.

> We were constructing a building in a village. Because the village does not have enough water, we carried our water with buckets and left them outside. We could bring water which is only enough for us. Every time we took a break, we saw our water is running out. We brought more, but same thing happened. Later, we realised there were Ezidis who were working in the field close by the construction. They were drinking our water without asking our permission. To stop them, somebody said 'put a leaf of lettuce on water. They cannot drink your water any more'. We did and later saw they could not drink our water any more.

This example shows that some Muslim residents are familiar with Ezidis' specific rules about the restrictions of consuming food. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, these rules sometimes create cultural prejudices between the groups. Still, there are many examples that show the religious respect of each group to other religious communities in Mardin.

Mardinite Muslims also consider their neighbours' religious rules about consuming food. Sometimes they remind their Syriac neighbours not to eat meat or animal products when it is time for Syriacs to fast before Easter.

> I realised my friend is eating meat. It was his fasting day. I warned him. What are you doing? You should not eat meat. I guess some Syriacs are not following this rule any more.

Some participants shared the former residents' consideration of their Syriac neighbours' religious rules related to eating restrictions.

> My grandmother was preparing a meal for her Syriac neighbours when they were fasting. She did not buy vegetable oil from the market for her family. She was using [homemade] butter while she was cooking. Because [Syriac Orthodox] Christians cannot eat animal products during those days, she bought vegetable oil from the *bazaar* and cooked a meal which includes only onion and potatoes. She was not adding meat to this meal. (Participant 91 (Muslim Arab, 43, male, teacher))

Because of sharing a context (social setting) with other groups, it seems the residents of Mardin are aware of the religious days of their neighbours. The example given by Participant 91 is considerable to show this point. Apparently, some Muslim neighbours are familiar with the fasting days of Syriacs before Easter when they refrain from animal products for 50 days. The grandmother of Participant 91 was aware of this rule so much so that she deliberately bought vegetable oil from the *bazaar* in consideration of the religious rules of her Syriac neighbours. This point is significant because people in the villages or districts of Mardin did not buy cheese, butter or yoghurt. Instead, they make these products at their homes. In addition, Mardinite people do not serve a meal to their guests if it does not include meat and they do not like eating vegetarian meals. Considering these points, the action of the grandmother can be seen as an example of genuine respect for others.

In addition to the religious sensibilities being taken into consideration by neighbours from different religious groups, Mardinites have some similar patterns related to having or serving meals. The first point that catches the attention of outsiders is they traditionally have meals sitting on the ground. Generally, a big dish is served to all guests and they eat the meal from this dish together. The host brings all courses and they are ready to be eaten at the table on the floor. At this point, it should be added that Mardin has special cuisine. The names of local meals are the same in every community, but they sometimes use different spices or techniques to cook. Every Mardinite group in the scope of this study showed similarities in inviting the people to have a meal even if they barely knew them; therefore, the hospitality that Mardinites are very proud of can be accepted as another aspect of their common culture.

Consequently, consuming food is restricted by religious and cultural rules as seen from the examples given by the participants of this study. Still, sharing food with others is one of the ways of constructing close relations in the context of Mardin, even if the religious or cultural

restrictions in eating food sometimes create prejudices between the groups. As a result, religious sensibilities considered by neighbours from different religious communities related to sharing food give an opportunity to analyse the genuine respect of the residents to other groups.

4.4 Other aspects of the intercultural engagement in Mardin

Although the previous section mainly focused on the examples given by the participants to support the demotic discourse, this section discusses other significant aspects of the intercultural engagement in the local context of Mardin that surfaced in the statements of the participants. These aspects are the outcomes of long standing relations of the residents, and they are examined in this section benefitting from the results of participant observation, which is supported by textual analysis. Firstly, two mediator institutions constructed by the Mardinite groups are given as illustrations of the intercultural engagement of diverse components. Secondly, having traditional body tattoos, which is an activity of the rural inhabitants in the south-east region of Turkey, are examined since they have symbolic meanings in addition to being a commonality between the ethno-religious groups. Later, the preferences in speaking local languages are discussed. Finally, the role of religious and opinion leaders in the social and cultural life of the city is analysed.

4.4.1 Virtual kinships in Mardin as mediator institutions

As a result of long-term co-existence in the context of Mardin, the residents from different backgrounds seem to have constructed some mediator institutions to eliminate the tensions that are created by the religious differences and practices. Also, these mediator institutions have helped the Mardinites cross the boundaries of their communities.

In the local context of Mardin, there are two significant virtual kinships that function as mediator institutions. The first virtual kinship is milk siblinghood. This social and religious institution can be seen as a result of the female culture, which establishes close relations between the female inhabitants from different religious communities[51]. The second type of virtual kinship between Mardinites is constructed by the institution of *kirvelik*, which is closely related to the tradition of circumcision.

Even though today these virtual kinships have started disappearing in the socio-cultural life of Mardin, the affiliations established by the former residents still exist. In the narrations of Mardinites, these virtual kinship bonds appeared as the signifiers of close relations among diverse groups[52].

4.4.1.1 Milk siblinghood

Milk siblinghood is a type of kinship that is constructed by the contribution of the female residents in Mardin. By giving their breastmilk to a Muslim, Christian or Ezidi baby, whether there is a need or not, the former female residents morally established a system of kinship. This virtual kinship has played a significant role in engaging with the other, for it requires some ethical obligations for the parties.

The most prominent obligation of this symbolic kinship is the prohibition of marriage between the milk siblings. Even a milk sibling's biological brother or sister cannot marry with their milk sibling. In addition, marriage between the biological siblings of milk siblings is not permitted because they are also accepted religiously and ethically as siblings. Therefore,

[51] At this point, it should be considered that there was a need to feed babies whose mothers died or did not have enough breastmilk. Besides, they did not have a chance to buy infant formula milk from a pharmacy or supermarket at that time. It was because of their lifestyle, which was based on a self-sufficient agricultural economy. Still, they could find a milk mother who was from their religious community.

[52] It should be added that the participants of this study did not use these examples to demonstrate their demotic discourse. Rather, the networks of Mardinites' virtual kinships were asked about by the researcher.

breastmilk constructs a new kind of kinship among the families. This practice obviously helps the aims of communities by eliminating the chance of marriage for young Muslim, Christian, and Ezidis by reason that milk siblinghood explicitly provides ethical concerns among groups. In any case, breastmilk brings the diverse religious groups of Mardin together constructing a moral system of kinship. On the other hand, blood still remains as a distinguishing factor between them, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Another ethical result of this practice is to establish a life-long relationship between the milk mother and milk siblings. Based on the data collected from Mardin, it is understood that milk siblings have retained their relations with their milk mothers and milk siblings, even if they immigrated to other countries. Even though these relations still continue, milk siblinghood seems to have lost its institutional role in the city, for there are no current examples of this practice[53].

Many participants of this study narrated stories of milk siblinghood from their family history. This practice happened especially in places where the diverse groups were neighbours. For instance, some villagers of Anıtlı shared a story about a Muslim woman who had a baby. This woman disappeared one day and was never found. The villagers tried to find what happened to her but they could not. In the end, a Syriac Christian woman gave her breastmilk to the baby of the missing woman and raised it as her own child. This village was made up of Muslim and Christian inhabitants in the past. Today, all villagers are Syriac, except for an old Muslim woman. For this reason, there is no way to determine what Muslim villagers of Anıtlı thought about having a Christian milk mother, or if there was a Muslim woman who recently gave a birth, so could give her breastmilk to that Muslim baby to verify the extent of the intimacy between the different religious communities in in Mardin.

[53] This may be because there is no need for milk mothers anymore. Instead of breastmilk, baby formula is commonly used today in Turkey.

Participant 46 (Muslim Arab, 53, male, self-employed), whose mother has a Syriac milk mother, articulated that 'there was no readymade infant milk at that time'. His grandfather is the first *mufti* of Midyat who settled in the capital of Midyat with his family in around 1927, as stated by Participant 46. When the grandfather's wife died shortly after giving birth, he chose a Syriac woman as a milk mother 'even though he is a *mufti*'. As a result of having a milk sibling, his mother learnt Syriac very well and has continued her relations with this Syriac family.

Participant 73, whose cousin, the son of her uncle, has a Muslim milk mother, explained why the relations of milk siblinghood have been constructed. 'That [Muslim or Christian] woman did not have enough breastmilk. Her neighbour gave birth and produced more breastmilk. For this reason, they help each other'. Then she added that the milk mother of her cousin died, but his milk siblings continue to visit him. 'The mother died, but X (Muslim milk sibling, female) still kisses him [on his cheeks] when she visits'. She especially underlined that the milk sibling of his cousin acts as if she is his biological sister**.**

Ezidi women would also be the milk mothers of Syriac and Muslim babies in the hinterland of Mardin. There are some clues that show this possibility in the stories of the residents who immigrated to European countries, but have recently returned to their villages and built houses. For instance, Participant 129 (Syriac Christian, 45, male, self-employed) recollected some illustrations of an Ezidi milk mother and a Syriac baby in the village of el-Beğendi (Kafro) in Midyat. Unfortunately, it is not possible to follow the traces of this kind of milk siblinghood in today's Mardin. Still, it is predictable that this type of milk siblinghood, even if it was established in the past, was not very common in Mardin, comparing the established virtual kinships between Muslim and Christians by breastmilk.

Although Mardinite groups do not approve of inter-religious marriages, there are many affiliations of virtual kinship constructed by breastmilk. Having a milk mother or siblings from a different religious community seems to have been used as a way to promote socio-cultural relations between the Mardinite groups alongside the need to feed babies. As a result, it can be said there is no negative attitude toward this virtual kinship between the different religious groups.

4.4.1.2 The institution of kirvelik

Another type of virtual kinship is constructed through the institution of *kirvelik* among the inhabitants of Mardin. This institution builds a new kinship between the families of the person who is circumcised and the family of *kirve*, the person who bears the expenses of circumcision. *Kirve* is not only a part of an acknowledgement that is economically limited, but also is the person who additionally undertakes legal and social sanctions (Kolukırık & Saraç, 2010). Consequently, this institution establishes a new social lifelong relationship between *kirve* and the circumcised person and his family, which is sometimes much closer than their first degree relatives.

As previously indicated, the institution of *kirvelik* is closely related to the tradition of circumcision. Since circumcision is a very important part of a man's life in Muslim and Ezidi communities, *kirvelik* has been a mediator institution to establish closer relations between these groups. Thereby, there can be found many examples of this virtual kinship established between Muslim and Ezidi communities.

However, Ezidis are generally the party who offer Muslims to be their *kirve*. There are some reasons for this preference. The first significant factor in choosing Muslims as their *kirve* is that they want to improve close relations with their Muslim neighbours. Another reason

would be that this institution brings the prohibition of marriage between the circumcised person and the daughter of his *kirve*. If an Ezidi chooses a *kirve* from the Ezidi community, his son and the daughter of Ezidi *kirve* cannot marry. For this reason, this prohibition between Muslim and Ezidi parties, on the other hand, is very functional for Ezidi residents. Besides, the Ezidi community only permits endogamy. Moreover, an Ezidi can only marry someone who is from their class due to their strict religious caste system. In addition to this rule, population is a serious matter for this minority group. Since their population in Mardin has decreased a lot, Ezidis have encountered difficulties finding a spouse. As a result of seeking close relations and solving problems related to the institution of marriage, they seem to have asked their Muslim neighbours to take this responsibility for them.

Syriac Christians also use the term *kirve* to call someone who is chosen by the family to take a spiritual role in the ceremonies of baptism and wedding. Some participants who live in villages shared some information about offering this role to their Muslim neighbours. According to them, it is possible to ask a Muslim neighbour to be their *kirve* either in a wedding or baptism ceremony. One of the participants who articulated the possibility of having a Muslim *kirve* extended his explanation with another example. There was a priest in his village who taught Muslim children how to read the Quran because the Muslim community of his village did not have an *imam* at that time. Yet, whether Syriac Christians would have a Muslim *kirve* in their religious ceremonies is questionable because of religious practices. Still, this approach can also be related to the lifestyle of villagers considering that some urban Syriacs rejected the possibility of offering a Muslim to be their *kirve*[54]. However,

[54] I presented a paper about the intercultural engagement in Midyat at the international conference of *Kesf-i Kadim*: *From Matiate to Midyat* held in the capital of Midyat in 2011. A Syriac member of the audience, who is the president of a Syriac association in Midyat, criticised my findings related to the Muslim *kirves* of Syriacs. According to him, Syriacs cannot make an offer to a Muslim to be their *kirve* in the ceremony of baptism or wedding, for all attendants of these ceremonies are also baptised in the ceremony. Still, the possibility of having a Muslim *kirve* should not be eliminated, considering the more equalitarian context of the rural dwellers who have experienced the spatial closeness with other. In addition, the participants who live in the village of Anıtlı

Muslims and Ezidis seem to have occasionally chosen the *kirve* of their son from the Syriac community even though the Syriacs do not have the tradition of circumcision.

Consequently, it can be said that both virtual kinships have helped Mardinites to construct close relations with the people from different religious communities, and eliminate the tensions between the groups. Even though the boundaries of religions in allowing inter-religious marriage are very strong in Mardin, the residents seem to have found additional ways for engaging with other groups through mediator institutions.

4.4.2 Body tattoos as a part of intercultural engagement in Mardin

In addition to some shared religious symbols previously indicated, body tattoos provide an opportunity to discuss the close socio-cultural interaction between Mardinites. Having traditional tattoos can be seen as a female activity in the hinterland; however, a few Mardinite men in the rural areas also have tattoos on their hands and faces.

In south-east Turkey, the practice of traditional tattooing was very common among the rural female inhabitants in the past. The techniques of tattooing are very outdated and its basic materials are very simple. The tattooists use a needle and a mixture of breastmilk and carbon black or kohl, a type of eyeliner called *sürme* in Turkish. Even though other materials for tattooing are easy to come by, there is a strict rule for breastmilk. It must be from a mother who has a girl since the tattoo is permanent. Using a needle, the mixture is applied under the skin permanently.

This painful practice among Mardinite women in rural areas can be seen as a rite of passage. The underlying reason of this practice is based on the understanding of beauty as articulated

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articulated that some Muslim government officers in the village who are invited by the Christian villagers sometimes attend the ceremony of baptism.

by the Mardinite women who had their tattoos as soon as they were teenagers. Even though the younger generation see these tattoos as very unattractive nowadays, the tattooed female residents indicated they had their tattoos to look more beautiful. There are some other symbolic reasons for having tattoos, such as the promise of fertility and having good luck or a long life. These local understandings, apparently, are associated with folk wisdom, which is the cultural remnants of ancient civilisations in Mesopotamia. In any case, tattoo images have symbolic meanings based on the social acceptance of the rural dwellers of Mardin.

The tradition of having female tattoos is one of the outcomes of the cultural wealth of south-eastern Turkey situated on the northern side of Mesopotamia, which has many cultural layers. In addition, this tradition is the indicator of cultural affiliation between the diverse groups in Mardin. From the different ethno-religious groups, the elder and middle-aged Mardinite women have these traditional tattoos on their hands, feet and faces. Although the size of female tattoos is very small, some elderly women have tattoos from their toes to their faces called ‘the life of tree’. This image would symbolise a deep-rooted common culture shared by the inhabitants of different civilisations in the region along with the local understanding, which is the desire to have a long life. Thereby, the similar tattoo images shared by Muslim, Christian and Ezidi women can be seen as an expression of socio-cultural closeness of the people in the region of Mardin.

As it is seen, the semblances of female tattoos have symbolic meanings. It is apparent that the common images are the remainders of the primordial inhabitants in the Upper Mesopotamian region. In addition to the sun, star and moon, figures such as three dots in the shape of a triangle and millipedes are symbols that represent abundance and the desire to have a good life. In addition to their cultural aspect, some figures of female tattoos are also religious

symbols. For instance, the image of the sun, peacock and cross are the religious symbols of Shamsies, Ezidis and Christians, respectively.

These symbols, sun, peacock and cross, can be seen on the bodies of the rural Muslim, Christian and Ezidi women. One of these remarkable tattoo figures, the sun, is the religious symbol of the Shamsies who worship the sun. Many elderly Mardinite women from different religious backgrounds have this figure on their foreheads. Another image that is also a significant religious symbol of Ezidis is the image of peacock. This symbol is used by the Ezidis to represent Satan, because they do not use pejorative words such as Satan, devil and demon. There are many example of this tattoo on the foreheads of the rural women in Mardin. The cross inarguably is one of the most significant religious symbols for the Syriac Christians. Considering that this symbol is a very well-known Christian sign by the other religious groups of Mardin, it is remarkable to see that Muslim and Ezidi women also have this symbol on their bodies, mostly on their fingers and specifically on the middle finger.

Even if they have different faiths, Mardinite women have shared their religious symbols with the female members of other religious communities. This point is significant since symbols are expressions of religious identity. At this point, it can be claimed that minority groups would easily be affected by the majority groups. But this assertion is not satisfying, considering that Muslim women have tattoos that are the religious symbols of Christians and Ezidis. Moreover, Islam decisively prohibits Muslims from tattooing or having tattoos. As it is seen, Muslim women have not only crossed the boundaries of their own religion, but they carry the symbols of other religions. However, another possibility would be that some female Mardinites who have the religious symbols of other religious groups on their bodies did not know the meanings of these tattoos when they were done. This possibility can be supported as the tattooist is a Christian woman in some narrations of Mardinite Muslim women. For

instance, Participant 79 (Muslim Kurd, 34, female, teacher) shared her mother's story. The mother, who is a Muslim Kurd, still has a tattoo in the shape of the cross in her left breast. In her youth, she desperately wanted to have tattoos on her body to look more beautiful and demonstrate she is a young woman. One day a Christian tattooist visited her village and she did not want to miss this chance. The Christian woman tattooed a few figures on her body. One of these figures is the cross tattooed on her left breast. At that time, she did not know it is a sign of Christianity. When she became an adult, she realised what this symbol means and why it is especially on her left breast. But it is too late to remove it. Even if she tried different ways to remove this tattoo from her skin, she realised she would need to have surgery for its removal.

However, it is remarkable that both Muslim Arab and Kurd women did not hesitate to have these tattoos done on their bodies by a Christian woman, considering the ethical rules of Islam. Furthermore, there is no argument about this practice among the rural Muslim dwellers who are very pious. Instead, some Mardinite men also have these tattoos on their hands and faces. It seems that the co-existence of different religions and cultures in the area for centuries lead the residents of Mardin to cross some religious boundaries, and easily accept the religious symbols of other groups as part of their cultural heritage.

4.4.3 Speaking the language of neighbours

Another example that can be seen as a result of close socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites is to speak local languages, which are the Qiltu, Qurmanci and Turoyo/Syriac dialects of Arabic, Kurdish and Aramaic. In addition, Mardinites indicated a common language, *Mardince*, which is basically Arabic, but includes Turkish, Syriac and Kurdish words. For them, *Mardince* is an illustration of the co-existence of differences in the local context of the city.

Almost all residents of Mardin are multi-lingual, for they have shared the local context with the other linguistic groups and, thus, had a chance to learn the languages of their neighbours. Even though the younger generation has faced difficulties engaging with this multi-lingual context, it can be claimed that every Mardinite, at least, is bilingual since they speak their mother tongue and Turkish, the national language.

Having the different linguistic groups, Mardin has been a place where various languages have been spoken for centuries. This point is significant to understand the multiculturality in Mardin, for language is one of the symbolic aspects of culture. Every language reflects the deeper meanings and understandings of a culture. In addition, a multi-linguistic context refers to the interaction of various cultures or a multi-layered culture. Thereby, sharing language with the other linguistic groups can be seen as an aspect of the intercultural engagement in Mardin.

Today, an outsider from the other cities of Turkey can be quickly bewildered by hearing the local languages in the *bazaar* of Mardin's capital, since many citizens of Turkey are monolingual[55]. However, Midyat is more multi-lingual than the capital of Mardin because four languages, Syriac, Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish, have been spoken by its residents. The outsiders can observe this fact while they are shopping in the marketplace of Midyat where silversmiths are located; on the other hand, Turkish and Arabic are the most commonly spoken languages in daily interaction in the *bazaar* of Mardin's capital. Based on the articulations of Midyatites, it can be said that almost all Midyatites could speak the aforementioned four languages in the mid-70s. 'A few decades ago, every person could speak four languages in Midyat'. Today, the villagers of *Mercimekli* (Hapsunnas) in Midyat whose

[55] Even if foreign language learning is a compulsory subject in official education, the number of people who can speak a language other than Turkish is very low in the total population of many other cities of Turkey.

population is made up of Muslims and Syriac Christians are very proud of speaking the three local languages along with Turkish, the national language.

Until a few decades ago, the languages mainly spoken in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat were Arabic and Syriac because they were also trade languages. In recent years, Kurdish has become another language that can be heard in daily interaction in the capital of Mardin and Midyat, since the number of the Kurdish speakers has increased in both capitals. In contrast to this development, the number of Syriac speakers has dramatically decreased in these contexts. Furthermore, the Syriacs in the capital of Mardin seem to have forgotten their native languages and became Arabic speakers, while the Midyatite Syriacs have continued speaking their mother tongue in addition to the local and national languages.

Today, Kurdish speakers outnumber other linguistic groups in Mardin considering the total population of the city. In fact, speaking Kurdish has been very common in the hinterland, for Muslim Kurds and Ezidis mainly live in those areas. In addition, some local Arabs and Syriacs in rural areas who have shared a local context with the Kurdish residents seem to have linguistically assimilated and become Kurdish speakers. However, some Kurdish residents are very sensitive about this matter; for instance, they criticise the Kurdish city dwellers' preference in speaking Arabic instead of Kurdish in the capital of Mardin. As an example, it was witnessed that Participant 57 (Muslim Kurd, 44, male, teacher) became very angry when he realised that a few Kurdish children spoke Arabic while they were playing in a narrow road between the historical stone houses of Mardin's capital. After warning the children to speak Kurdish, he pointed out that these children are Kurds assimilated by the dominant groups, Arabs at the local level and Turks at the national level. The issue raised by Participant 57 can be identified as natural assimilation in a diverse area since the dominant culture or language has a power over other cultures. As previously articulated, the other linguistic groups of

Mardin have experienced the same situation as well. Therefore, there is a natural assimilation in the case of Mardin in terms of speaking the language of the majority group in a social context.

In addition to the factor of population, economic considerations also seem to have been one of the main reasons for language commonalities. In the capital of Mardin, Arabic has been the trade language since the city was a trading place before it became a city of the new Turkish State. Considering its links with the other Arab countries that border Turkey, Mardinites have maintained their trade relations with people who are mostly Arab speakers. For this reason, the Christian groups who are the merchants of Mardin's capital seemed to prefer speaking Arabic instead of their native language; they eventually became native Arabic speakers.

In the capital of Midyat, the Arab residents, on the other hand, learnt to speak Syriac in the past because of population and trade relations with the Syriac Christians who were the majority group of Midyat. Some Arab Midyatites still speak Syriac in the marketplace; for instance, Participant 11 (Muslim Arab, 39, male, employee), who is a Mhallemi Arab, speaks Syriac along with Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish. However, the use of Syriac in the *bazaar* of Midyat has declined because of social change in the local context and the existence of tourists from the other cities of Turkey.

Based on the results of participant observation, it can be claimed that Syriac residents are more multi-lingual than other groups, for only a few Muslim residents can speak four languages today. In Midyat, there are some Syriac shop owners who can still speak four languages. This fact can be observed in the marketplace of Midyat where different linguistic groups are present due to commerce dealings. During an interview, it was witnessed that a Syriac shop owner talked Syriac on the phone, shared his ideas in Turkish with the researcher

of this study, and spoke to his local customers in Arabic and Kurdish. According to Participant 3 (Syriac Christian, 53, male, religious man), Syriacs have an ability to learn other languages quickly. They learn Arabic quickly because Syriac and Arabic are Semitic languages. 'I wondered if I can read the books written in Arabic. I tried to read a book and realised that I understand what it says'; although he did not have any education in learning Arabic, it is because he received training in Aramaic.

There is a recent development in the context of Midyat. Some Mhallemi Arabs have tried to learn Syriac since they believe they have a common background with the Syriac Christians of Midyat[56]. This idea originally comes from the claims of the Syriac Patriarch Ismail (İ. Çetin, 2007). It is a possibility that some Syriacs chose to be Muslim in the past, and they forgot their native language because they lived with the Muslim Arabs and spoke Arabic in their daily life[57]. However, there is not much evidence to support this claim.

As for the Ezidis, they seem to have been a monolingual group as Kurdish speakers until they received an official education. The elderly Ezidis in Midyat can understand Turkish, but barely speak languages other than Kurdish. The young Ezidis, on the other hand, can easily speak Turkish because they have had to attend compulsory education provided by the State. It has been asserted that Ezidis are Kurds based upon the fact they have been the Kurdish speakers. However, the Iraqi Ezidis mainly speak Arabic and do not support this claim as to

[56] As a public figure, Mehmet Ali Aslan, a Mhallemi Arab, is a good example of this development. He is the president of a Mhallemi association, *Mhallemi Dinler Diller ve Medeniyetler Arası Diyalog*. It was observed he has good relations with the Syriacs of Midyat. He recently learnt to speak Syriac, attending a Syriac course opened by a Syriac association in the capital of Midyat. Participant 91 (Mhallemi Arab, 44, male, teacher) raised some criticism about the recent struggles of M Ali Aslan. At first, they opened a Mhallemi association together. Later, a conflict emerged between the two. Even though Participant 91 was also invited to attend a television programme about the Mhallemis by the Suroyo TV in Södertälje in Sweden, M Ali Aslan went alone and asserted that the Mhallemis were Syriac (Christian) and forgot their native language after they accepted Islam.

[57] Participant 91, who has researched the ethnic and religious origins of the Mhallemis, articulated that the Mhallemis would be Arab Christians considering the background of the region and some cultural practices of this group, which seem to come from the Christian culture such as putting the cross on dough. However, he rejected the claims of the Patriarch and some Syriacs who say that 'they [Mhallemi Arabs] were speaking Syriac until they became Muslims. Then they forgot their language and thought they were Arabs'. For Participant 91, this claim is an expression of recent changes in the context of Midyat.

their ethnic origin. Besides, it should be considered that the Mardinite Ezidis have lived in the regions where Kurdish residents are the majority; therefore, they might not have needed to learn other local languages.

Apart from the local languages, the use of the national language has been a controversial topic in the city, considering the conflicts between the local and national structures. As will be articulated in Chapter 6, speaking local languages, especially Kurdish, which is the most spoken local language, was seen as a threat toward a newly established nation in Turkey in the first years of the Republic. The reforms of the State to establish a new country based on one national identity have had a great impact upon the local context of multi-linguistic areas. As one of these areas, Mardin has been affected by the tensions that occurred during this rapid transformation, for these reforms created local problems as well as conflict between local and national structures.

Even though Mardinites have continued using their native languages in the local context, what creates new social classes or the distinction between the linguistic groups is the language of education, which is Turkish[58]. Before the Republic, *madrasas* and monasteries gave education in local languages[59]; therefore, minority groups could access not only religious but also linguistic education[60]. After the law of *Tawhid-i Tedrisat*, the unification of education, in

[58] There are many movies that discuss the dilemma of learning native language at home, and receiving an education in the national language. Of these movies, *İki Dil Bir Bavul* [*Two Languges One Suitcase*] deals with the problems created by this matter. As a metaphor, the suitcase symbolises the context of the State.

[59] At this point, Said Nursi's educational model can be given as an example. *Medresetuz Zehra* was imagined as an educational institution where the local languages, Kurdish and Arabic, would be used along with Turkish. This university model most probably was a revelation of a need observed by Nursi. Although this project could not be put into practice at that period, today Artuklu University, which was established in 2010, seems to have a similar approach. It provides some opportunities to students to learn local languages and get an official education. In the summer of 2011, a Syriac course was opened for Syriacs in the capital of Mardin and other language groups to learn the local Aramaic. This course was given by a Syriac scholar who came from the US to be a chair at the university.

[60] Today, Melfonos, the local Syriac teachers, try to teach Syriac children their native language at unofficial courses attached to their churches. Since this language education is very basic, the Syriac students only learn to read some religious prayers and hymns. However, it was observed that the students were not allowed to speak a language other than Syriac in this course.

1924, all residents had to attend national schools; therefore, they lost the chance of learning how to read and write in their native language. Some residents of Mardin resisted sending their children, especially daughters, to the official schools; therefore, this matter became a part of social transformation in the local fabric of Mardin.

Speaking Turkish has been more than a national and educational language in the context of Mardin, for it refers to the distinction between urban and rural people. In the capital, the urban Mardinites prefer to speak Turkish along with Arabic in their daily interaction. Among them, speaking Turkish is evidence of having an official education; therefore, speaking the national language is a symbol of having attained a high status in society. Syriac Christians generally participate in the understandings of the Muslim Arabs on speaking Turkish while the Kurdish residents have generally been very critical about the language preference, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Even though there is a conflict among Mardinites in terms of engaging with the national context using its official language, it can be said that learning the language of neighbours has not created any tension between the Mardinite groups. Rather, being multi-lingual in the local context has been seen as contributing to the cultural wealth of Mardin and, undoubtedly, this approach has constructed bridges between the communities in Mardin. By this way, Mardinites have had a chance to learn the cultural patterns of their neighbours; as a result, speaking the languages of neighbours can be seen as an example of the intercultural engagement in Mardin.

4.4.4 The role of religious people/opinion leaders in the socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites

The positions of religious and opinion leaders in Mardin society should be indicated, for they have had a vital role in constructing and maintaining the close relations between the ethno-religious groups in the city. From the perspective of Muslim and Christian groups, religious people have taken part in conflict resolution, as indicated by the participants of this study, along with being the representatives of their religious communities.

In the construction of the local context of Mardin, the powerful social figures have had a significant place. There are still many tribes and families who have taken place in the collective memory of Mardinites. Even though the political organisation of Mardin society has been transformed under the rule of the Turkish State, the people of Mardin still refer to religious people such as sheikh or *sayyid*[61], the descendants of Prophet Muhammed, and to the local powerful leaders such as *aghas*, *begs* and *mirs.* Hence, the perception of leadership in the understanding of the residents should be considered along with the local structure of Mardin.

In Mardin, it can be said that following a leader or accepting the superiority of a powerful figure still exists. Moreover, religious and social affiliations are very important for some residents of Mardin[62]. Considering this point, it can be understood why some Mardinites do not individually act or take responsibility, but seek solutions for their problems with the help of local powerful figures. For this reason, the effects on conflict resolution of religious and

[61] Some *sayyid* families in Mardin are Kurdish. Related to this point, there are two possibilities. Either they are not genuine descendants of Prophet Muhammed, but believed to be by the residents, or they are Kurdified through language assimilation or marriage.
[62] This fact is more observable among the Kurdish residents in their tribal relations and acceptance of the superiority of sheikh and *sayyid* families.

social leaders as well as their power upon the socio-cultural relations of Mardinites need to be analysed.

As given in the background of the research area, Bruinessen (1992) claims the sheikhs gained religious and social power, and, thus, achieved a prominent position in society especially after the conflict between Kurds and Armenians because of the existence of missionaries and their support for Christian minorities in south-east Turkey. As a result of these developments, the sheikhs became social actors in the 19th century apart from their religious and educational responsibilities.

The political and social positions of the sheikhs seem to have remained unchanged until the ban of *madrasa* education in 1924 and other steps taken by the Turkish State to eliminate the effects of religion on society. Many sheikhs in the south-eastern part of Turkey left the region for Syria; still the memories of the former sheikhs persist in the collective memory of Muslims and Christians. Sheikh Fethullah was one of the prominent sheikhs in the context of Mardin who tried to lead the residents to not harm one another in the time of *ferman-ı filleh*, the rescript related to the relocation of Christian population in east and south-east Anatolia. According to Participant 35 (Muslim Kurd, male, civil servant)[63], Sheikh Fethullah refused to accept this rescript, and he, in fact, acted against it. After the *ferman* was enacted, the Christian residents surrounding the capital of Mardin suffered from the public disturbance. The biggest incident, the surrounding of Aynwerd, related to this rescript happened in Midyat around 1915, for its population was mostly made up of Christians, and it lasted almost three years (Ünsal, 1999). The Syriac Christians called this incident *Seyfo*, sword, which is an inseparable part of the collective memory of the Syriac community.

[63] He also gave a counter example of Sheikh Seyda to emphasise the constructive struggles of Sheikh Fethullah. 'Sheikh Seyda accepted *ferman-ı filleh*'. For further information about the role of Sheikh Seyda on the Muslim-Christian relations see Aras (2012).

A very well-known Mhallemi religious leader, Sheikh Fethullah gained a great reputation for solving social and political conflicts between Muslims and Christians in a time when tensions between the minority groups of Mardin were raised. When *ferman* was declared, he did not accept it, as indicated in the statements of Muslim and Christian participants. He and his followers tried to protect the Christian neighbours from any possible attacks by some Muslim people or the Kurdish tribes. Besides the data collected from the field, academic works (Aydın et al., 2001; Lewy, 2011; Özcoşar, 2008) show the incidents that occurred between the Muslim and Christian groups were not part of a religious conflict. Rather, they were due to a conflict of interest between Kurdish tribes who took control of the local administration and the Armenian inhabitants who strengthened their political power and gained economic welfare by the support of missionaries and foreign countries, such as Russia and Great Britain[64].

Besides his role in ending the surrounding events in the village of Aynwerd, this prominent religious leader took a significant place in the narrations of Muslims and Syriacs in promoting the religious and cultural interaction between Muslim and Christian groups. By attending the religious ceremonies of Syriacs or making visits to their villages, he showed his followers they should maintain their neighbourhood relationships with the Christians, showing respect for their religious matters. In addition, he opposed some local prejudices, such as refusing to eat Syriacs' meal (see the narration of Participant 132 in Chapter 6). Today, Syriac Christians still remember this religious leader with a great respect. In fact, they have a picture of this religious leader along with the former *Metropolitans* (Bishops) on the wall of Dayr'ul Zafaran, which was the religious centre of Syriac Orthodox Christianity until 1932 and is still a symbol of Syriac existence in the city.

[64] Lewy (2011) discusses the conflict of interest between the Kurds and Armenians in the eastern region of Turkey, and he asserts the Kurds cannot only blame the Ottoman State for the incidents that happened between them and Armenians since they did not want the existence of this powerful group in the region.

It seems that the position of Muslim religious leaders in society is also held in regard by the Syriac residents. Some Syriac participants in villages still visit a sheikh or *mel'e* to get his advice when they encounter a problem related to their relations with their Muslim neighbours. Therefore, they affirm the authority of the religious leaders of Muslim neighbours like their clergy and priests. The same attitude can be found in the understandings of the Muslim Mardinites. They also have great respect for the Christian religious leaders and they visit them to get their opinion about some shared matters, as understood in the narrations of the participants. As an example, the term of *ebune*, our father, is used by some Muslim participants as they recite their memories. It was observed in the backyard of Kırklar Church that Syriac Orthodox and Armenian Catholics who attended the Sunday ceremony used this word when they called Gabriyel Akyüz, the priest. Some local Muslims also call the priests *ebune* at the beginning of their dialogue in the sense of an honorific title; for instance, this usage appeared in the articulations of Participant 108 (Muslim Arab, 65, male, retired). Before starting a conversation, he called the priest by this title: 'I said *ebune* I am an Arabic nationalist'.

As previously articulated, the Muslim children in the village of Anitli in Midyat, where the number of Christians outnumber that of Muslims, learnt how to read the Quran from a Syriac priest in the monastery who has knowledge about Islam. This example can be analysed from a few perspectives. First of all, it shows that sometimes Syriac religious leaders help Muslims in their religious matters in the absence of their own religious leader. Therefore, they have become knowledgeable about the religious life and practices of their neighbours[65]. In

[65] A Syriac priest reminded Participant 108 that he should perform *salah* five times a day when he was 14 years old. 'He said 'are you performing *salah*?' We (he and his cousin) are practicing in Ramadan. He said 'no, every person with the book [*ahl-al kitab*] should perform *salah* in order to be protected from the evil of Satan'. The Syriac Christians also practice *salah* seven times a day. Today, they combine the morning prayers with the midday prayers; as a result, they worship three times a day. The main reason for this change is that the male members have faced difficulty in attending ceremonies in the church seven times a day, for all Christian men are merchants.

addition, it shows that Muslims take into consideration the religious authority of the priests. More significantly, it reveals that religious groups in Mardin have considered the spiritual needs of their neighbours. This point was discussed in the example of the mosque that was constructed by the Syriacs for their Muslim neighbours in Midyat.

Like the substantial role of the religious leaders in the interaction of Mardinites, opinion leaders,[66] who can be seen as social actors, are also key figures in solving conflicts between the different groups in Mardin. The father of Participant 137 (Muslim Kurd, 33, male, self-employed) was one of these social figures and a very well-known person in the district of Kızıltepe. People visited his father to ask his advice on a matter or when the parties had a disagreement. 'One night, our door was knocked on. It was very late. We were sleeping. There were two Gypsies in front of our door'. The Gypsies who used to be good friends had an argument about some property and could not end their fight. Both of them claimed the property for themselves. In the end, they decided to appoint the father of Participant 137 as an arbitrator. After listening to the parties, the father offered a solution to them. Without any objection, they accepted this solution and left the house of this opinion leader as close friends again. Participant 137 is a member of *Ömeryan* tribe; therefore, his father must be a significant person in this tribe. In addition to his affiliations with this tribe, the father was also respected for his religious education. It seems that this reason led the Gypsies to accept him as *qadi*, a Muslim judge, even if they live the nomadic life and are free from the social obligations that the inhabitants must follow.

In a similar way, Participant 52 (Muslim Kurd, 36, male, civil servant) narrated that people from different ethnic and religious groups have shown great respect to his father and asked his

[66] This term is used to refer to people who gain the respect of the residents from different religious or ethnic communities because of religious education, family or being known as *sayyid*, the descendants of Prophet Muhammed. For instance, the *Hamidi* family is respected for being from the *ahl-al beyt*, literally meaning the people of the house or the family of the House of Prophet Muhammed.

opinion about social and religious problems they have encountered, for he had a *madrasa* education. Another example was given by Participant 64 (Muslim Arab, 29, female, teacher) who is a member of the *Hamidi* family. Her grandfather had a shop on *Birinci Cadde*, but he did not sell any products. He sat there and had visitors who wanted to consult him, ask him questions or just have a conversation.

Based on the Ottoman records, it can be articulated that some Christian leaders also acted as problem solvers in the past (Özcoşar, 2008). For instance, the Patriarchs sometimes wrote a letter to the central administration in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman State to solve conflicts between the diverse groups because of tribal matters. As an example, the Syriac Patriarch at that time informed the Ottoman State about a local matter that was created by a local figure, Hacı Sheikh Agha, in 1863 (Özcoşar, 2008). This person victimised Muslims and Christians not only in Mardin, but also in nearby cities. The Patriarch's request from the central administration in Istanbul was taken into consideration and the problem was solved. Later, the Ottoman Sultan sent a letter to the Patriarch that conveyed an appreciation of his sense of responsibility toward social problems.

Today the *Metropolitan* (Bishop), Saliba Özmen, of Mardin and Diyarbakır, and the priests can also be seen as representatives of the Christian community. They are present at official ceremonies to represent their community. In addition to their visibility at official occasions, they sometimes visit prominent Muslim families of the deceased to express condolences on behalf of their community. They are invited to attend academic organisations as speakers and, sometimes, they give lectures in the universities. Therefore, it can be said that the Syriac religious leaders have continued their social contribution to Mardin society.

However, the religious leaders of both Muslim and Christian communities have lost their status in society compared with their previous positions in Mardin. The underlying reason for this change can be found in the policies of the Turkish Republic toward religion. One of the actions taken by the State was the ban of *madrasas*. As a result of this ban, the education given in Muslim and Christian religious institutions was officially prohibited. Yet, the existence of the *madrasa* and the monastery in Mardin society as education centres has not completely disappeared.

Both monasteries and *madrasas* in the city were not only education buildings, but social institutions for eliminating tensions between the groups and supporting the close relations of diverse religious groups. In addition, they were the source of social mobility and developments. From different countries, students came to the region of Mardin and attended these institutions[67]. Therefore, both monasteries and *madrasas* also were the source of cultural wealth and diversity of the area. After the Republic, they lost their superiority in socio-cultural life, yet a few *madrasas* and the Syriac monasteries still continue to give religious education but they are not functional. These local *madrasas* are still attended by some Kurdish Muslims to get unofficial education to read some Islamic sources. The monasteries of *Dayr'ul Zaferan* and *Dayr'ul Umur*, on the other hand, give basic religious information to Christian children as well as providing training for young Christians who want to become a priest or a nun[68].

[67] The monastery of *Mor Yakup* in the district of Nusaybin has been seen as one of these institutions. According to one of the archaeologists who examined the remnants around the monastery, it was an education complex that had the capacity to serve almost 1,000 boarders from different countries. Also see Akyüz, 2005.

[68] Based on the data collected from the field, there are twelve nuns staying in *Dayr'ul Umur*. In addition, I met a nun and a priest who live in the church in the village of *İzbırak* after returning from my visit to the village of *Anitli*. The nun who took the name of Meryem, Mary, after her monastery training looked like a Muslim villager woman wearing casual clothes. The only distinctive feature of her clothes was a black head scarf. This church was recently restored by the financial supports of Syriacs in the diaspora. The nun and the priest are the only Christian residents in *İzbırak* who farm the lands of the church.

After losing their superiority in solving social and political matters among Mardinities, the social positions of the sheikhs seem to have been replaced by *mel'es*, the local imams. However, their effect upon the socio-cultural life of the city and their authority could not be maintained by the new religious figures. Rather, some local imams have acted as conflict makers between the rural dwellers from different religious communities. This fact was raised by some Muslim and Christian participants who have witnessed their negative effects on the mutual relations of the groups and have some suspicions about the truthfulness of their honorific titles in a religious sense.

However, the trails of the previous religious leaders' positive impact upon social life can be found in the narrations of the current residents. There is still a tendency among the residents to accept one's superiority as a religious, opinion leader or a local power, such as *aghas*. This point could be related to the fact that past experiences have had a great impact upon the social structure of Mardin; for instance, the tribal affiliations are articulated by some participants as if there are relative bonds between the members of tribes.

As for Ezidi leaders, there is no opportunity to observe their effectiveness in today's Mardin since they have lived out of the context of the city. Still, it can be predicted that they have taken the responsibilities in solving problems between the religious groups in Mardin. The leader of the Ezidi community in Turkey lives in the district of Viranşehir in the city of Urfa, while other prominent Ezidi religious leaders mostly live in Iraq and Germany. However, they have continued their relations with the Mardinite Ezidis. Indeed, the Ezidi sheikhs regularly visit their community; for example, a female Ezidi sheikh was the guest of the Ezidi family who participated in this study. In addition, Mir Tahsin, an Ezidi leader who lives in Iraq, most probably appears in the context of Midyat to see the Ezidi community and is informed about their social or political problems. His visits to the *mufti* of Midyat also show the religious

people have maintained their social responsibilities toward other religious communities in the contexts of Mardin and Midyat.

Consequently, it is hard to say that religious or opinion leaders have completely lost their position in Mardin society, but their social and political roles have been transformed. Mardinites seem to have regarded these religious figures as conflict solvers and the representatives of religious communities, even if their positions in leading their community members have been narrowed by the reforms of the State, as previously outlined in Chapter 2.

4.5 Overview of the chapter

This chapter analysed the role of religion in the engagement of diverse components in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat. The chapter dealt with the notion of engagement in two aspects. First, it provided some background information about the social organisation of the city to indicate the significance of spatial closeness for the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites. By giving the examples of close relations of the former Mardinites, Chapter 4 indicated the continuous lifestyle that enables the communication of different identities in the capital of Mardin. Even though today's neighbourhoods are not the same as the past ones, social closeness still helps Christian and Muslim women's interaction. In addition, the male Mardinites encounter the members of other communities in the *bazaar* and protect their relations with other groups. Therefore, the daily interactions of female and male participants were given to underline the significance of spatial engagement in Mardin.

The second aspect of engagement was analysed with some examples of social and cultural interaction. Based on the narrations of the participants and participant observation, the chapter analysed some indicators for intercultural engagement in Mardin society. Sympathising with the other is the first indicator that appeared in the narrations of the Mardinites participating in

this research. The practices and rituals of condolence visits in the city were seen as a way to protect relations with the other. Another aspect of intercultural engagement is to celebrate the religious days and festivals of neighbours. Today these celebrations continue between Muslim and Christian residents, though only a few consider the religious days of the Ezidis. Considering the religious sensibilities of neighbours was another example given by the participants to explain the importance of showing respect to the other. Religious symbols and matters are taken into consideration in communicating with other religious groups. The practices of sharing food with other religious groups also showed that the Mardinites are aware of other groups' religious rules and respect them.

In addition to the examples given by the participants, Chapter 4 indicated other significant aspects of the intercultural engagement in Mardin. There are some established virtual kinships in Mardin society, though their effectiveness has decreased by social change. Through establishing virtual kinships with other religious groups, the Mardinites eliminate the tensions created by religious differences. This was illustrated by the examples of milk siblinghood and the institution of *kirvelik*. The rural Mardinite women have body tattoos, some of which are the religious symbols of other communities. This was indicated in this chapter to underline the significance of sharing a place with the other. Almost all Mardinites are bilingual and this promotes the interaction of diverse groups in the city. Therefore, speaking other groups' languages is another aspect of intercultural engagement in Mardin. By using other local languages, the Mardinites have a chance to learn the cultural patterns of their neighbours.

The final aspect of engaging cultural components is the role of religious people/ opinion leaders. Even though their roles have been transformed in recent years, the participants indicated their influence in resolving conflicts between the residents of Mardin.

One of arguments of this dissertation is that religion plays a significant role in engaging the different components of Mardin society. Chapter 4 demonstrated that religion is one of the inseparable aspects of intercultural engagement in Mardin. As is seen from the illustrations of the engagement of cultural components in the context of Mardin, religious practices and rituals have had a significant impact on the maintenance of the socio-cultural interaction between Mardinites.

5 CHAPTER 5

DISENGAGEMENT OF DIVERSE COMPONENTS IN THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF MARDIN

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 identified the nature of intercultural engagement in the case of Mardin, focusing on the role of religion in maintaining and constructing the intercultural engagement of diverse components in the city. Chapter 5 deals with the role of religion in constructing social and cultural boundaries between the ethno-religious groups of Mardin who are the subject of this thesis. In doing so, the chapter aims to discuss that religion has a double function in the case of Mardin. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Mardinite groups are not minorities that are completely separated from each other. Each group has connections with local groups and the national context of Turkey. In the local social order, the Mardinites seem to have found common areas with the help of religious rituals and cultural practices. They have created a few mediator institutions to protect their interactions and eliminate the tensions between them and their neighbours.

However, Mardin society has some social conflicts. The dominant discourse of the Turkish State on the culture of Mardin does not indicate the differences and tensions between the diverse groups of Mardin. The Mardinites have adopted this approach in presenting their city to outsiders. However, their demotic discourse has a hidden face regarding the social conflicts or differences of the Mardinite groups. Mardin is located in the south-east of Turkey, which has been affected by local and national conflicts. Historically, this region was the cradle of political and historical disagreements. This reality affects the approaches of the residents of Mardin towards intercultural relations; as a result, they sometimes find themselves in a situation where the only thing they can see is the negative aspect of social relations. This may

also be a social reflex since the groups in Mardin who have protected their entities until today seem to cultivate a new approach of social conflict. The cultural components of Mardin have not completely overlapped; in other words, they have not been assimilated in a broader context, which is the Muslim-Christian context in the Ottoman Period and, later, the Turkish context in the Republican period. The exception was a few religious groups, such as the Shamsies who were mostly integrated into the Christian community.

By considering social conflicts in Mardin society, this chapter discusses the role religion plays in constructing the disengagement between cultural components. Firstly, it analyses the spatial disengagement between the urban and rural spaces of Mardin. It discusses the social, cultural and religious boundaries between the residents of Mardin, which help diverse groups protect their entities. Later, some cultural prejudices of the Mardinite groups are analysed to indicate the role of religious factors in intercultural relations. After this analysis, the institution of marriage is examined as a boundary maker among the ethno-religious groups of Mardin, since their reactions to inter-group or inter-religious marriages are significant in understanding the fact of disengagement in Mardin. Finally, the chapter reviews the implicit tensions among the groups to evaluate the significance of distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’ in a multi-ethnic context.

5.2 Spatial disengagement of diverse components in Mardin

There is spatial engagement in the old settlement in the city centre of Mardin, which has helped the diverse Mardinite groups to construct close relations. However, the urban and rural spaces of the city have been separated from each other with the help of social and political developments. However, the main reason for this separation is two types of governmentality, as discussed in section 2.2.5. As a result of this spatial disengagement, a social class, *Mardinli* (Mardinite), emerged in the conversations of residents. The reference to being a Mardinite

who was born and has lived in the capital of Mardin creates a symbolic boundary between the rural and urban dwellers, which is strengthened by not only spatial but cultural factors.

The new social system of the Turkish Republic has supported the social distance between the urban and rural groups of Mardin. Since its policies led to internal and external migration, Mardin has experienced a rapid social transformation. Migration, as discussed in Chapter 2, has irreversibly changed the demographical picture of Mardin and affected the socio-cultural interaction of its diverse groups. There were several social reasons for internal migration in the city. The rural dwellers of Mardin suffered from the activities of the PKK and Hezbollah. Secondly, the tribal structure of Mardin's hinterland resulted in conflicts between tribes or within a tribe, which lead to economic problems in the city causing the residents of villages and towns to move to the capitals of Mardin and Midyat.

Until a few decades ago, the first group of social organisation in the capital of Mardin, in terms of its population and social positions, was the Muslim Arabs who belonged to wealthy families. However, the Kurdish population recently increased through internal migration; on the other hand, the Syriac population decreased due to external migration. After the Kurds from surrounding areas had settled in the capital of Mardin and Midyat, new neighbourhoods were developed. As a result, the social and demographic changes make ethnic boundaries clearer between the Mardinite Arabs and Kurds in the local context.

> Midyat had a city culture. It was a city until the people from its surroundings moved into Midyat. They could not adapt into our city culture and created problems. In the 70s, people could speak four languages here: Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, Syriac. Now, everything has changed (Participant 51 (Syriac Christian, 37, male, barber)).

Many Arab and Syriac participants who live in Mardin's capital and the centre of Midyat raised the distinction between the urban and rural people and expressed their discomfort because of the existence of newcomers in the urban space. Even though the participants did not identify those they criticise, it was clear they were Muslim Kurds from rural areas who would not adapt to urban culture. The term Midyat between Midyatites refers to the part of the district where Syriacs are in the majority. Since the Mhallami Arabs have mostly lived in *Estel*, the other part of Midyat's centre, the Kurdish residents were generally blamed for the social dislocation of Midyat as frequently revealed in the statements of the Midyatite Syriacs and Arabs. These participants criticised the newcomers since they have not learned the patterns of urban culture, and they are reluctant to participate and interact with others. Therefore, the close relations of Midyatite city dwellers seem to have been transformed by the existence of the new residents in the capital.

Likewise, the flows of Kurdish people have been seen as a threat by the natives of Mardin in the capital of Mardin. The disapprobation of the city-dwellers may be the result of the fear of becoming involved in the conflicts that the newcomers may have carried with them. Consequently, questions regarding the newcomers raise other matters of cultural, religious and spatial boundaries among the Mardinites and Midyatites who live in the city centres.

5.3 Socio-cultural boundaries between the Mardinite groups

The concept of boundary in social sciences gained special meaning after F Barth's contribution to the social organisation of cultural difference, ethnic identity and ethnicity. In anthropological analysis, this term refers to territorial borders and the lines in social relations (Douglas, 1984) and it has social, cultural, and territorial dimensions that sometimes are aspects of a single boundary (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). Socio-cultural boundaries are symbolically constructed by people in their interactions with others from whom they wish to

distinguish themselves. The terms ‘border’ and ‘boundary’ have been used in anthropological analyses to indicate the differentiations between ethnic groups. Ethnic groups, as Barth (1969) argues, are ‘socially constructed, made up of individuals who strategically manipulate their cultural identity by emphasising or underplaying it according to context’ (Donnan & Wilson, 1999, p. 21). With a process of inclusion and exclusion that differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, the members of ethnic groups mark themselves off and are marked off from other collectivities. In this process, external factors are effective as much as internal structures alongside wider structures such as class and state. Therefore, micro and macro power relations need to be considered in analysing socio-cultural prejudices between the diverse groups.

However, people may cross the boundaries between groups and may maintain regular relations across them, but this does not affect the durability and stability of the boundaries (Donnan & Wilson, 1999; Güç Işık, 2011). Therefore boundaries, as Barth (1969) articulates, may be crossed without threatening their existence. At this point, it is important to indicate that ‘ethnic boundary defines the group not the cultural stuff that it encloses’ (Barth, 1969, p. 15). To describe the boundaries in the relations of diverse groups, a few analogies have been suggested, such as a balloon (Cohen, 1969) that responds to changes in internal and external air pressure. Wallman (1978) considers several other analogies, such as fences or the covers of teabags to describe how social boundaries are always the outcome of a two-sided process (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). Given these analogies, Wallman (1978) argues that a boundary occurs only as a reaction of one system to another. Thus, it has two sides and therefore two kinds of meaning. The first meaning is structural or organisational. A social boundary ‘marks the edge of a social system, the interface between that system and one of those contiguous upon it’ (Wallman, 1978, p. 206). Its second meaning refers to how it marks members off from non-members and acts as the basis by which each can be identified. For Wallman, all social boundaries are characterised by an interface line between inside and outside, as well as

by an identity line between ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘The interface element marks a change in what goes on. The identity element marks the significance given to that change and expresses the participants’ relation to it’ (Wallman, 1978, p. 207).

Any social boundary, she argues, must be seen as a consequence of the various possible relationships between identity and interface on both sides. Therefore, every society has its own inner and outer lines, as discussed by Douglas (1984). Keeping these points in mind, socio-cultural boundaries that the Mardinites use to identify themselves and draw a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ can be analysed.

5.3.1 Being the native of Mardin/Midyat

This section analyses the boundaries between the ethno-religious groups of Mardin focusing on the distinction ‘urban-rural,’ which divides the local people of Mardin into two categories. A native of Mardin/Midyat is defined as someone who was born and has lived in the capital of Mardin or Midyat. When identifying a native, a distinction emerges between the city-dwellers and the villagers. The term native refers to the prominent social boundary between the Mardinite groups. To criticise this distinction, the local terms of *bajari* (urban) and *gundi* (rural) were produced by the rural residents, although the term *gundi* is not commonly used. The *gundis* are the residents of Mardin who were born in the towns or villages of the city. Even if the *gundis* moved into the capital, their social status is still closely tied to this distinction. Consequently, this socio-culturally constructed boundary has drawn a line between the residents of Mardin.

Even though political and ethnic matters have affected the understanding of the other in Mardin, being *native* seems to have protected its position as a distinctive line between the city and rural dwellers.

I am a Mardinite/Midyatite. I am a native of Mardin/Midyat.

I am a Mardinite/Midyatite. I am not a villager.

The residents of Mardin frequently use these sentences when they introduce themselves to outsiders. Many participants of this study stated whether they are a *Mardinli* or not at the beginning of conversation, which shows that being from inside or outside the capital of Mardin/Midyat is still very important to the residents of the city.

The main purpose in producing the term *bajari* was to criticise the approaches of the people who live in the city centre. The term evokes the concept of bourgeois, since the people who are identified as *bajari* are the landlords or bureaucrats of Mardin. A few decades ago, the residents who lived in the capital were the owners of the fertile plains of the city where the Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac villagers live. The *bajaris* hired their lands to the villagers who could be from any ethnic group. There is no doubt that *bajari* as a term has some negative implications, which have arisen from the collective memory of the Mardinites.

Although this term was used to reveal imbalances between the social statuses of groups, its implications seem to have changed. When the residents of Mardin use this term or stress 'they are a native of Mardin', they intend to say 'they are not a villager'. Apparently, coming from the periphery of the city refers to a low status in collective memory, even though the newcomers have recently attained significant positions in Mardin society. However, drawing a line between the urban and rural people is one of the significant aspects of social relations in Mardin since it gathers different ethnic and religious identities under the category of either urban or rural. Therefore, this distinction provides diverse groups a common ground to establish close social relations based on spatial closeness with neighbours from different communities.

The reference to being a native introduces another dichotomy – outside and inside – which can be seen from two perspectives. From the perspective of *Mardinlis*, it refers to spatial boundaries that have been socio-culturally constructed between the capital of Mardin and its rural areas. The dichotomy from the perspective of people who live outside of Mardin indicates spatial boundaries between Mardin and the other cities of Turkey. In this second category, all residents of Mardin from its urban and rural areas are seen as Mardinite which means 'a resident of Mardin', not concerning local social boundaries as illustrated in the narration of Participant 69.

> I got my [undergraduate] education in Izmir. I had to get up the nerve to say 'I am a Mardinite' because Mardinites are Kurds according to them [classmates] (Participant 69 (Muslim Arab, 32, female, teacher)).

The classification of urban and rural can also be observed among the local people of Midyat, which has been seen as a Syriac centre because of its urban culture constructed by the Syriac Christians. From their perspective, Midyat has its own inner and outer boundaries. Mardin is the 'outsider' area of Midyat for the Midyatites, even if its territorial borders are officially within this city. This outlook, therefore, constructs two urban groups who can be collected in the category of *bajari*, the natives of Mardin and Midyat.

The complexity of who is the insider and who is the outsider in terms of urban and rural spaces blurs the social schema in Mardin. After the struggles of Turkification began in multi-ethnic areas, a new understanding of social class emerged among the residents of Mardin. This new class was closely related to the spatial boundaries between the urban and rural dwellers. During the Ottoman period, the residents of Mardin were the members of a *jamaat*, religious community, under the protection of the State. They were ruled by local administrations and their religious organisations. Most probably, it was too sudden to

overcome being the ethnic minorities of a nation based on a Turkish identity. Consequently, the symbolic classification of *bajari-gundi* may be seen as a response for the need of Mardin society, which was deeply affected by rapid social changes.

5.3.2 Being Muslim or non-Muslim

The concept of *gayr-ı* Muslim, non-Muslim, is widely used in social analysis related to Muslim societies. It was an important signifier between the religious communities of Mardin in the Ottoman period because religious identity was prominent in the interaction of diverse communities. After they became the ethnic minorities of the Turkish State, the concept eventually lost its visibility in the conversations of the Mardinites.

The elderly residents of Mardin still use this concept to refer to their Christian neighbours. However, they did not recognise the Ezidis as non-Muslims. This is most probably because of a conviction that Ezidism is a deviant sect of Islam. The local terms such as *filleh* and *nasrani* were used by some participants along with the term Christian. These terms clearly do not include any negative meaning about their non-Muslim neighbours. In contrast to the elderly Mardinites, the young participants mostly preferred to identify their neighbours as Syriac and Armenian in an ethnic sense.

The Syriac, Armenian and Ezidi participants mainly used the concept Muslim instead of Arab, Kurd or Turk when they mentioned their neighbours. However, the term Kurd was not included into the category of Muslim by some Syriac participants in Midyat. This happened when they raised an ethnic or political matter. Still, these participants did not separate Kurds from other Muslim groups while they criticised past events related to their communities.

The Muslim participants were sometimes confused by the term *Süryani* (Syriac) because they recognised all Christians as Syriacs in the city. This perception was clearly because the Syriac community has represented all Christians from different denominations. Mardin has a few Chaldeans, Syriac Catholics and Armenian Catholics who join the Sunday ceremony with the Orthodox Syriacs.

The preferences of the Mardinites in identifying other religious groups indicate that ethnic identification has gained significance in the socio-cultural interaction of Mardinites in the national context of Turkey.

5.4 Cultural prejudices between the Mardinite groups

The multi-ethnic context of Mardin provides a suitable field to analyse cultural prejudices that people use to classify and interpret the lives and actions of others. Supported by social and political understandings, cultural differences and religious beliefs and practices, the Mardinite groups have developed some cultural prejudices that distinguish 'us' from 'them'. These cultural prejudices surface when they attempt to identify themselves, articulating their prejudgements regarding the other groups.

Some cultural prejudices of the Mardinites include negative implications while others have positive meanings/indicators. The positive and negative prejudices of the local people of Mardin are cultural products produced in their socio-cultural interactions. Like Mardin, a multi-ethnic context, however, includes the fact that cultural prejudices, which are developed by some assumptions of diverse groups about the other, can be questioned when they engage with the other[69] and their pre-conceived assumptions are challenged as they get to know the

[69] There is a school of thought in social psychology that suggests regular contact between groups may mutually reduce prejudice and increase respect (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

other better. Therefore, examining some prejudices of the Mardinites can help explain in which places the cultural components of Mardin are distinguished as different cultural entities.

5.4.1 Between the majority groups of Mardin

The majority groups of Mardin are Muslim Arabs and Kurds. As a tie between these ethno-religious groups, religion gives them flexibility to cross the boundaries of their communities. Still, the Mardinite Arabs and Kurds have some prejudices related to each other and some similar prejudgements about the other groups with whom they live.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, socio-cultural boundaries within the social context of Mardin have been as significant as religious boundaries to produce assumptions related to the other. These boundaries, or symbolic lines, combine with socio-political and demographical reasons. The local order is a key in which prejudices between the Muslim groups develop. These include beliefs such as:

> Arabs are city-dwellers (*bajari*).
> Kurds are villagers (*gundi*).

As indicated by many participants of this study, they identify Arabs and Kurds as urban and rural. Being urban implies being more modern, educated and elegant; as a result, it refers to people who follow the patterns of city culture. According to many Arab participants, the Kurds do not have these cultural patterns, which a city-dweller must have.

In addition to this distinction between Arabs and Kurds in Mardin, the most significant prejudices revealed by these groups are related to the conflicts between the national and local orders.

> Muslim Arabs are very nationalist, too. But they do not reveal it.
> They clandestinely are nationalist. They are hiding their nationalistic feelings.

These statements were frequently used by the Kurdish participants to criticise the Arab residents. They also indicated that Mardinite Arabs ingeniously suppress their nationalistic feelings in the Turkish context even if their Arab nationalism is sometimes revealed in their relations with the Kurds. These attitudes of Arabs were explained as based on wanting to have good relations with the Turkish State and to protect their social status in the city. However, their nationalist feelings appear in the local context that they share with Kurds, according to the Kurdish people interviewed.

> All Kurds are nationalist.
> Kurds are very nationalist.
> They are the enemy of the State.

These sentences were repeatedly articulated by the Arab participants to reveal their discomfort about the actions of the Kurdish residents and to express their loyalty to the State. Their declaration of 'we are loyal citizens of Turkey' was mostly supported by a so-called 'reality' that they have not been involved in any illegal action toward the State.

It seems there are other reasons for persistently referring to the nationalistic activities of the Kurds who live in the hinterland. First of all, Mardinite Arabs do not want to be seen as a threat by the State like their Kurdish neighbours who 'always create problems'. As a minority group in the national context, they want to keep their Kurdish neighbours at a distance when it comes to ethnic and political debates on Kurdish identity in Turkey. Another reason is to prevent the possibility of close relations with the Kurds in demanding ethnic rights. The Mhallemi Arabs of Midyat have articulated their ethnic demands. This development apparently creates a tension among the Arab residents since the Arabs of Mardin's capital do

not want to be seen in the same picture as the Kurds. Even though the Mhallemis have started to demand their ethnic rights more loudly than the Arabs in the capital , they clearly do not want to share a common ground with the Kurdish nationalists.

The Mhallemi Arabs organised a festival, 'Arabic Stories Competition', in Midyat in July 2011 to promote the local Arabic dialect they called 'Mhallemice'. There were two speakers who identified themselves as Mhallemi, one was from Germany and another lived in Midyat**.** Both expressed their desire to have rights in terms of using their mother tongue in education and having the ethnic identity of the Mhallemis recognised by the State. Nevertheless, they carefully argued that their demands were not similar to those of Kurdish nationalists. One of the noticeable features of this organisation was that the local speaker was sometimes criticised by the Midyatite Mhallemis for his closeness to Syriac nationalists in Midyat. This connection is significant since it shows the Mhallemis have started to use a nationalistic discourse, which was previously used by the Kurds and, later, by the Syriacs in Midyat.

In the social order of Mardin, prejudices between the Muslim groups related to social status and nationalism seem to be more difficult to overcome; nevertheless, being in communication with or encountering the other groups in daily life sometimes forces people to confront their own cultural pre-judgements.

> I thought 'They [Kurds] are very rude. They like to hurt people' before going to Kızıltepe go to my job. Therefore, I have to be careful, I thought. Then I went to Kızıltepe and spent time with them. I saw there are good people as well. But, from time to time, their nationalistic feelings were apparent when the matter of Kurdism comes up. I guess almost two years later, one day when all of my students were present in the classroom, most of them were Kurd, one of them said 'Teacher, you look like the Kurds a lot'... I said I do not understand 'Are you complimenting or insulting me?' It was not supposed to be a nice thing to call 'Kurd' to an Arab. (Participant 67 (Muslim Arab, 44, female, teacher))

The district of Kızıltepe, which consists of a huge Kurdish population, is identified as 'one of the castles of Kurdish nationalism' among the Mardinites. As a resident of this highly politicised district, a Kurdish female student intended to say 'you are different from the other Arabs who we know'. After discussing her student's sentence, Participant 67 added:

> I think they have an imaginary Arab in their minds. Who does not fight for or claims his/her rights. Who keeps quiet.

After using the Turkish expression 'to turn into an Arab's hair' as an example of prejudice, which is used to explain a situation that is very complicated and hard to explain, she continued to question her cultural prejudices and she recognised that both Arabs and Kurds did the same about the other.

> When I was a child, we said 's/he wore like a Kurd' when we saw a person who does not wear properly or wear very colourful clothes. Of course, this is not a thing we say deliberately. Somebody had produced the expressions and we use them.
>
> When I went to Kızıltepe [to give a class], a woman came into the class and said something to me, and left. My students did not know that woman. After she left, they said 'she dressed like Arabs'. I am astonished. In Mardin, [in the same situation] we would say 'she dressed like Kurds'.

As is seen, the cultural prejudices between the Arab and Kurdish residents are based on the spatial division between the urban and rural spaces, and are supported by their politic and ethnic affiliations.

5.4.2 Between the Muslims and Syriac Christians of Mardin

Even though spatial boundaries created in the local context remain distinctive, the prejudices between the Muslim and Syriac Christian residents are generally based on religious

understandings and practices. Some Muslims in Mardin would not eat a meal that was prepared by Syriac Christians. The main reason the participants gave was that the Syriac Christians do not make *ghusl*[70], which means performing a major ritual ablution and washing the whole body. In other words, they are seen as unclean or impure.

> … because they are not taking *ghusl*.

Being baptised or taking *ghusl* reflect the understandings of pious people related to pureness and impurity. Since Syriacs do not perform a ritual ablution, they are not completely clean/pure according to some Muslim neighbours. However, the Syriac Christians may not feel a need to perform this kind of ritual in some circumstances because, for example, they regard their baptism as the ritual that purifies them. Therefore, different understandings of purity or being clean can be seen as a distinctive characteristic between these groups.

Muslims generally hesitate to eat a meal if they do not know whether that meal is *halal*. Their main concern is related to the meat that is used in preparing the meal since they cannot eat pork; moreover, there are some specific rules about slaughtering an animal in Islamic law. However, there is no doubt that animals are slaughtered according to Islamic principles in the capital of Mardin since all butchers are Muslims. Muslims can, in fact, eat the meat even if the animal was slaughtered by a Christian as he is seen as *Ahl al-Kitab*, the people of the book[71]. In addition to this, pork is consumed by neither Syriacs nor the other religious groups in Mardin. Therefore, Mardinite Muslims' hesitation in eating their Syriac neighbours' meals can be seen as an example of cultural prejudices in the local context.

[70] *Ghusl* is performed by Muslims after sexual interaction, wet dreams, completion of menstruation or postpartum bleeding.
[71] *Ahl al-Kitab* is a term used in the Quran to refer the adherents of Judaism, the Sabian religion and Christianity.

The reluctance of the Muslim Mardinites may be attributed to other reasons. For instance, the local imams, called *mel'e*, clearly attempt to reduce the interaction between Muslim and Christian residents. They seem to support the assumptions about this matter to some Muslim residents, especially in rural areas, by emphasising the differences between the two groups. Some Syriac participants in villages, also referred to the roles of *mel'es*, start conflicts between them and their Muslim neighbours. To reduce the tensions created by the local imams, some Syriacs visit a *sheikh* or another *mel'e* who has a more positive approach to Syriac residents.

> I went to Batman to visit a *sheikh*. I asked him why our Muslim neighbours do not eat the meat. They say it is *haram* because you butchered it. He [sheikh] said this is not true. (Participant 132 (Syriac Christian, 63, male, farmer))

As a legendary religious leader among the Syriac Christians, Sheikh Fethullah is identified in some stories. Sometimes the participants narrated these stories as if they had been present.

> Sheikh Fethullah came here [the village of Anitli]. They [Syriacs] asked one of his *sufis* to butcher the animal [lamb to serve their guests]. Sheikh Fethullah asked why? They said some [Muslim] people do not eat what we slaughtered. The Sheikh asked one of Syriacs to slaughter and said one who does not want, does not have to eat.
>
> He visited a church to express condolences. He sat by the *Metropolitan* [Bishop]. People watched if he ate the meal [served as a tradition in condolence visits]. He ate from the dish of *Metropolitan* to teach those present a lesson.
>
> Narrated by Participant 132 (Syriac Christian, 63, male, farmer) and Participant 95 (Syriac Christian, 41, male, farmer)[72]

[72] Participant 132 was a Kurdish speaker and had difficulty in expressing his ideas in Turkish. For this reason, his son, Participant 41, helped him narrate the story.

In these stories, Sheikh Fethullah tries to show Muslims' misunderstandings by his actions. Not only does he eat the meals of the Syriac neighbours, but he eats from the same dish as the Syriac *Metropolitan* (Bishop) of Mardin. When narrating these stories, the Syriac participants somehow showed that the villagers are more disposed than the city dwellers to overcome the tensions between the groups.

However, the acceptance of cultural prejudices without questioning can be observed in the explanations of some Muslim participants. After hesitating to find a reason why they do not prefer to eat a Syriac meal, they said:

> I do not eat because I do not know how they cook that meal.

A few Muslim Kurdish participants who recently moved to Midyat said 'they are not clean' to express why they do not want to eat the meals of Syriacs. When asked whether they have ever visited the houses of the Syriac Christians, they said they have not. Later, they added 'there is a smell in their shops' as a further explanation.

In contrast to the preferences of meals, many Muslims who live in the capital of Mardin and Midyat have some positive convictions about their Syriac neighbours.

> Syriac Christians are very clean people.

To explain this sentence, some participants said 'their houses are very clean, even the roads in front of their houses are very clean'. This conviction can be true, but it still needs to be discussed since the Syriac villagers' lifestyle is different from those who settled in the capital. Moreover, it brings out another conviction that was either explicitly expressed or implied in their responses.

> Syriac Christians are city dwellers.

These convictions, which many Muslim residents believe, seem to have been supported by the Syriacs, though a significant portion of the Syriac population in the city has lived in the hinterland. After the relocation of the Armenians from the city and the migration of the *bajari* Syriacs from the city, the Syriac rural dwellers took up their positions in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat. Therefore, these convictions may reflect a desire to see the whole Syriac community more modernised and cultured than the other groups.

Another conviction about the truthfulness of Syriac shop owners was constantly articulated by the Muslim participants.

> They are very honest people in trade relations.

Although Syriac Christians are known as honest tradesman by many, there are some examples that show the contrary. For instance, a few participants were sceptical about the articulation of Syriacs' honesty:

> They are honest because their population is very low now.

This understanding referred to by some Muslim participants suggested that, since Syriacs are a minority, they have to be careful about their trade dealings. Against the common discourse about the truthfulness in trade dealing of the Syriacs, a criticism sometimes emerged in some of the responses of the Muslim participants.

> There was a Syriac goldsmith in Midyat who keeps the gold and money of the Muslim and Syriac villagers. One day he collected everything [these people's savings] and ran away to Europe (Participant 18 (Muslim Arab, 51, male, self-employed)).

The Syriacs believe they represent Christianity in the city, so they must be very careful not to give a negative image of their community. To protect their positive image, they collect money in the church for Syriacs who need financial support.

> You cannot see a beggar who is a Syriac in Mardin.

One implication of this statement is that 'All beggars in the capital of Mardin are Muslims', thereby providing another distinction of us and them. There is no doubt that Syriacs see begging as a humiliating act. Therefore, they take preventative measures to stop begging among their community and the main concern would appear to be, not the wellbeing of the individual, but the standing of their community in a multi-religious and ethnic context.

With reference to eating habits, the attitudes of some Syriacs show similarities to their Muslim neighbours':

> I unofficially conversed with a few Syriacs in Midyat. Even though they criticise Muslims, they have also some prejudices. They said they do not eat the side of meal eaten by the Muslims [Meals are generally served on a big plate in Mardin. Everybody at present eats from the same plate]. Even, after they left, they [Syriacs] cut that side and threw it in the rubbish bin (Participant 86 (Muslim Kurd, 35, male, academic)).

This example is significant for showing that the prejudicial behaviours of the Mardinites are not only performed by the majority groups, but the minority groups as well. In addition, it reveals the fact that every group has produced some rituals that keep their differences alive.

5.4.3 Between the Muslims and Ezidis of Mardin

The prejudices between the Muslim and Ezidi residents are based on both cultural and religious understandings, but the strongest ones are related to religious beliefs.

> They worship Satan.

Although the Ezidis do not worship Satan, but show respect to *Melek-e Tawus* (the Angel of Peacock), the conviction that 'they are devil worshippers' is very common among the Muslim Mardinites. This conviction seems to emerge in an understanding that implies Ezidis are *haram* to Muslims.

> We hired workers for construction. They were Muslims. They refused to eat lunch we prepared. They cooked their meals every day until they finished their jobs (Participant 89 (Ezidi, 72, male, farmer)).

Being *haram* means the Muslims cannot eat a meal cooked by the Ezidis. Therefore, the relations with this group require some practices and rituals created by the Muslim Mardinites (Güç Işık, 2012). As an example, mostly rural Muslim residents do not use a dish if an Ezidi touches it or eats from it until they wash the dish with red soil. Red soil is culturally accepted as a pure material. Muslims in the area use this soil to construct an earth oven named *tandır* to bake their bread. The ritual of washing kitchen utensils and dishes with red soil must be repeated seven times. The number seven is significant since it symbolises plurality in the Arabic language and the kitchen utensil that the Ezidi touched can be purified. Thus, it can be asserted that this ritual was created to reassure Muslim neighbours who are in communication with Ezidis and believe they are devil-worshippers, convincing them that their purity in a religious sense can be recovered.

This local perception of *haram* was supported by another example that was given by Participant 90 and Participant 89. They were asked by a Muslim buyer to wash the mouth of his cow seven times with red soil before beginning any dealing for trade.

> He said you must wash its mouth at first. Otherwise, I cannot buy it. You are *haram* to us (Participant 89 (Ezidi, 72, male, farmer) and Participant 90 (Ezidi, 27, male, farmer)).

Some Muslims eat the meals prepared by Ezidis although they are not sure about their actions since they may cross a boundary that is religiously and culturally not accepted by many Muslims in the hinterland. Therefore, their preference creates a tension that they need to overcome.

Having close relations with the Ezidis in a village of Mardin, Participant 85 (Muslim Kurd, 47, male, self-employed)[73] started his comments using the concepts of *haram* and *halal*.

> So to speak, making *haram* the *halal*, I spent time with the Ezidis. I felt very sorry about them. One day, a Muslim guest asked who slaughtered the animal when we were having lunch in an Ezidi's house. They always serve meat for their guests. After learning the butcher was an Ezidi, that man pushed meats and only ate rice. I was very ashamed of his attitude.

Participant 85 gave this example to criticise the subordination of Ezidis in the Muslim context. However, it also shows that some Muslims eat Ezidis' meal even if they do not prefer to eat the meat served by them if the animal was not butchered by a Muslim man. This preference can be understandable when considering there are specific Islamic rules about slaughtering that Muslims must follow. Nevertheless, Participant 85 believed the question asked by the Muslim guest was a kind of humiliation. He also did not feel comfortable eating their meals; however, he did not want to hurt his Ezidi friends' feelings. Still, he expressed his situation as 'making *haram* the *halal*' which implies he eats the meals of Ezidis, which is not accepted as *halal* by many Muslims. This understanding of the Mardinite Muslims seems to

[73] In addition to trade, Participant 85 worked for National Geographic Türkiye as a photographer. He visited Ezidi villages to learn about their lives, aiming to report news initially. Later, he was affected by the stories of the Ezidis and became personally interested in their lives. He stated it took one year to gain their trust and learn more about them. Also, Participant 90 said 'we did not trust him in the beginning. We did not give any information about us for over a year. But he continued visiting us'.

also be supported by the approaches of the *mel'es*; accordingly, it seems to common among Muslim rural dwellers, especially the Muslim Kurds.

There is also a dilemma about accepting Ezidis as *haram* in relation to inter-religious marriages. There are a few examples of Muslim man-Ezidi woman marriages that will be discussed later in this chapter. This point shows that the Ezidis being *haram* to a Muslim is a cultural prejudice that is not applied in establishing a family, even though this prejudice is blended with religious beliefs to distinguish 'us' from 'them'.

5.4.4 Between the Ezidis and Syriac Christians of Mardin

Being the smallest group and not having social status, Ezidis were sometimes identified as more humanistic than other groups by some Mardinites who participated in this research.

> They are very humanist people. Frankly speaking, they are the most humanistic people I have ever met (Participant 85 (Muslim Kurd, 47, male, self-employed)).

> I am praying every morning turning to the Sun not only for the Ezidis but all human beings (Participant 89 (Ezidi, 72, male, farmer)).

However, the Ezidis have some cultural prejudices that are apparent in their interaction with the other. For instance, some Ezidis do not eat the meals of their Syriac neighbours.

> I do not touch it. I do not eat their meal (Participant 89 (Ezidi, 72, male, farmer)).

The boundaries in their relations with their Muslim and Christian neighbours are constructed around the tradition of circumcision, since this tradition takes a significant place in Ezidi life. This is demonstrated by Participant 89 who articulated that he cannot eat the meals provided

by Syriac Christians because they do not perform circumcision. This conviction was repeated by other Ezidi participants.

> The animal slaughtered by a Syriac who is not circumcised is *haram* to the Ezidis.

A butcher must be a circumcised man according to the Mardinite Ezidis. Therefore, they do not want to eat the meals of their Syriac neighbours, for most of the Syriacs in the city are not circumcised[74]; on the other hand, there is no hesitation about eating meat if a Muslim man slaughtered the animal since Muslims follow this tradition.

It seems that the Ezidis who immigrated from Mardin to Germany have also followed this cultural prejudice. Participant 122 (Ezidi, 56, female, Ezidi sheikh[75]) recalled a story that happened in Germany. She wanted to sacrifice a lamb for God in front of her house. One of her neighbours offered to help. He held the knife and was ready to start the process of slaughtering. She suddenly asked if he is a Muslim or Ezidi. As soon as she learned he was a Christian man, she intervened.

> My neighbour who is a Christian intended to butcher our sacrificial lamb. I cried out to stop him. He is uncircumcised.

After shuddering as if she remembered an unpleasant thing, she continued her story:

> I took the knife from him. I said you cannot butcher our lamb if you are not an Ezidi or Muslim. Then I went home and I washed the knife a few times.

[74] Some Christian men are circumcised in Mardin because of medical problems. In some conversations, being circumcised was seen as an indicator of socio-cultural stratification, 'My son was circumcised when he was a baby because of health problem. Sometimes I am saying my son that you are both from us and from them' (Participant 110 (Armenian Catholic, 38, female, housewife)).

[75] Ezidis have a caste system. The class of sheikh takes top position in this hierarchical organisation. Participant 122 was in Mardin at that time because she was looking for a wife for her son.

The only reason that she did not let him butcher the lamb was he was an uncircumcised Christian man, as she believed. She explained with her body language how she washed the knife that he had touched a few times before using it again for sacrificing the lamb. While she was going through these actions, she shuddered as if she had touched something that was nauseating.

Participant 85 who felt an empathy with the Ezidis was present while Participant 122 was narrating this story. He had earlier expressed his feelings about Muslims who refuse to eat an Ezidi's meal. He bewilderedly said 'I do not know this' a few times at the end of the narration of Participant 122.

Syriac neighbours also display some prejudices toward the Ezidis. The urban Syriacs see the Ezidis as villagers, in other words, from the lowest status of Mardin society.

> The urban people always saw themselves superior than the villager or the people who live in rural [Mardin]. This was not only towards the Ezidis or Muslims or Christians. This is the problem of urban people (Participant 6 (Syriac Christian, 38, male, works for church)).

More importantly, they share the conviction with their Muslim neighbours that the Ezidis 'worship Satan'.

5.4.5 Children's reflections on cultural prejudices in Mardin

Children can sometimes reflect the negative feelings and ideas expressed by their families and others with whom they communicate. This may be because they know little how social actors play in their interaction with others. Nonetheless, the judgemental behaviours of children are

significant for understanding prejudices that the Mardinites have gained in their cultural context.

The reflections of the Mardinite children become clear through their use of the term *gavur* (unbeliever)[76] since both the Muslim and Syriac participants gave this example to explain the implicit tensions between the groups. From the comments of the participants, it seems the public primary schools are places where children reveal the cultural prejudices of their own groups. This may be because for the first time in their lives some Mardinite children encounter or communicate with children from different backgrounds.

> Because we had no teacher here, my children went to school in neighbouring Muslim village for a while… Muslim children called Syriac children *gavur*. They said 'the *gavurs* came here'. It was very disturbing (Participant 99 (Syriac Christian, 36, male, works for church)).
>
> They say *gavur* to our children in schools (Participant 6 (Syriac Christian, 38, male, works for church)).

Children's games can sometimes turn into a fight when some Muslim children call their Syriac friends *gavur* to annoy them.

> I have a close Muslim friend in the capital of Mardin. We go to their house, they visit us. One day our children were playing outside. Suddenly they started fighting. We asked why are you fighting with each other? [It was because] My friend's son called my son *gavur* (Participant 112 (Syriac Christian, 44, male, works for church)).

Not being aware of its implications, the Muslim Mardinite children reflect the hidden tensions in the local social memory using the term *gavur*, which underlines the religious differences

[76] Margosyan (2012), who is an Armenian born in Diyarbakır, Turkey, wrote a book related to the use of this term among Muslim neighbours. This book provides some reflections on how a child sees religious differences.

between groups. In addition, it indicates the challenges for accepting others with their differences.

However, the Syriac participants who shared their childhood memories also indicated they had good relations with their Muslim friends when they became teenagers. For example, Participant 121 (Syriac Christian, 23, male, student and works for church) encountered some difficulties when he was a child.

> I faced some negative attitudes when I was a child. But, we improved our relations when we were teenagers. I went high school in Mardin. I have Muslim friends now … The young Syriacs and Muslims are playing football together. I attended a few times, too. Later, I did not because I do not like playing football.

As is seen from the experiences of the Mardinite children, the residents of Mardin learn the differences between ethno-religious groups in the early stages of their lives because of socio-cultural context within which they were born. Despite the difficulty of facing the reality of being different, they have a chance to identify and present their ethno-religious identity.

> One night I went home after work. I found my youngest son when he was crying. I asked him why you are crying. He said I don't know who I can marry when I grow up. I am the only Syriac in my class. It was his first year in the public school (Participant 50 (Syriac Christian, 43, male, goldsmith)).

As a result, the examples of the cultural prejudices among the Mardinites show the differences between the people are always a source of discomfort, but, at the same time, they reveal that people feel a need to emphasise the differences between 'us' and 'them' to protect their identities. Among the Mardinite groups, religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in understanding others and being understood by them.

5.5 The institution of marriage as a boundary between the groups

As a social institution, marriage is a foundation element on which society is based. Through marriage, a new family becomes part of a broader group of family units and thus 'communities' are created. Every family unit is based on a legal contract or the approval of the community, which links individuals as spouse and relatives and thus creates a kinship system. While every family can be seen as a circle (ring), an extended family is composed of interlocked circles. In an ethnically and religiously diverse context like Mardin, every community has many family circles and remains within a circle of the wider society. As a result, it is possible to approach the engaged and separated parts of society via consanguinity.

The institution of marriage can be viewed as the circle of relationships that is established via consanguinity, bringing different families together, which enables them, among many other activities, to perform social rituals. This circle can include various ethnic groups or be exclusive to only one ethnic group. Many different types of affiliations have displaced the relations established via consanguinity in today's social systems, though a multi-ethnic society with traditional social patterns may still have kinship circles based on blood relations that are protected by religion.

In the case of Mardin, marriage provides one of the key factors underlying intercultural relations and marriage is not only an issue of kinship, but also a protector of boundaries in areas that are made up of various ethno-religious identities. The ethno-religious groups' approaches to marriage and the system of kinship in Mardin help illustrate how Mardinite groups are interlocked or separated into individual units. Examining the approaches of the groups also clarifies the boundaries between the different communities.

Before discussing inter-group/inter-religious marriages, it should be stressed that the society of Mardin still has traditional patterns of female-male relations, though this has been challenged by the effects of modernity. These patterns have been intertwined around topics relating to women's bodies and chastity, especially when the only avenue for sexual relations that is accepted by Mardin society is through marriage. In this context, the question of who the female marries is a serious matter for all ethno-religious groups and this is also related to the power balance among the different groups. Given the importance of this balance, it is understandable why the female residents of Mardin are very careful to follow the rules of their communities when they want to marry.

5.5.1 Muslim-Muslim marriage

Among Muslim groups, marrying a person who is outside the group is not considered a problem when compared to non-Muslim-Muslim marriage. However, there are some social and cultural boundaries that restrain the Muslim residents from inter-group marriage. The first boundary is based on the distinction between urban and rural, which, because of the different social classes, may be the main reason why families reject marriage between the Muslim Arabs and Kurds. Still, this practice has been challenged by the social and demographic changes in Mardin and, recently for Kurds, it has become more desirable to give their daughters to Arabs who live in the capital because of social status. On the other hand, the *bajari* Arabs still hesitate when a rural Kurd wants to marry an Arab woman, though there is no objection if the prospective groom comes from a wealthy Kurdish family.

> They do not hesitate to give their daughters to the Kurds if the groom's family is rich or he is the son of an *agha* [the chief of a tribe or who is a member of a powerful family] (Participant 134 (Muslim Turk, 53, female, civil servant)).

The previously identified perception 'Arabs are city-dwellers and Kurds are villagers' emerged in some interviews.

> I think the reason is that an Arab woman cannot live in the circumstances of village. She has a different lifestyle (Participant 69 (Muslim Arab, 32, female, teacher)).

5.5.2 Muslim-Syriac marriage

From the perspective of the Syriac Christians, there is an unwritten social contract between the Muslims and Christians of Mardin in terms of inter-religious marriage. For this reason, a non-Christian man's demand to marry a Christian woman is accepted as 'a betrayal by their Muslim neighbours' within the Syriac community. Similarly, it is not acceptable for a Christian to demand to marry a non-Christian.

Nonetheless, a Muslim man can marry a woman who is from *Ahl al-Kitab*, the people of the book, according to Islamic law; in contrast, it is not permitted for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. This rule has been followed rigidly by Muslim groups in Mardin, and it is not possible to talk about the marriage of a non-Muslim man-Muslim woman. When one tries to talk about the possibility of this kind of marriage, there is always a silence as if there is a social consensus among the Muslim residents, which illustrates that the boundaries relating to women's body are very clear in the city.

Despite the Syriac Christians' reactions to Muslim-Christian marriage[77], there are a few examples of marriage of a Muslim man-Christian woman that have not created ethical or

[77] According to Participant 108 (Muslim Arab, 65, male, retired civil servant), the Syriac Christians sometimes choose an Alawite woman as wife because of the Alawites' flexible religious rules. He supported this claim with his observations among the Alawites. He asserted that he saw pictures of Mary, Ali and Atatürk together on the walls of their houses 'like a trinity'. In addition, he encountered an Alawi woman in a Syriac village who was the wife of the village's chief. Although there is no evidence to support this claim, the possibility of this type of marriage between the Syriacs and Alawites can happen because of difficulties the Syriacs encounter in finding a spouse.

religious issues for Muslim groups. However, the Syriac participants articulated that existing inter-religious marriages of their 'daughters'[78] were because they were forced to marry a Muslim man or they were kidnapped. They reject any notion of probable love between Muslim men and their daughters.

> A man from Estel kidnapped our daughters (Participant 82 (Syriac Christian, 65, female, housewife)).

Participant 82 used the term kidnap when she was answering the question about inter-religious marriages. For her, it was a kidnapped girl who was forced to marry a Muslim man. Although this kidnapped girl was not her biological daughter, she was one of the daughters of the Syriac community to which Participant 82 belonged.

If a Christian woman is kidnapped by or willingly runs off with a Muslim, this is not only a matter for her family, but for the whole Syriac community in Mardin. At the beginning, her family attempts to get her back and thus preserve her position in the community. If they do not achieve this, and generally they do not, then they refuse to communicate with her. All relations with the daughter are cut off and she is considered 'dead' by the community. Consequently, kidnapped young women or women who willingly run away with Muslim men are outside the boundaries of the Syriac community.

> At first, they try to get back their daughters. Later, if they do not achieve, they cut off their relations with her (Participant 72 (Muslim Arab, 46, female, self-employed)).

Some young Muslim participants shared stories of their Muslim and Christian friends who met each other during their high school education. One of these stories is about a young

[78] The Syriac people call all the young female members of the community their daughters. The usage of the word can be seen as an example that reveals the priority of religious affiliation for this group.

Christian man's love narrated by Participant 70 (Muslim Kurd, 25, female, unemployed). The young Christian man asks the Muslim girl to marry him, explaining that he is ready to convert to Islam if it is necessary. But one of his Syriac classmates becomes aware of the situation and informs the priests who conduct night classes in the Mar Gabriel Monastery in Midyat for the young Syriacs after their formal education. This love story turns into a crisis within the Syriac community. The action taken by the community is that the young Syriac is sent to Europe to continue his education. This example can be seen as one of reasons why some Syriac families do not want to send their daughters to high school. Obviously, the Syriac parents fear losing their control and influence over their children, an attitude that is especially noticeable in Midyat.

> After this happened [the Syriacs did not let the young Syriac marry the girl in high school], I made a conversation with my mother. I said 'mum, if I marry a Syriac, if he becomes Muslim, would you permit?' Of course, she said, I would marry you off myself.

> In the 1990s, there were these kinds of marriages [Muslim-Syriac]. Before the 1990s, there were. But in recent years, there are not ... Men became Muslim [to marry a Muslim woman] ... Christian women, Syriac women who accepted Islam in marriage are a lot ... Of course, a Muslim family wants to have a Syriac daughter-in-law if she wants to accept Islam. They say it is a desirable thing, but they never wed their daughters to a Syriac man (Participant 70 (Muslim Kurd, 25, female, unemployed)).

> I received a proposal from a Syriac. It was very serious. But, me and a Syriac? How can it be? He lives in America. He came here to attend a Syriac festival ... He said, if it is necessary, I can change my religion, I can be a Muslim. It is not a problem for me, he said. (Participant 71 (Muslim Kurd, 26, female, unemployed)).

In spite of the local Syriacs' approaches about inter-religious marriage, both the young Syriacs and Muslims try to find a solution around such problems to marriage. For example, a Muslim girl who lives in Istanbul opened a discussion on the forum of a well-known Syriac

website:[79] 'What do you think about the marriage between a Syriac man and Muslim girl?' Some users of this website became involved in this discussion. The Syriac users shared their own 'impossible' love stories to explain why a Syriac man and a Muslim girl cannot marry. Some of them said 'You must become a Christian'. Still, it is not enough. 'You must prove your sincerity'. Even after this, there is no guarantee of being accepted by the Syriac man's family. In the end, both the Muslims and Syriacs who participated in this discussion agreed that the boundary of religion cannot be crossed for the sake of inter-religious marriage, even if it is very hard for the lovers to separate.

Even today, tensions surface among the Syriac Christians when a marriage between a Muslim man and a Christian woman occurs[80]. Some Muslim and Christian Mardinites who migrated to European countries have had close relations in the new country. Sometimes this relationship results in inter-religious marriage, where the social pressures that are found in Mardin are not so strong or influential. When the news of this marriage is received by the community, it also causes dissatisfaction among the Syriac people in the capital of Mardin and Midyat. As it is seen, marriage remains a strong boundary between the Muslim and Christian residents of Mardin.

5.5.3 Muslim-Ezidi marriage

In the memory of most Mardinites, examples of Muslim-Ezidi marriages do not exist. However, there are some clues that indicate marriages between a Muslim man-Ezidi woman may have taken place in the past. This is despite the rule for Muslim men and women in

[79] See http://www.suryaniler.com/forum.asp?fislem=cevaplar&kategoriid=2&ustid=1499

[80] A Syriac girl married a Muslim man in Istanbul in 2010 without the permission of her family. Both of them were killed by her brother. After this case appeared in the news, the Syriacs in Mardin made a statement about this incident. They said this incident should not be seen as evidence of an honour crime. There is no honour killing among the Syriac community in Mardin. Yuhanna Aktas, who is the chief of the Mardin-Syriac Culture Association, added that 'our Syriac girls are kidnapped by the young Muslims but they do not run off'. See http://haber.gazetevatan.com/muslumana-kiz-vermek-istemeyiz-ama-evleneni-de-oldurmeyiz/346492/1/Haber

Islamic law that does not accept marriage to a person who is neither Muslim nor from the people of the book. Nonetheless, since the Ezidi religion is accepted as a deviant sect of Islam, the close relations between the Ezidis and Kurdish tribes may have led to such marriages and ones that some residents of Mardin were able to recall.

However, this type of marriage can happen only if the man is Muslim; otherwise, the Muslim community does not accept it. The other option, a Muslim woman-Ezidi man, cannot be considered because the social reaction to this possibility can be extreme. If an Ezidi woman runs away with a Muslim or Christian man, her action would be seen as a betrayal of her community. There is no excuse for this marriage.

> They are very vengeful. They found them and definitely killed them, both Muslim man and Ezidi woman. They definitely take their revenge even if it takes many years(Participant 85 (Muslim Kurd, 47, male, self-employed)).

If a daughter of the Ezidi community is kidnapped by a man from another religious community, the same decision is made. Both are killed if they are found by community members. The Ezidis' reactions to inter-religious marriage are shown in the drama *Mahmud and Yezida* by Mungan (2006), who is a native of Mardin[81]. The play is about an impossible love between an Ezidi girl and a Muslim man. At the beginning of the drama, Yezida and Mahmud discuss the possibility of their marriage, and Mahmud tries to convince her to run off with him. However, she gives many reasons to show why their marriage is impossible. First of all, their villagers fight each other. Even if her father accepts this marriage, there are other obstacles that they cannot overcome.

> Do you think your village, your villagers accept me? Your mother does not, your brother does not, your *agha* does not, your neighbour does not, even your dog in front of your

[81] The *Mungan* family is one of the prominent Arab families in the capital of Mardin.

> house does not. I am ready to be a dog in front of your house Mahmut, but the stick [used to tie the dog] in your doorsill does not accept me (p 21).

A few participants asserted this kind of marriage happened between an Ezidi woman and a Muslim, most probably Kurdish, man. It may have happened because marriage is one way to improve and sustain good relations with the powerful groups so daughters of the community or tribe could be offered to the other. Through marriage and the formation of family circles of relatives, some Ezidis could permit Muslim men to marry their daughters in order to guarantee support from and improve relations with their Muslim neighbours.

5.5.4 Ezidi-Syriac marriage

In the social memory of Mardinites, Ezidi-Syriac marriage does not exist. This may be because Ezidis and Syriacs in Mardin have mostly improved close relations with Muslim groups who make up the majority of the city. Another reason could be the strong reactions of these groups against inter-religious marriage; therefore, they might not allow their members to marry a person from another group. As soon as they become aware of a possibility of an inter-religious marriage, they remove the chances for those who want to marry. Consequently, the restrictions regarding inter-religious marriage of these communities would prevent the possibility of this kind of marriage.

5.5.5 Armenian grandmothers

In terms of inter-religious marriages, another subject that needs to be discussed is Armenian grandmothers[82]. In Mardin, there are many families, mostly Kurdish, who have an Armenian grandmother in their pedigree.

[82] The issues of Armenian grandmothers were raised by many Kurdish participants. There is a book written by F. Çetin (2008) on the memories of her grandmother after learning she is an Armenian.

> My grandfather had three wives. The last one was an Armenian of Samsun [a city in the north of Turkey]. She was so beautiful and urban. She was well-educated. She taught us the urban lifestyle. We loved her very much (Participant 40 (Muslim Kurd, 47, male, self-employed)).

> In here, every family has an Armenian grandmother (Participant 76 (Muslim Arab, 38, female, housewife)).

> We have an Armenian grandmother … She became Muslim. She read the Quran. But just before she died, she sometimes crossed herself when she was unconscious (Participant 1 (Muslim Kurd, 48, male, self-employed)).

The eagerness of the Kurdish participants to talk about their Armenian grandmother can be related to their political stance[83]. From their stories, it became clear there were marriages between Muslim Kurdish men-Armenian women during the Armenian relocation in the early 20th century. According to information given by the participants, this kind of marriage generally occurred because Armenian women needed protection after losing their family members or when a Muslim man wanted to marry an Armenian woman because of her beauty. Therefore, many Muslim Kurdish families in Mardin have Armenian grandmothers in their family tree.

5.5.6 On the contradictions of inter-group or inter-religious marriage

From the perspectives of the Mardinites, inter-group or inter-religious marriage is a sensitive matter since the institution of marriage brings families together who may be made up of different ethnic or religious communities. When this type of marriage is conducted, tension among the different groups comes into the situation. For most Mardinites, an inter-group or inter-religious marriage is a threat to the cultural and religious boundaries that protect the community's integrity, thus determining its differentiation and integration with other groups.

[83] The examples of Armenian grandmother were given by the Kurdish residents who are mostly secular and nationalist.

The communities' approaches to inter-religious marriage reveal the social and cultural boundaries between the Mardinites. Every group is very sensitive towards the boundaries that have been drawn among groups considering their religious differences. There is some possibility for an inter-group marriage to take place, but only if both female and male are followers of the same religion. However, the tension does not completely disappear even when the groups come from the same religious background.

Therefore, marriage can be used as an analytical tool in the case of Mardin, for the residents use it to indicate their boundaries and distinguish themselves from other groups. For the Syriac Christians, their marriage system is more reasonable than Muslims' because their religion does not allow polygamy and divorce. The Syriac participants generally referred to polygamy among Muslims when they expressed that their male-female relations are more equal than Muslims'.

> Muslim men can have two wives. There is no assurance for them [Muslim women] (Participant 80 (Syriac Christian, 65, female, housewife)).

> We are not afraid … Our husbands cannot marry again (Participant 105 (Syriac Christian, 67, female, housewife)).

Similar explanations were given by other Syriac participants. The indication of 'us' and 'them' in these sentences particularly distinguish Syriac women from Muslim women in Mardin. Their religion does not allow their husband to have a second wife; as a result, there is no need to be afraid of bigamy for Syriac women.

> We cannot divorce. If your wife dies or if adultery is a matter, then they would divorce. Otherwise, they cannot (Participant 80 (Syriac Christian, 65, female, housewife)).

For the Syriac female participants, their Muslim women neighbours are not lucky, for there is always a threat to them because their religion allows polygamy. In reality, polygamy is not a common marriage type among the *bajari* Muslims. However, a few examples can be found in the rural areas, especially in the Kurdish villages[84].

Besides the religious rules, the population of Syriacs should be considered in terms of polygamy. They frequently expressed that it is hard to find a spouse for their children. In addition to the religious rule, the Syriac community does not have much opportunity for finding a wife or husband; therefore, it is understandable why the community does not allow its male members to marry again. The factor of population can also be effective in the matter of divorce within the Syriac community.

In contrast to the interests of the Syriac in the marriage life of their Muslim neighbours, the Muslim participants did not pay much attention to the differences between the religious communities related to marriage. Rather, they indicated the differences between the Kurds and Arabs of Mardin. Their main concern was the respect that has to be shown to the wife. Arabs claimed they cherish their wives much more than the Kurds; on the other hand, the Kurdish participants expressed that their female-male relationship is more egalitarian than the Arabs'.

> Kurds help their wives much than Arabs [at home] (Participant 57 (Muslim Kurd, 44, male, teacher)).

> Our female-male relationship are more equal than Arabs'. A Kurd woman never lets her husband subordinate her (Participant 22 (Muslim Kurd, 41, male, employee)).

[84] Some Muslim men who live in the villages or towns of Mardin married young Arabic women who are from Arab countries including Syria and Lebanon. According to Participant 96 (Muslim Turk, 24, female, teacher), these women are very poor; therefore, they do not care if the man is married or not, and do not have many demands.

Both Arab and Kurdish participants revealed their prejudices about the other in the example of the female-male relationship.

The institution of marriage is undoubtedly one of the clear boundaries between cultural and religious groups in Mardin. Kinship brings some ethical and social obligations and consequences among the family members. Even though blood relationship is significant for establishing a kin system, religion seems to remain as the main protector of the boundaries and this is linked to the institution of marriage. The second factor that protects the boundaries through marriage is the classifications of social classes. However, the institution of milk siblinghood remains a factor that blurs the lines among kin systems, which are strengthened by religion and social classifications in the region.

As a result, religion is an effective factor in the establishment of marriage, family and therefore kinship system in the case of Mardin. The lines between the Mardinite groups, which are drawn by religion, require much respect according to the residents compared to those that are sociologically or economically generated.

5.6 Overview of the chapter

Even though the dominant discourse highlights social cohesion in Mardin society, it also has social conflict between and within its diverse ethno-religious groups. This chapter analysed the disengagement in Mardin society. After indicating the spatial disengagement between the urban and rural spaces of the city, the chapter discussed socio-cultural boundaries between the Mardinite groups in the example of *bajari/gundi* and Muslim/non-Muslim. Cultural prejudices between the groups were articulated in order to demonstrate that religion also functions a distinguishing factor in the context of Mardin. The examples of cultural prejudices showed that ethnicity and religion are important factors in constructing the image of the other.

The first prominent division, urban and rural, seems to have fostered some ethnic-based prejudices between Muslim Arabs and Kurds. Among diverse religious groups, food is a social tool in determining the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites and in drawing a line between 'us' and 'them'. In the case of Mardin, cultural prejudices are not the outcome of majority-minority division, but cultural and religious understanding. In spite of general opinion, minority groups have cultural prejudices toward majority groups that appear in sharing food. Because of circumcision matters, some Ezidis refuse to eat Christians' meals. Likewise, Syriac Christians sometimes show a negative attitude in sharing food with their Muslim neighbours. The findings of this chapter demonstrated that cultural prejudices are mostly cultivated by religious understandings in the case of Mardin.

The chapter furthered its findings with another distinguishing fact. The institution of marriage provides the socio-cultural boundaries supported by religious beliefs in Mardin. Communities do not approve of interreligious marriages between Muslim-Christian, Muslim-Ezidi and Christian-Ezidi, while people who come from the same religious background can marry even though there are still some barriers, such as class or ethnic background. Even though the Muslim groups showed reaction to Kurd-Arab marriage, social sanctions seem not to be as strong. For Muslims, Muslim-non-Muslim marriages are acceptable only when a Muslim man wants to marry a Christian or Ezidi woman. On the other hand, non-Muslims, Syriac Christians and Ezidis, perceive this kind of marriage as a threat to their community boundaries when a man or woman wants to marry a non-member of their community. If a Syriac or Ezidi woman marries a Muslim man, they accept 'she is dead' and out of the boundaries of the community. Explicitly non-Muslim groups do not want to establish blood relations with Muslim groups, but they have been constructing virtual kinships with them.

In the case of Mardin, inter-religious and inter-group marriages require questioning the acceptance of ethnic identity since every family is a combination of different ethnic identities. Consequently, Mardin society has some disengaged parts in its cultural fabric. Religion plays a role in constructing and maintaining this disengagement; however, it is not a primary boundary among the Mardinite groups that creates social distance.

6 CHAPTER 6

IDENTITY, DIASPORA AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

'I am Turk, honest and hard-working.
My principle is to protect the younger to respect the elder,
to love my homeland and my nation more than myself.
My ideal is to rise, to progress.
My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence'.
Student oath in primary schools

How happy is the one who says 'I am a Turk'.
M. K. Atatürk

Linguistic diversity is the pivot of all diversity.
Amin Maalouf

6.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 analysed the role of religion in the engagement and disengagement of diverse components in the cultural fabric of Mardin. In doing so, the chapters also considered the dominant discourse of the Turkish State and the demotic discourse of the Mardinites. As previously discussed, the policies of the Turkish Republic have rapidly transformed the context of Mardin and triggered the departure of diverse Mardinite groups. This chapter illustrates the social transformation of the city in three themes to underline the recent changes in the position of religion in Mardin society. These themes are related to the links between local, national and international contexts. This chapter benefits from the narrations of the participants along with the results of participant observation and textual analysis.

The first theme is the language reform of the Turkish State, which was made to establish a new nation. This reform offered a new Turkish language and prohibited local languages; as a result, ethnic nationalism became prominent in the national context of Turkey. The emphasis

on Turkishness created other social problems for the whole society and these problems have taken a significant place in the departure of its minority groups for other countries. The ethnic nationalism of the Turkish Republic is key to understanding the shift in the expression of identities in Mardin. The ethnic aspect of multiple identities has eventually become more prominent in the national context. In recent years, the Mardinites who live in European countries have become involved in discussions on identity and language, and they have reflected their new understandings, which were gained in Western societies, related to ethnic minorities and their rights. The immigrated Mardinites did not completely cut their relations with their families in Mardin; however, they have only been able to establish transnational networks between Mardin and their host countries in recent years. Their return to Mardin has had an impact on both the internal issues of their communities and their relations with the other local groups. Since they have started a change in the context of Mardin, their recent existence needs to be considered in analysing the role of religion in the interaction of the residents. The third theme is the collective memory of the Mardinites. Both the Turkish State's policies and the diaspora Mardinites have contributed to the revelation of some certain past events and the re-construction of the collective memory of the Mardinites. Therefore, memory has become a significant subject in distinguishing 'us' from 'them' in the context of Mardin.

Mardin becoming a prominent example to demonstrate the multiculturality of Turkey has not only added a new dimension to the socio-cultural interaction of the residents of Mardin, but also has created a dilemma. On one hand, the dominant discourse of the State has treated the Mardinite groups as distinctive authentic entities of Anatolia and glorified them. On the other hand, the State has expected its Arab, Kurd, Syriac and Ezidi citizens to act for its benefit and abandon their ethnic distinctiveness. In addition, the representation of Mardin and the lives of the Mardinites to outsiders neglects the social and political problems of the residents that

engage the new system of Turkey. To demonstrate this dilemma and the transformation of the local context under the rule of the Turkish Republic, the following section discusses the process of creating a new nation in the example of language and introduces the problems of expressing local identities in the Turkish national context.

6.2 Creating a national context and an imagined Turkish society

The context of Mardin remained almost the same until the Republican period when its unavoidable transformation happened under the effects of the strict Kemalist ideology[85]. This ideology tended to create a new nation assimilating ethnic and linguistic differences in Turkey. Its roots can be found in the government of ITC in the last years of the Ottoman State, which started the project of Turkification with the relocation of its ethnically diverse population within the country (Şeker, 2008)[86]. Under the threat of nationalistic tendencies at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman elites tried to find a way to maintain the existence of the State (Lewis, 1962). Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkism were offered as solutions to protect the borders of the State (Mardin, 2012). Because of the rapid dissolve of the nations in the western territory of the State, the options of Islamism and Ottomanism were quickly eliminated. The last solution, Turkism, which stressed one ethnic background and attempted to construct an umbrella national identity, became the agenda of the Turkish elites (Lewis, 1962).

This cultural nationalism was immingled with religious and ethnic elements in the beginning, even though the ruling class of modern Turkey tended to diminish the tie between Turkish

[85] It is also known as the Six Arrows: Republicanism, nationalism, populism, secularism, statism and revolutionism. These principles define the basic characteristics of the Turkish Republic.

[86] A similar project was imposed by the Turkish State in the 1930s. The State re-settled some Kurdish residents in the middle and north regions of Turkey. Today, these regions still have some Kurdish villages that were attached to the Turkish villages. For example, my (the researcher) parents' village in the city of Kastamonu has an attached Kurdish village. Even though the Kurdish and Turkish villagers have had relatively good relations, marriage has remained a social boundary between them. Further information about the relocation of the Kurdish residents in the 1930 see (Alakom, 2004).

identity and Islam (Şeker, 2008). The Lausanne Treaty, which was the founding treaty of the Turkish Republic, is an obvious example of this. The Turkish delegates of the Treaty insisted on seeing the ethnic and religious minorities of Turkey as 'religious groups', not ethnic or cultural minorities, despite the struggles of some European countries, especially Britain (Oran, 2007). On one hand, religion was thought to be maintaining a connection between the Muslim groups from different ethnic backgrounds, such as Kurd, Arab, Georgia and Chechen along with Turk. On the other hand, the social and political reforms of the new Turkish State attempted to decrease the role of religion in public life and cut its ties with the Ottoman State. The new Turkish society was imaged as secular, laic and modern in such a way that it can be identified as an 'imagined community' (Andersen, 1983).

Modern Turkey provided some special privileges related to religion, language and education for Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian Christian communities (Oran, 2007). In fact, these privileges were given by the Ottoman State in its last years and continued to exist under the minority rights laid out in the Lausanne Treaty. However, other ethno-religious groups faced difficulties being represented in this new country[87]. In addition, they had to adapt to the new social system, for many cities were obliged to abandon their millet-based plural characteristics because of strong pressure by the Turkish Republic immediately after 1923.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is the father of the secularisation project in the creation of the new nation, promoted a historical thesis about the Turkish background of Anatolia written in the 1930s[88]. This thesis was based on the theory of Sun, which claims that contemporary Turks were the inheritors of the glories of the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks and the earliest Hittite civilisation in Anatolia. This thesis asserted that the other nations of Anatolia

[87] It can be said that the cultural rights brought into effect by the Lausanne Treaty for the benefit of not only non-Muslim but also Muslim minorities are not being fully applied. For further information, see Oran (2007).
[88] Lewis analyses the reasons behind the promotion of this thesis. For further information see Lewis (1962).

were also Turks to consolidate the central position of the Turkish identity in creating a new nation. Therefore, it let the Turkish Kemalist elites apply their social engineering; for example, they changed the names of some cities and districts with Turkish names[89].

'Turkish History Thesis' was one of the tools in constructing a new national identity. This thesis is significant to understand the 'myth' behind the imagined national community of Turkey. It was created not only to claim that Turks were indigenous inhabitants of Anatolia, but also to omit the Ottoman period and the legacy of Christian minorities. Therefore, the national identity of Turkey, which was imposed by an elitist group, consisted of the acceptance of Turkish (secular) identity and the Turkish language.

As Bruinessen (1989, p. 8) summarises, there were some substantial aspects of creating a new national context in Turkey.

> Soon after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, its government embarked upon a radical programme of nation-building. Ethnic diversity was perceived as a danger to the integrity of the state, and the Kurds, as the largest non-Turkish ethnic group, obviously constituted the most serious threat. They were decreed to be Turk, and their language and culture were to be Turkish. All external symbols of their ethnic identity were suppressed. Use of the Kurdish language was forbidden in cities and towns. Turkish teachers were despatched to Kurdish villages with the teaching of Turkish as their chief objective. Distinctive Kurdish dress was forbidden. Personal and family names had to be Turkish; later, village names, too, were Turkicised … In the 1930s, after the first Kurdish rebellions, large numbers of Kurds were deported to Turkey's western provinces, while other ethnic groups (Circassians, Laz, and muhacirs from the Balkans) were settled in the Kurdish districts: all attempts to speed up the Turkicisation of the Kurds. These assimilation policies were backed up by a new historical doctrine according to which the Kurds were really Turks originally, but had by historical accident lost their language.

[89] Mardin provides many examples for this social engineering. Kurdish and Syriac villages' names were changed for Turkish ones. For example, the name of *Aynwerd*, a village in Midyat, was changed to *Gülgöze*.

The Turkification project of the Turkish State clearly affected both the Kurds and other minority groups. The diverse groups of the new State experienced difficulties in practising their religious beliefs, expressing their ethnic identities and using their native languages. The effects of the strict Kemalist regime were dominant on the local groups of Turkey. This can be seen in the example of taking a name in a local language that was not permitted until the 2000s[90]. The language policy of the Turkish State was restrictive and its negative treatment of local languages resulted in political conflicts in its national context.

The following section discusses the prohibition of the local languages and its effects in expressing ethnic identity in the case of Mardin.

6.2.1 Prohibition of the local languages

Language homogenisation was an important strategy of the new Turkish State and its language reform took a prominent place in its nation-building process (Feroz, 1993). This reform, which was carried out in 1928, was one of the most radical and important cultural revolutions of the Turkish Republic. Since language was attributed a foundation role, the Latin alphabet was introduced and Ottoman Turkish was transformed into a language that was claimed to be simpler and plainer[91]. This linguistic nationalism was based on the 'Sun language theory,' which claims the Turkish language is ancient and the root of other

[90] Some Mardinites use a Kurdish name among their families and communities even though their names are different on their identification cards. In recent years, there is a growing tendency to take a Kurdish name; for example Baran, Berfin, Berivan, Nupel, Rojda, etc. Also, the Christian names are Turkified with Turkish letters; for example Gabriyel (Gabriel) and Con (John). Some Christians give their children Islamic names, for example Yusuf, but call them its Biblical connotation, Joseph, in their daily lives. Participant 110 indicated this matter and added 'we gave Yusuf to our son because we considered he will do his compulsory military service. We did not want to disclose his religious identity. He might have some problems'.

[91] This language reform cut the ties of the new State from its Ottoman background. Instead of having six centuries of heritage, it was imaged to be a newborn nation-state. The effects of this reform on society have been very traumatic since the younger generation of the Turkish Republic could not understand texts written in Ottoman Turkish or its vocabulary. Further, the children of the Republic have been raised without gaining a sense of history so many do not have a critical understanding toward their social and historical background. Instead, the younger generation of Turkey are expected to be proud of only 90 years' history of the Turkish Republic.

languages (Tachau, 1964). As the Turkish language protects the special features of the Turkish nation, only people who can speak this language would be accepted to be from the Turkish race. Passing into a system of stringent Kemalism, the Turkish language became compulsory in schools and on official documents from 1929. The national schools of the Kemalist regime aimed to teach people 'commonalities' – a common language, a common body of knowledge and a common culture – to foster 'a shared consciousness of society' (Cornell & Hartmann, 2006).

Under single-party rule, the pressure to use only the Turkish language in public began to be applied across society from 1928. Language was regarded as the primary element in the process of Turkifying non-Muslims, Kurds and Arabs. For this reason, the 'citizen speak Turkish' campaign spread in Turkey (Aslan, 2007; Cagaptay, 2004). This campaign resulted in many people gradually abandoning their ethnic identity and language for the sake of integration, while also making people focus more on their religious and lately acquired Turkish identity in a citizenship sense rather than an ethnic one. However, the restrictions on local languages created conflicts between the State and Sunni Kurds. These conflicts resulted in the establishment of the PKK, which used language reform as proof of the subordination of the Kurdish people in a national context. The Kurdish nationalists gradually stressed language and ethnic identity; as a result, a linguistic and an ethnic Kurdish nationalism became prominent not only at the national level, but also at the local contexts in south-east Turkey.

In the case of Mardin, speaking a local language had different implications in the early years of the Turkish Republic, because local languages other than Turkish were prohibited in the public areas of Mardin to constitute the national identity (Aydın et al., 2001). This led to many problems in the socio-cultural life of Mardinites and strengthened the urban-rural

division between residents, for the rural dwellers could not reach the high status of Mardin society or participate in the reproduction of culture.

A Kurdish Mardinite, Musa Anter, who was a writer, poet and journalist, shared his childhood memories about the prohibition of Kurdish in Mardin.

> The Kurdish language was banned inside and outside the city and if anyone was caught speaking Kurdish, they were fined 1 TL [Turkish lira] for each word spoken. This struck Mardin city dumb because unable to speak Kurdish in public meant people used sign language (Anter, 2007, p. 34)

This prohibition takes a significant place in the collective memory of the Mardinites. The following story, which was narrated by Anter (2007) about a Kurdish man and his donkey, was shared by some Kurdish participants of this study without referring to its source[92].

> The villagers used to take wood to the city to sell. They transported it by donkey. They would sell the firewood for about 5060 *kurus* (pennies). If the donkey and the saddle were in good condition, they could sell it for 5-6 lira. To make the donkey go while riding it, a Kurd would say 'Co'. Villagers speaking nothing but Kurdish when they arrived at the city would say 'Co' and the soldiers would stop them and fine them on the spot for speaking Kurdish. Unable to speak Turkish, the Kurdish villager would attempt to explain to the soldiers in Kurdish and thus the fine built up and up.
>
> A relative of my mother was set up by the soldiers and in order to pay the fine he sold his firewood and donkey. He received five Turkish liras for them but his fine was 12 lira so he was beaten up and put in a cell for two days. Three and a half months later when the tax collectors came to our village, they demanded the remaining seven lira outstanding on the fine. If he did not pay up, they would seize his house and belongings. My uncle managed to pay the fine by selling some of his sheep. Such incidents were part of our ordinary, normal daily life. If records of fines had been kept in Mardin city, it would be possible to find many such cases as this (Anter, 2007, pp. 34-35).

[92] Aydın et al. (2001) also refers to this story in their well-known book.

The participants shared this story to criticise the policies of the new Turkish State. Their main focus was the 'suffering' of the Kurdish people in the national context of Turkey. However, it should be reiterated that this enforcement also included Arab and Syriac speakers in the case of Mardin. Moreover, some Arab and Syriac villagers were Kurdish speakers and affected by this language barrier. Therefore, the local ethnic identities of Mardin were not a target of this practice. Rather, constituting a new national identity was prominent and speaking the national language was related to the policies of the new State.

During the later stages of the Republic, in particular when political polarisation between the people from the left and right wings made its mark on the agenda in the late 1970s, the intolerance towards the use of languages other than Turkish in the public sphere increased. This created tensions between the State and its local groups, but its main consequence was the appearance of a linguistic and ethnic Kurdish nationalism. The PKK, which is also known as the Kurdish movement, had been dominant in the articulation of this nationalism. The activities of the Kurdish nationalists from the left wing created social, political and economic problems for the State and these problems also affected other groups who share a social setting with the Kurds.

In contrast to the responses of the Mardinite Kurds to the language policies of the Turkish State, the *bajari* Arabs of Mardin was the first group who embraced the official language and the national identity in the city. This was probably because of their eagerness to protect their status in the social, economic and political life of Mardin. The national language helped them to strength their power over the other groups of Mardin. The Mardinite Arabs were followed by the Syriac residents who participated in this process of adopting the national language. Like the Arabs, they expressed their willingness to be part of the new nation with their words 'we are the citizens of Turkey'. At this point, it can be asserted there is a voluntary linguistic

assimilation in the case of both the Arab and Syriac communities who readily prefer to speak Turkish instead of their native languages. Thus, the Syriac Christians and Muslim Arabs in the capital of Mardin have engaged more with the national context than the Mardinite Kurds. Despite all Arabic communities speaking both Arabic and Turkish at the micro-level, today many Mardinite Arabs speak Turkish with their children as a strategy of integration into the dominant Turkish culture and official Turkish language, and particularly for the sake of their education[93].

The Ezidis of Mardin are Kurdish speakers. For the Mardinite Ezidis, it took time to adopt the official language since they stayed in the periphery of Mardin society and their caste system did not allow them to be educated. Today, young Ezidis who received official education speak Turkish fluently, while elderly Ezidis have difficulties expressing themselves with the national language even though they understand the conversation. One Ezidi participant of this study was a female sheikh who immigrated to Germany almost 30 years ago. Her story is a good example that shows the importance of language in the interaction of people from different ethnic and linguistic background. She stated she did not know Turkish when she left Mardin. Because of the language barrier, she could not make friends in Germany until she came across a Muslim Turkish neighbour from a different city of Turkey. She was very happy to see a person from her 'homeland'[94], even if she did not know a word in Turkish.

> I was visiting my Turkish neighbour almost every day. I did not know Turkish, but we understood each other because we were from the same country. One of my visits, my son wanted to drink water. I did not know the word water in Turkish. It was very difficult to express myself. I went home with my son, gave a glass of water to him and came back. My neighbour asked why you did go without saying anything. I tried to explain with my

[93] Fulya Dogruel (2010) investigates the understanding of boundary in the case of Antioch in her doctoral dissertation. She underlines that the Christian Arabs of Antioch also adopt the national language as a strategy in engaging with the national context.

[94] This example also shows how the conditions of a social context determine the interaction of ethno-religious groups.

> gesture. She said why you did not tell me. How could I? But I learnt speaking Turkish from her. She became a very close friend to me in Germany. We raised our children together. She is like a sister for me. We still visit each other. (Participant 122 (Ezidi, 56, female, Ezidi sheikh))

A tendency appeared in the narrations of the Kurdish participants who identified themselves as nationalist. They saw the language policy of the new State as oppressive toward the Kurds who are the majority group in south-east Turkey. Also, the approaches of the Kurdish Mardinites toward education language are different from the Mardinite Arabs and Syriacs. The participants from the last two groups expressed that they did not see any problem in having education in Turkish; however, some of them added that they want to learn their native language or teach their language to their children because language is important in carrying culture. In the statements of the Kurdish participants, the desire to receive education in their native language was very prominent; however, this seems to have remained as a 'discourse'. The new policy of the Government party, the AKP, regarding the local languages gives opportunities for the Kurds to open language courses[95]. The Kurds in Mardin opened a language centre, but only a few people registered to receive language education. According to some Arab participants, nobody attended those courses and they were closed after a short time. Even though the Kurdish participants preferred to be silent about why the course was closed, it seems the Mardinite Kurds would rather speak their native language rather than learn how to read and write in Kurdish.

Most Kurdish participants stated they speak their native language at home, so their children can protect it. Especially in the districts and villages of Mardin, many Kurdish children still learn only Kurdish until they attend official education in primary schools. This can also be because the uneducated Kurdish mothers speak only Kurdish or Arabic; therefore, the only

[95] This example is one of the expressions of language matters in Turkey that has turned into a political discourse rather than a cultural right.

way for children is to learn their native language or a local language at home. Some Turkish teachers expressed that they encountered difficulties with Kurdish children and taught them how to speak Turkish in their first year of primary school instead of following the curriculum.

The Syriacs of Midyat are the second group who wants to protect its native language and the Syriac children follow an unofficial education in churches and the monastery of Mor Gabriel. In the capital of Midyat, they attend a course that is given in the church by a *melfono*, teacher, who may not have an official education, but received education given by the Syriac community. These teachers have basic knowledge about the Syriac language and sacred texts. Because of the need to teach the Syriac children how to read prayers and hymns in Syriac, these *melfonos* are permitted to give lessons and the students follow an education system that is similar to *madrasa* education, which allows every student to complete a level without waiting for other students. It was observed that the students were not allowed to speak Turkish in the classroom and the garden of the church in Midyat. If they used a Turkish or Kurdish word, the *melfono* warned them to speak only Syriac. In the capital of Mardin, the *melfono* was more flexible in using Turkish vocabulary in the class. Sometimes he also spoke Turkish to explain some subjects to the Syriac and Armenian students whose ages were between the range of five and 13, and gave permission to the students to speak Turkish or Arabic in the classroom. The differences between language education in the capital of Mardin and Midyat also disclose the different attitudes toward language and ethnicity among the Syriac community.

Despite Turkish gradually taking the place of the local languages at public and private levels, every local language is used in the capital of Mardin depending on the situation. Still, there is a relation between language and power in the case of Mardin. The core elements of ethnicity, which are religion and marriage, survived better in Mardin from the late Ottoman times until

today than language, which is a surface pointer of ethnicity. As has already been discussed, Kemalist governmentality as a macro-power was a decisive factor in the language matter since it saw language (Turkish) as a unifying factor and used it for fostering a shared consciousness of society. This was different to the perception by the minorities as micro-powers, for whom religion (and not language) has until recently been seen as the most important factor of identification, a factor determining the continuity of specialisation in business life and of endogamy among the ethnic communities who live in Mardin. This has been fundamental for understanding the mechanisms of macro- and micro-powers in the context of Mardin. However, the Kurdish residents have followed a different path from the Arabs and Syriacs of Mardin and underlined the place of language in their ethnicity. 'When asked to specify what constitutes their identity, most Kurds would mention language and religion first' (Bruinessen, 1989, p. 1). In the case of Mardin, the rise of ethnic nationalism was supported by the prohibition of local languages along with cultural rights and the difficulties related to identity expression. Language is regarded as an important symbol of identity, and in Mardin examples are still seen of how identities are formed through language acquisition. Yet, the connection between speaking a local language and expressing an ethnic identity is ambiguous in the example of Mardin. For example, the Mardinite Kurds mostly tended to see all Kurdish speakers as Kurds. However, this was problematic because some Syriac and Arabic villagers speak Kurdish in their daily life and continue identifying themselves as Syriac and Arab.

Based on the narrations of the participants and the findings of participant observation, it can be asserted that putting local languages under pressure consequently meant that many Mardinites felt even their sub-identity was also under pressure. If anything has gradually lost its value in the capital of Mardin, it is the use of two local languages, Arabic and Syriac. Kurdish also is under threat of the national language; however, the percentage of people

speaking Kurdish is obviously higher than the other two. As a result, the local languages of Mardin have survived until today despite the difficulties created in the national context of Turkey.

6.2.2 Being Turk: The politics of national identity

Identity has long been one of the slipperiest concepts in the social scientist's lexicon. However, it can suggest ways in which people conceive of themselves and are characterised by others. An individual has multi-identities; however, they can choose one of these to identify themselves. Sometimes the situation they present can be the reason to show one of these identities.

A massive body of social and social psychological theory addresses the ways in which people conduct their everyday lives in terms of their identities. The multiple identities of a self[96] result from a negotiation process that arises in social interaction.

> Identities are seen to be generated in, and constructed through, a kind of internal (self-attributed) and external (other-ascribed) dialectic conditioned within specific social worlds. This holds for both personal and collective identities, which should be understood as always closely entangled with each other (Vertovec, 2001, p. 577).

However, national identity is dominant and tends to assimilate multiple ethnic and religious identities in a national context. In the case of Turkey, only one ethnic identity, Turk, was highlighted in constructing a national identity and was imagined as a canopy identity for all citizens from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. However, this ethnic nationalism of the State has been challenged with the criticism of the Kurdish nationalists. Today there is a change in understanding Turkishness and the State seems to be more open to embrace

[96] For the most prevailing theories of identity see Jenkins (2004).

differences in the society. For example, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has frequently used the expression 'the citizens of Turkey' in his speeches in recent years. This shift in the policy of the State related to national identity can be analysed in the example of the student oath that is repeated by primary students before class every day[97].

The phrase 'how happy is the one who says 'I am a Turk'' was used by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in his speech delivered for the 10th Anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, on 29 October 1933. Reşit Galip, the former Ministry of National Education, introduced this phrase to the student oath in 1972 and it became a guiding principle of the Kemalist education system of the Turkish Republic. Since then, the text of the oath has been declared by all primary students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds every morning before receiving education.

Cherishing Turkishness in the official education brings a dilemma for those who are not ethnically Turks[98]. Many Kurdish and Syriac participants of this study shared their childhood memories about how frustrated they felt by this oath on the first day of their formal education. Most of them generally spoke their native language at home or knew only the local languages before their education at primary school.

The oath begins with the sentence '*I am Turk, honest and hard-working*'.

> Am I Turk? I was shocked by saying this in the first day of my school [official education]. I could not understand why I have to say this (Participant 6 (Syriac Christian, 38, male, works for church)).

[97] This oath caused many discussions in Turkey, for it supports a racist discourse. It was removed from secondary schools in 2012, but remained in primary schools. See http://www.memurlarnet.biz/egitim/andimiz-ortaokullarda-kaldirildi-darisi-ilkokullara-h252.html

[98] This oath is problematic for Turkish children because of its discriminative tendencies.

> I did not know [speaking] Turkish before going to school. They said you have to say this oath. I am Turk, honest… But I am not a Turk. I am a Kurd. I was very disappointed in the primary school (Participant 38 (Muslim Kurd, 23, male, employee)).

> You know, you have to read the oath. I am Turk, honest and hard-working. Our children have to repeat this every day. This is ridiculous. Why do we have to say this? (Participant 83 (Muslim Kurd, 55, female, self-employed))

The involvement of Midyatite Syriacs in this discussion along with the Kurdish residents of Mardin is significant to see their recent close relations about ethnic identity, and political and cultural rights. These close relations become more observable when it is taken into consideration that the Arab participants did not criticise this oath.

Today, the language of education continues to be a problem in primary schools in the hinterland. Some students do not know how to speak Turkish and this makes it impossible to teach them how to read and write in the official language in the first grade. This problem was also raised by some Turkish teachers who are attached a village school because of their compulsory duty. When teaching the first year of primary school education, the teachers encountered difficulties in communicating with their students because of the language barrier.

> It took one year to only teach speaking Turkish. We have not come to other topics which should be taught in the first year (Participant 79 (Turk, 24, female, teacher))

> We could not follow curriculum because they [students] do not know Turkish. At first, we have to teach them the language [Turkish] (Participant 78 (Turk, 25, female, teacher)).

As parts of collective memory, mostly the Kurdish and Syriac participants from the rural areas of Mardin stressed the student oath and shared their frustration when they attended classes without speaking the official language. Along with the prohibition of the local languages, this

nationalistic practice indicates a common discourse that has emerged among the Mardinites and gives priority to express ethnic identity.

6.2.2.1 From religiosity to ethnicity

As discussed in Chapter 2, the religious communities of Mardin became the unofficial ethnic minorities of the Turkish Republic after 1923. The religious groups of Mardin found themselves in a position where was no chance to be officially recognised as a religious community in the new State. This was related to the policy of the Kemalist elites who did not pay much interest in different religious identities, but attempted to reduce ethnic and linguistic differences. However, the State adopted a controversial understanding toward religion because of its modernisation project. The attempts of the State to secularise the public sphere have affected all groups marked by a religious identity. In addition, it seems that expressing religious identity eventually lost its importance in the context of Mardin after the strong emphasis on ethnicity, both locally and nationally. The ethnic emphasis in constructing Turkish national identity let the local groups be politicised in the case of Mardin. For the Mardinite groups who are the subject of this research, the only way to be recognised or exist in the political arena in Turkey is to be identified as an ethnic group. Among the residents of Mardin, ethnic identity has eventually become prominent even though the existence of the Syriac Christians and Ezidis in local order has also sustained the revelation of ethnic identity.

6.2.2.1.1 Expressing religious identity in Mardin

Considering their religious identity, the Mardinite groups who are the subject of this research are divided as Sunni Muslim, Orthodox Christian and Ezidi. The majority of the participants expressed that they have not had a serious problem in terms of disclosing their religious identities in the city when they encounter other religious groups. However, some participants who lived in the hinterland stated that sometimes they did not express their religious identity

because they were afraid of being attacked by others, especially in the 1990s[99]. They added that Mardin has become a more secure space in every aspect in recent years.

The young adults from the Syriac and Ezidi communities articulated that they do not feel any threat in expressing their religious identity in Mardin.

> We have not faced any difficulty expressing our religious identity (Participant 125 (Syriac Christian, 25, male, self-employed)).

> My classmates, my friends, everybody here [Midyat] know I am a Syriac (Participants 16 (Syriac Christian, 26, male, self-employed)).

> I did not disclose my religious identity until my high school education. Nobody asked. I didn't say, too. I don't know how but my friends learnt that I am an Ezidi. They could not believe this at first. But this [being Ezidi] did not affect our friendship. They asked many questions to me to learn about my religious beliefs. I am still seeing my friends from high school (Participant 90 (Ezidi, 27, male, farmer)).

Based on the narrations of the Syriac and Ezidi participants, it can be said that they did not have any serious problems in terms of expressing their religious identity out of the context of Mardin. However, some Christian families gave a Muslim name to their sons when considering the compulsory military service.

> I did not say anything about my religious identity while I was doing my military service. I made a friend. A Muslim friend. We were reposing ourselves in bunk bed and we were talking in the dormitory before sleep when we did not have a night watch. One night my friend asked me if I saw the Syriacs. He heard somewhere that the Syriacs have tails like monkey. I laughed. I said I am a Syriac. Do you think I have a tail? He did not believe. I said, if you like I can show you my identification card. It is written Syriac on it [in the box of religion] (Participant 95 (Syriac Christian, 41, male, farmer)).

[99] The PKK and Hezbollah were very active in the hinterland of Mardin in the 1990s. Considering this point, it can be said that political matters negatively affected the relations of different religious groups.

> I did my military service in the city of [X]. There was another Christian man. He did not say he is a Christian. Later, he said to me he is a Christian, too. I did not hide I am a Christian. It was nearly Christmas time. They [the soldiers] said 'the commander wants to see you'. That Christian man was afraid about me. He said 'somebody must have reported you to the commander. They will beat you. They must know you are a Christian'. I went to see the commander. He said 'are you a Christian?' I said 'yes, I am an Orthodox Syriac'. He said 'it is almost Christmas. I'll send you to your hometown so you can celebrate it with your family'. I said 'my commander, I don't want to leave because it is winter. It is hard to reach my village' … When heard this, that Christian man felt sorry because he could see his family if he didn't hide he is a Christian (Participant 132 (Syriac Christian, 63, male, farmer)).

The religious identities of the Mardinites do not seem to be a problem in their social interaction. Almost every group in the capitals of Mardin and Midyat is aware of their neighbours' religious backgrounds. Depending on the situation, they identify themselves with either their religious or ethnic identities. However, the expression of ethnic identity among the residents of Mardin seems to have been more visible in their encounters.

6.2.2.1.2 Expressing ethnic identity in Mardin

In the national context of Turkey, ethnic identities have gradually gained importance in the interactions of diverse ethno-religious groups. Although there are several other reasons for this development, the most significant one is the emphasis on ethnic nationalism of the Turkish State, as previously articulated. This has obviously forced the local groups to search and highlight their ethnic backgrounds. Thus, the policies of the State have contributed to the emergence of secular Kurdish nationalism, which is also an impulsive factor in the case of Mardin. It is apparent in the interactions of the Mardinites that the Kurds have compelled their Arab and Syriac neighbours to express their ethnic identity in their interaction with them. This becomes more obvious when the relations of the diaspora Kurds and Syriacs are considered.

The mutual relation between local ethnic identities and Turkish nationalism was revealed in the conversations of the participants of this study. Asking their ethnic identity to the Mardinites was more sensitive than asking their religious identity. In contrast to many Kurdish participants, other participants of this study felt a need to express they were not ethnic nationalists after disclosing their ethnic identity.

For the Kurdish participants, ethnic identity was a prominent aspect of their social lives and they readily identified themselves as Kurd. The perception of ethnicity was higher among the Kurds than the other groups of Mardin and this was revealed in the narrations of both secular and religious Kurds. The majority of the Arab participants also articulated that 'all Kurds are (ethnic) nationalist' as clearly raised by Participant 130.

> I have observed that even my pious Kurdish friends have adopted a secular nationalism. They have become more politicised as compared with [their perception of nationalism] five years, 10 years ago (Participant 130 (Muslim Arab, 37, male, academic)).

In the narrations of the Kurdish participants, a statement frequently appeared: 'The Mardinite Arabs are also nationalists'. However, the expression of the Mardinite Arabs on their ethnic identity was different from the Kurds in some aspects. Firstly, the ethnic or linguistic nationalism of the Arabs became visible when they considered the local conditions of Mardin. Since they clearly did not want to share power and high status with the Mardinite Kurds, they drew an ethnic line in their interaction with the Kurds. When the Arab participants considered the national context of Turkey, they expressed that they are citizens of Turkey and underlined that their nationalism was not the same as the Kurds. Based on data collected from Mardin, it can be said that ethnicity is important for the Mardinite Arabs in the local context, but they do not want to be in a questionable situation in their relations with the State.

The Syriac community takes a significant place in the representation of Mardin as a religious group or an authentic cultural entity. The dominant discourse highlights the religious identity of the Syriacs giving their representation to the *Metropolitan* (Bishop) and the priest of the Kırklar Church. However, some young Syriacs stated they want to also be recognised as an ethnic group. From this perspective, they started questioning the status of religious people in their representation and the position of the church in their socio-political life. For the Syriac nationalists, the ambiguous situation of their community in Turkey was sometimes based on the decision of the former Syriacs who readily embraced the national identity. The former Syriac religious leaders expressed that they did not want to be seen as a minority group, but citizens of Turkey, since they saw themselves as an inseparable part of modern Turkey. This past decision was obviously challenged by some Syriac participants since it created political and social problems for their community. The Turkish Republic did not accept them as a separate ethnic group nor as the full citizens of Turkey. Many Syriac participants expressed that they were not happy with the ambiguous situation of their community in Turkey.

This recent change in stressing their ethnic identity seems to divide the community into two parties. Mostly the young Syriacs in Midyat expressed their ethnic identity and the need to seek their ethnic rights. They were clearly supported by the diaspora Syriacs who have associations in Sweden and Germany[100]. The Syriac participants in the capital of Mardin did not see speaking Turkish as a problem, while the Syriacs of Midyat were more sensitive in speaking their native language and identifying themselves as Syriacs instead of Christian.

[100] The Mardinite Syriacs are very active in Sweden and they have a television channel, Suryoyo TV. According to Miroğlu (2010), MED TV, which is a Kurdish broadcaster, gave opportunities to immigrant Syriacs to televise some programmes in their native language. The diaspora Syriacs learnt a lot from the Kurds about how they can represent themselves in the receiving countries. This example reveals the close relations between the Kurds and Syriacs in Europe. As stated by Participant 7 (Syriac Christian, 42, male, self-employed), Suryoyo TV is followed by the Syriacs of Mardin and it has a great influence on their local community because ‘it teaches language and give information about Syriac culture and ethnicity’.

What determines an ethnic identity is a controversial subject considering the diverse ethnic backgrounds of the Mardinite families. This point can be seen in the statement of Miroğlu (2010), who is known as a Kurdish intellectual. He articulates that he could highlight his Mhalmi identity if he wants to be proud of his ethnic identity: 'I feel myself Mhalmi as much as I feel myself Kurd. I can say that both these identities have the same significance in my existence' (p.27). The example of a well-known Kurdish family in the capital of Mardin also shows that expressing ethnic identity is related to social and political factors. The grandfather and his son became involved in some political and ethnic activities in the city and are known as Kurdish nationalists. Although they are recognised as a Kurdish family by other residents of Mardin, the family members have different ethnic backgrounds. The grandmother of this so-called Kurdish family is an Albanian who came to the city in the 60s to accompany her aunt and married a son of a *bajari* Kurdish family. Her daughter-in-law is from an urban Arab family and she has two grandchildren, a girl and a boy. The granddaughter, who is an undergraduate student, expressed that she believes she is a Kurd even if she is aware of the diverse ethnic backgrounds of her family members. Another interesting anecdote about this family was that the great grandmother believed she was an Arab until she died. She never accepted she was a Kurd according to the family members. She rejected talking Kurdish and insistently spoke Arabic in her daily life even though she understood conversations in Kurdish and questions that were asked to her in Kurdish.

> My mother-in-law denied her ethnic background and resisted to speak Arabic until she died. She thought being Arab was more important than being Kurd (Participant 75 (Muslim Albanian, 68, female, housewife)).

> My grandmother never accepted she was a Kurd. It was a shame. She was assimilated by the dominant Arabic culture (Participant 1 (Muslim Kurd, 48, male, self-employed)).

According to the family members, the resistance of the great grandmother in speaking Kurdish was because she denied her ethnic identity. According to the son of the Kurd and Albanian couple, his family is a *bajari* Kurdish family who obtained Arabic language and was assimilated into the dominant Arabic culture over time.

Based on the data collected from the field, it can be asserted that the ethnic identities of the Mardinites have gained more visibility than their religious identities in their interactions with other groups in the city. Moreover, the ethnic boundaries between the Mardinite groups have been strengthened by the impulses of Kurdish nationalism since their demands on ethnic identity and language have affected the other groups. This fact can clearly be seen among the Syriac Christians and the Mhallemis (Arabs) in Midyat who have been searching for their ethnic backgrounds and trying to construct a distinctive ethnic identity.

6.3 The recent effects of the diaspora Mardinites on the local context

This section deals with the fact of diaspora, which has had an impact on the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites in recent years. This fact in the case of Mardin can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the ethnic and linguistic nationalism of the Turkish State. Because of security problems in south-east Turkey, many residents of Mardin from different communities left the city for European countries. As a result of political changes and transnational developments, they have been able to return to their 'homelands' and re-settle in the city. Consequently, they have become transnational communities.

> The approaches of contemporary transnationalism have been affected by some developments such as sending countries' more positive views of their emigrants and the impact of migrant remittances on local economies and labour markets (Vertovec, 2001).

The locality of Mardin has been transformed by the migration of its diverse groups. Security problems, economic conditions and political matters were the common reasons for each group's leaving of the city for mostly European countries. However, religion was seen as a factor in the departure of both the Syriac Christians and the Ezidis of Mardin, since they thought they were under pressure because of their religious identities. The AK Party, which has been in power since 2002, has taken some steps to reduce the conflicts between the PKK and the Turkish military. These struggles of the State seem to have been supported by its attempts to be a member of the European Union, which is accepted as a positive development by the residents of Mardin. The Mardinites in diaspora have also appreciated the recent social and political changes in Turkey and more importantly trusted the politics of the government; as a result, some Syriac families have decided to return to the city.

Thus, the diaspora Mardinites have constructed transnational links between their host countries and the context of Mardin. This was also because of transnational developments, such as the options of cheap calls and the price-cut in international transportation. The fact of diaspora seems to be more related to the Syriac and Ezidi communities; however, some Arabs and Kurds have also become transnational communities through their dual lives. The immigrated Kurdish and Arabic Mardinites have protected their relations with their families in Mardin, while the diaspora Syriacs and Ezidis have been more able to re-establish networks with their homelands since 2000.

The transnational networks of the Mardinites have had some consequences. One is related to the position of religion in the Syriac and Ezidi communities. It seems the diaspora Syriacs have questioned the role of religion in their communities more than their community members in Mardin. Before they left the city for European countries, they expected that their religious identity would determine their relations with the host countries. However, they were

disappointed by the secular understanding of the 'Christian' countries that did not pay attention to their Christian background. The new national context forced them to stress their ethnic identity and seek for their minority rights. Through only this way, were they able to benefit from the cultural and ethnic rights given by their new countries.

> When the Syriacs immigrated to European countries, they thought that they [the host countries] will welcome them because they [the Syriacs] are also Christians. But they could not find what they expected (Participant 3 (Syriac Christian, 53, male, works for church)).

> They [Syriac Christians] thought Europe [European countries] will happily accept them as their own citizens because they are also Christians. They did not. The Syriacs were very disappointed in the beginning. Later, they thought they have to open associations and construct political relations like the Kurds. They learn how they can survive in today's conditions (Participant 19 (Muslim Arab, 54, male, self-employed)).

> I am living in Europe. The European people did that they left religion behind [ethnic identity]. Humanity became first [for them]. Human is human … We went there and said we are Christians. They said 'so? these [other immigrant groups] are humans and you are human'. We expected that they will welcome us, but they did not (Participant 23 (Syriac Christian, 38, male, self-employed)).

Participant 23 furthers his explanations with a story that happened in a European country:

> A man newly arrived in Europe. A few drunk men beat him at train station. He said I am a Christian, he said church … But they beat him much than before. He got a beating more. There is no such thing [being Christian is not important for European people]. For this reason … look they are in which level, we are in which level [in Turkey].

At this point, Participant 24 joined the conversation and said that religion should be left behind with ethnic identity when people encounter others from different backgrounds.

> Tolerance cannot be with religion … Religion is not the thing which brings these nations [Arabs, Kurds and Syriac] together who separated from each other (Participant 24 (Syriac Christian, 43, male, self-employed)).

The understandings of the diaspora Syriacs were clearly adopted by the young Syriacs of Mardin, as summarised by Participant 125.

> They [the diaspora Syriacs] came here and organise us [politically teach them how they can be an ethnic group]. We have learnt a lot from them (Participant 125 (Syriac Christian, 25, male, self-employed)).

Especially in Midyat, many Syriac participants expressed that 'church cannot be a solution for the problems of their communities any more'[101]. They have to take position in political life to demand ethnic and cultural rights.

The diaspora Mardinites have maintained 'intense linkages and exchanges between sending and receiving contexts including marriage alliances, religious activity, media and commodity consumption' (Vertovec, 2001, p. 575). The immigrant Ezidis and Syriacs of Mardin have financially supported their communities. This is obvious in terms of the Syriac community since the diaspora Syriacs have sent a great amount of remittance to their community members in Mardin for the restoration of churches and fostering religious education. For example, the church in the village of *İzbırak* was renewed with the financial support of the Syriacs in Europe even though the village does not have a Syriac population. They asked for a very old priest and a nun who received her religious education in the Mary Monastery in the villages of Anıtlı to look after the church and its lands. Their recent properties in the city are another aspect of transnational linkages. The Syriacs have built new houses in the city with

[101] Some young Syriacs do not attend the Sunday ceremony, which is a very important practice for the existence of the Syriac community in a Muslim context. One of these Syriacs, Participant 125, expressed that he has not visited the church for over a year because he does not see any benefit from attending religious ceremonies.

locally sourced yellow stones. The Syriac participants in Midyat were very proud of these highly expensive houses in the village of *el-Beğendi* (*Kafro*). According to the narrations of the participants, this village became empty because of the departure of its villagers. Answering the Return Project of the Turkish State, some villagers have returned from Sweden and built new houses and resettled in the village. However, their children, who were born in a European country, did not want to stay in the city because they could not adapt into the local culture and society. This point was also raised by some Kurdish and Arab participants who observed the difficulties these young Syriacs encountered. As stated by these participants, the efficiency of the Return Project is questionable since the young Syriacs who were not born in Mardin do not see the city as their 'homeland'.

However, the recent activities of the diaspora Mardinites in the city are one of the most significant current factors to understand the re-construction of power relations among the diverse groups of Mardin. The relations of the Syriacs in diaspora with the Kurdish nationalists seem to have raised the involvement of the Mardinite Syriacs in political arena with the local Kurds. In addition, the diaspora Syriacs have affected their community members on the understanding of the past incidents that happened between the diverse Mardinite groups. As a result, the past experiences of the Mardinites regarding to inter-group relations were used to underline 'us' and 'them'. In contrast to their previous approaches on policy, the majority of the Syriacs seem very eager to be involved in recent political debates. This point can be seen in the example of Erol Dora, who was a lawyer in İstanbul and elected as a member of parliament in the last election in June 2011. Although the Syriacs wanted to have a representative in the Government party, Justice and Development Party (AKP), they had to vote for the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) since Dora was on the candidate list of BDP. The process of selecting Dora as a candidate was a very controversial issue among the Syriac Christians in Mardin, but they acted together, considering the interests of their

community. Although almost all Mardinite Syriacs supported this unexpected candidate, the Syriac participants of this study underlined that they supported a Syriac candidate. This did not mean that they approved the political demands of the Kurdish nationalists, as stated by Participant 50.

> I talked to the Syriac candidate. I said we do not approve the activities of the Kurdish political movement. We do not want to have any problem with the State. You should not get involved any sensitive matter. You have to be very careful. You are representing us (Participant 50 (Syriac Christian, 43, male, goldsmith)).

According to some Arab and Kurdish participants, the local Syriacs inform their members in Europe as soon as they are confronted with a problem. The Syriacs in Europe use their political relations to solve the problems of their communities in Mardin[102]. This clearly shows the efficiency of the Syriacs in European countries who most probably have good relations with the Kurdish associations. The Mardinite Syriacs, Ezidis and Kurds have constructed close relations in the receiving countries. Apart from the local conflicts, they seem to have come together and demanded their ethnic and cultural rights in the host countries. It is predictable that the political relations of the Mardinites in diaspora who come from different ethno-religious background would eventually alter the power balance in the city. Therefore, their recent existence in the context of Mardin is very important since they are able to affect the understandings of their communities toward interaction between the diverse groups of Mardin.

The function of religion in the interaction of the Mardinite groups has been challenged by the existence of the diaspora Mardinites, since they have a strong criticism about the position of

[102] Since 2008, there is a disagreement between the Mor Gabriel Monastery and a few Muslim villages. Some Muslim villagers made a complaint about the lands that are used by the monastery and claimed these lands belong to them. See an article related to the case: http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-287667-mor-gabriel-monastery-and-the-new-akp.html. The diaspora Syriacs have taken the initiative in finding a solution for taking these lands back.

religion in their communities and the understanding of religious identity. To be recognised by the new countries, the diaspora Mardinites have articulated their ethnic identity much more than religious identity. Bringing new understandings of their host countries to the context of Mardin, they have engaged with the secularisation project of the Turkish Republic. As a result, Mardin society has been under the effects of secularist approaches more than before. In addition, the diaspora Syriacs and Ezidis have participated in disclosing the negative memories related to socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites and re-reading the past with today's perspective. These recent changes are obviously challenges for the locality of Mardin and refer to a social distance that the Mardinites can experience in the near future. To understand these recent changes, the following section analyses the re-construction of collective memory of the Mardinites.

6.4 The collective memory of the Mardinite groups

There has been growing interest in the subject of collective memory[103] in social sciences. Collective memory provides a new understanding for inter-group relations. The Mardinite groups share a collective memory because of their long-term coexistence in the context of Mardin. The narrations of the Mardinites included many stories that happened in the last years of the Ottoman State and the first decades of the Turkish Republic. This collective memory is full of details about the past relations of their communities with others and the experiences of their family members; however, it has a negative tendency toward the intercultural relations between the Mardinite groups.

The social traumas that Mardin society experienced took place in the memories of the residents. For example, some memories of the Mardinites related to the incidents that

[103] Maurice Halbwachs advanced the concept in his book *La mémoire collective* (1950) and developed a theory of collective memory.

happened during the relocation of the Armenians from the cities of Anatolia before World War I. These memories were generally recollected as '1915 incidents' by the participants. Both the Kurdish and Syriac participants of this research readily shared their thoughts about these past events since their communities were involved in them.

Even though the responsibility of ITC in the relocation of the Armenians was considered by the participants, they tended to criticise the role of their family members. In particular, the Kurdish participants narrated some stories where their fathers or grandfathers were the main actors of 'unpleasant realities', as they stated. The Armenian grandmothers in their family pedigree were given as the example of these traumatic events. For these participants, what their father or grandfather did to their Christian neighbours was unacceptable. They eagerly recounted the negative roles of their families in the replacement of the Armenians and the siege of *Aynwerd*. In the narrations of the Kurdish participants, the term *ferman* (the year of *ferman*, *ferman-ı filleh*) frequently appeared to refer to these incidents.

The concept *ferman-ı filleh*, the law about the relocation of the Armenians, was mostly used by the Muslim participants whose ages were in the range of 40-65. During the replacement of the Armenians in the east and south-east of Anatolia, the Syriac Christians of Midyat were also affected by the consequences of the *ferman*, even though this law did not include them. The Syriac participants also indicated the same problems that were raised by the Kurdish participants and affected their communities in the last year of the Ottoman State. Lots of stories took place in the statements of the Syriacs about the siege of *Aynwerd* in Midyat. The Syriac participants used the term *seyfo*, sword, instead of *ferman*. The term indicated the incidents that started in 1915 in Midyat and lasted three years.

Seyfo is obviously an inseparable part of the collective memory of the Syriacs. They repeatedly said 'in the time of *seyfo*' or 'before/after *seyfo*'. The Syriac participants used this term when they recollected the memories of their families about the siege of *Aywerd.*

> We did not forget the case of *Aynwerd.*

This sentence was repeated by a few Syriac participants[104] to express that they did not trust their Muslim neighbours because of this past experience and preferred to be careful about their relations with Muslims. When they were asked about the role of the Kurdish tribes in the incidents that happened at *Aynwerd*, they hesitated to criticise the Kurds who complicated the conflicts[105]. Miroğlu (2010), who identifies himself as both Kurd and Mhallemi Arab, discusses the roles of the Kurdish tribes in the case of *Aynwerd* and states that the Syriacs encountered these difficulties at that time because of the decisions of the governor of Diyarbakır, who wanted to confiscate their properties, especially the gold reserves that the Christian residents had. Miroğlu (2010) reveals the involvement of his family members in these incidents to indicate the role of the Kurdish tribes.

As discussed in Chapter 5, a spatial distinction between the urban and rural spaces of Mardin takes place in the collective memory of the Mardinites. Related to this distinction, the participants of this study shared some stories that also disclose the perceptions of the urban people toward the rural dwellers.

> Some people made fun of villagers. I remember … one day an Ezidi man came to Mardin [the capital city]. He did not know what kebab was. A man asked him if he wanted to eat kebab. He said 'yes, I have not eaten kebab before'. That man put *baklava* [sweet pastry

[104] The ages of these participants was between 30 and 45. They were politicised and adopted nationalistic approaches toward the relations between the Mardinite groups.
[105] Their hesitation becomes significant when the recent political relations between the Kurds and the Syriac are considered.

> with nuts] into bread and gave it to the Ezidi. That poor Ezidi also did not know *baklava.* He thought he was eating kebab, but he was eating *baklava* (Participant 45 (Muslim Arab, 53, male, self-employed)).

> We were ignorant at that time [when he was a teenager]. Down this street [the main street of Mardin's capital] … On the skirts of the hill, the villagers brought their products and sold them to the urban dwellers. When it became evening, they wrapped the top of their products with a cloth. We [he and his friends] hided and waited somewhere we could watch them, but they could not see us. When the villagers slept, we went their stands … we rolled their watermelons from the hillside. When they wake up, they became crazy. What happened here? They asked one another. It took hours to collect watermelons from the skirts of the hill. We were too young to be aware of what we were doing (Participant 108 (Muslim Arab, 65, male, retired civil servant)).

> The urban people liked to make fun of the people who came from villages. I witnessed a few times. The blacksmiths throw a brand in front of their shops and waited for a villager. When a villager passed though the *bazaar*, they asked from him to bring the brand. The poor villager screamed in pain as soon as he held it. The shop owners laughed at him (Participant 44 (Muslim Arab, 58, male, self-employed)).

As can be seen, the characteristics of the collective memory of the Mardinites were revealed in the stories that the participants recounted[106]. By repeating the past events, the residents reproduce their collective memory, which reflects both social cohesion and social conflict in Mardin society. During interviews, the participants not only highlighted some past events that created tension between the diverse groups of Mardin, but also they narrated the stories of their parents and grandparents to explain the close relations between the Mardinites.

However, the negative tendency of memory seems to have recently covered its positive side in the case of Mardin. This is because some Mardinites tried to understand the past experiences of their communities from today's perspectives or reflected them to understand their current

[106] The story about the Kurdish man who went to the capital of Mardin to sell wood is a good example of this point.

social relations with other groups. This has the potential to create tensions between the residents of the city. In addition, the reproduction of collective memory can result in social distance, which dissolves the close socio-cultural relations of the Mardinites established through religious ceremonies and rituals.

There is a connection between the fact of migration and collective memory. The participants of this study indicated these incidents as reasons for the departure of their community members to other countries. Besides, the memories of the Mardinites reject the dominant discourse's representation of their city, which hides certain events that created tensions between the diverse groups of Mardin. The collective memory of Mardinites also reflects the recent changes related to the situation of religion among the communities. For example, the Syriac participants mostly underlined the negative memories of their communities as if they occurred because of religious differences. Even though they were because of political, social or economic conflicts between the Mardinite groups, the Syriacs tended to see them as religious conflicts between the Muslims and non-Muslims of Mardin.

There is a recent tendency among the Mardinites to consider the religious sensibilities of their neighbours as examples of their subordination.

> The guests are asking if the animal was slaughtered by a Muslim.

Some young adult Syriac and Kurdish participants exemplified the subordination of non-Muslim groups in Mardin with the question about the butcher asked by the Muslim guests. The elderly Mardinites did not treat their guests' inquiry whether the meal is *halal* as an expression of their subordination. Rather, they stated the former residents of Mardin were

sensitive about their neighbours' religious rules and they considered the religious sensibilities of their Muslim neighbours.

There is a negative relation between the collective memory of the Mardinites and national matters. This point can be followed in the narrations of the Kurdish participants. They chose the negative memories of the Mardinites to illustrate their subordination in the national context of Turkey. Even though the memories of the participants were mostly related to the difficulties they encountered because of the policies of the Turkish State, they did not clearly share their responsibility in these cases. Therefore, they distorted the reality of the past incidents.

> We were hiding in daylight [from the soldiers and tax collectors] and moving from one place to another at nights. Thus, they could not find us (Participant 89 (Ezidi, 72, male, farmer)).

The childhood memories of the Ezidis,, as illustrated by the narration of Participant 89, were seen as evidence of the subordination of this religious group, especially by the Sunni Kurds. Participant 89 narrated his memories to articulate they had a 'tough life' in the context of Mardin. However, he did not provide any other reason for their escape. They hid from officers of the State because they did not want to be officially recorded. Otherwise, they had to pay tax and do compulsory military service. Nonetheless, these memories are important to realise the problems the Ezidis of Mardin faced in a Muslim-Christian context in Mardin and the social distance, which was created because of the religious identity of the Ezidis, between them and their neighbours.

In the revelation of their collective memory, there is another aspect related to social psychology. Sharing traumatic past events that deeply affected Mardin society, the Mardinites

seem to rehabilitate themselves[107]. From different communities, the Mardinites have suffered the same social and political problems. Their eagerness to talk about the grief of past events can be seen as social rehabilitation because they want to overcome the burden of unpleasant events in their past by revealing them.

The participants from every community narrated some stories that make explicit their thoughts about their city and neighbours. In Mardin, there is a kind of communication network between the residents. It is possible to hear exactly the same stories or sentences from people from different ethno-religious groups. It is obvious they share their ideas with their community members and neighbours, and they discuss the matters about which they have been concerned. As a result, they construct and re-construct their collective memories related to their interaction with others. Therefore, the oral history that passes from one generation to another should not be ignored in understanding the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinite groups.

6.5 Recent changes related to the role of religion in the social interaction of the Mardinites

As discussed in Chapter 2, the secularisation project of the Turkish State and its reforms to create a new nation have had a negative impact on expressing religious identity and representation in the whole country. The State saw the tie between religion and identity in the Ottoman period as a threat to its new secular country and treated religion in two contradictory ways. Firstly, it attempted to reduce the effects of religion on society and made some reforms, such as the prohibition of *madrasa* education. Secondly, the State expected the religious ties between the Muslim groups to be a constructive element in creating a new country. This

[107] Some participants of this study said 'God sent you to us' to me before they shared their thoughts about the socio-cultural relations of the Mardinites. This sentence can be seen as an expression of the need to overcome the burden of the past in Mardin. As well, it discloses the social conflict in the city that the dominant discourse denies.

process resulted in some Kurdish people questioning the role of religion in their socio-cultural life. The religious communities' approaches toward religion in Mardin seem to have been affected by the rise of ethnic demands in the Turkish context. As a result, the role religion plays in the interaction of the Mardinites has become more questionable for the Syriacs and the Kurds.

Even though religious ceremonies and rituals in the social interaction of the residents have continued, religious authorities could not protect their high status in Mardin society. The first group who became suspicious about the role religion plays in their community was the Mardinite Kurds. At this point, the PKK had a significant role, because it sees Islam as a barrier for the ethnic and political rights of the Kurdish people. The PKK questioned the roles of *aghas* and sheikhs in the Kurdish community and improved a discourse related to the religious background of the Kurds. According to this discourse, the Kurds were the adherents of Zoroastrianism at first and Ezidism later. These religious systems are believed to be more philosophical than Islam and, thus, can lead a secular understanding. Also, this claim helped the Kurdish nationalists to construct a relation with the Ezidis of Turkey and demand their political support. These assertions are significant to see that the Kurdish people still give importance to religion (Islam) and belong to some religious sects or follow a *tariqa* in the region. For this reason, the Kurdish secular nationalists have had to adopt a relatively positive approach toward religion in recent years.

This shift is also related to the recent productive activities of the Department of Religious Affairs. Since the Kurdish secular nationalists believe that religion diminishes the nationalistic feelings of the Kurdish people, they support *mel'es*, the local imams, in the area to promote Kurdish language and identity. Several events, called 'alternative Friday *salahs*' or

‘civil Friday *salahs*’, appeared in 2011[108]. The *jamaat* under the leadership of these imams performed the Friday *salah* in Kurdish outside the mosques. Later, it was disclosed that these ‘Friday protests’ were organised by activists of the PKK and the imams were not real *mel’es*. These events were important because the Kurdish majority is concerned about their religious beliefs in their social lives. The Kurdish nationalists in the left wing and the supporters of the PKK ignored this fact until they realised that ordinary Kurdish people do not want lose their religious affiliations. Thus, a dilemma appeared in their nationalistic activities. On one hand, they have tried to convince the Kurds that their religious background goes back to Zoroastrianism, expecting to diminish their ties with religion. On the other hand, they organised some ‘religious’ protests in Kurdish to show that the PKK has the potential to protect the rights of the pious Kurdish people and considers their religious expectations. Some Kurdish people joined these events, but this intervention was not as effective as the PKK expected. Performing *salah* in Kurdish did not collected the support of the pious Kurds because the majority of the Kurds did not seem to approve of these activities.

The Syriac community is known as a religious group. However, some young Syriacs seem to have been affected by the nationalistic activities of the Kurds in Mardin. In addition to the local effects, the diaspora Syriacs have fostered ethnic-based understandings among their community in Mardin. As a result of these developments, some Syriacs, especially those who live in Midyat, have adopted ethnic nationalism and started questioning the status of religion in their socio-cultural lives. Some Syriac participants expressed that religion should remain in the private sphere and it should not only be a common ground for the Syriac community.

[108] These activities still continue in Turkey. According to the Kurdish news agencies, these Friday *salahs* have been organised by ‘the Kurdish political movement’ and aim to criticise the policies of the Turkish State. See http://www.ajansafirat.com/news/kadin/sivil-cuma-namazy-zulme-karthy-durmak-bir-ibadettir.htm. The sermons and preaching of Friday worship are in Kurdish and seen a criticism to the language policy of the State. After expressing this point, A. Ersin Gur states ‘religion is a reality of society which we live in and it does not seem to be possible to reach our goals ignoring it and to establish a democratic social life. We have to face the reality of the country [Turkey] avoiding the conviction of ‘religion is the opium of the people’. See http://alternatifsiyaset.net/2013/02/24/ali-ersin-gur-sivil-veya-alternatif-cuma-namazlari/.

They also added that they cannot exist only trusting the church, though religion is very important for the Syriacs. Considering today's social and political conditions, they have to be active in the political arena. For this reason, the Syriacs in Mardin have established close relations with the Kurds at the local level and demanded the political support of their community members in Europe. Through their associations, they have become effective in the political life of Turkey.

In terms of the Ezidi community, religion is still the dominant aspect of their identity. However, they have also been influenced by secularist approaches and recent political matters[109]. The Ezidis in Europe have become more secular than the Ezidis in Turkey and Iraq. This can be seen in the example of Germany. The Ezidis in Germany were divided into two parties about their ethnic background and the position of religion in their communities (Yalkut, 2006). One party believes they are ethnically Kurds, and therefore they should demand their ethnic rights with the Sunni Kurds. This group has close connections with the Kurdish nationalists in Europe. The second party expresses the importance of religion for their community and do not want to be included in Kurdish political demands (Yalkut, 2006). However, these discussions have resulted in the visibility of the Ezidis in political arena in recent years.

Some Arab participants expressed that they are not pious, but religion is a significant aspect of their socio-cultural life. They were the only Mardinite group who did not question the status of religion in their lives and in their relations with other groups in Mardin. This may be

[109] Participant 90 stated the young Ezidis in Germany have abandoned following their religious rules and do not regard some significant religious boundaries. For example, they may marry a person who is not Ezidi. It was asked to the female Ezidi sheikh, who lives in Germany and was present in Mardin to find an Ezidi daughter-in-law, whether young Ezidis in Europe still consider their religious affiliations. She answered this question saying that religion is very important for the Ezidis, so they still consider their religious beliefs. At this point, Participant 90 became involved in the conversation and expressed that he observed the opposite among his friends and family members. The female sheikh did not let him continue and changed the subject.

because they have not bothered with the combination of Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism in the national context. The Turkish State has had a problematic relation with religious matters; however, it has affirmed Sunni Islam as a part of national identity because of its political demands. As Sunni Muslims, the local Arabs of Mardin have not seen their relations with the State as problematical and this seems to have prevented them from discussing the relations between ethnicity and religion. However, some Mhallami Arabs have started demanding their ethnic rights and seeking recognition as an ethnic group. This recent change in highlighting ethnic identity can lead Mardinite Arabs to articulate an ethnic nationalism instead of a local nationalism. Therefore, there is a threat for the role of religion in their lives. They can eventually minimise the status of religion in their lives as the Kurds and Syriacs of Mardin have done.

6.6 Overview of the chapter

The locality of Mardin has been transformed by national and transnational effects. Chapter 6 examined this transformation in the example of three themes: identity politics, diaspora and collective memory. The identity politics of the Turkish State have resulted in the rise of ethnic and linguistic nationalism among its local groups. In the case of Mardin, the Mardinite Kurds was the first group who highlighted their ethnic identity rather than their religious identity. Later, they were followed by the Syriac Christians, especially of Midyat. The Mhallemi Arabs in Midyat recently joined these groups in the articulation of ethnic identity. The emphasis on ethnicity and language has diminished the positive effects of religion in the socio-cultural relations of the Mardinites. In addition to the impact of the nation-building process of Turkey, the diaspora Mardinites, who have re-established their relations with the city and their community, have contributed to the rise of ethnic nationalism in the city. These recent networks between the Mardinites in European countries and in Mardin have also affected the re-construction of collective memory. Certain events that happened a decade before the

establishment of the Turkish Republic seem to have a potential related to the understanding of other and highlighted the division ‘us’ and ‘them’ between the Christian and Muslim groups of Mardin. Chapter 6 concluded that the identity politics of the Turkish State have let the Mardinite groups give importance to ethnicity and this importance has negatively affected the understandings of the Mardinites toward religion.

7 CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is a discourse that has come to dominate the representation of Mardin. This dominant discourse represents Mardin as a 'city of tolerance' and gives a misunderstanding about its culture and history. Although there were many discontinuities in its social context, the dominant discourse treats the locality of Mardin as a stable social setting and reifies its culture. This discourse has been adopted by the residents of Mardin because it has contributed to the revival of the economic life of the city. However, the adaptation of the Mardinites in the dominant representation of the city has not completely overlapped with the dominant discourse. The Mardinites have improved a demotic discourse that affirms the dominant discourse in relation to the advertisement of the city. However, the demotic discourse of the Mardinites includes some criticism toward the distortions in the presentation of the city to outsiders.

Mardin society had relatively protected its social, economic and political balance until the period of the Turkish Republic. Its self-sufficient social organisation under the rule of the Ottoman State seems to have provided a relatively peaceful co-existence of diverse ethnic and religious groups. After the establishment of the Republic, Mardin became the subject of external forces that transformed its local context. At first, the nation-building process of the Turkish Republic played a significant role in the transformation of its social and cultural life; for example, its policies led the majority of the Syriac Christians and Ezidis to leave Mardin for other countries. By the departure of the Syriacs, the population balance was changed between Muslim and Christian residents and this balance was an important element for intercultural engagement. The recent developments, including the Return Project of the State that calls for diaspora Syriacs to return to their 'homelands', aim to promote the revival of

diversity, which Mardin was able to protect a few decades ago. However, it does not seem to be possible to re-construct the past experience of living together in Mardin.

In addition to threats of the dominant discourse on the local context of Mardin, the ignorance of the tensions between the diverse components of the city can cause suspicion about the fact of engagement between the local structures and a counter reaction that denies seeing the positive effects of ongoing cultural interaction in the city. The dominant discourse mostly focuses on the pre-national Turkish character of the city under the rule of the Artukids and the Ottomans, which in turn can dangerously result in other claims on the space. Some residents of Mardin have already started searching for examples of peaceful co-existence in their past. For this reason, the current relations of the residents, in turn, can be affected by the distortion of their culture, leading them to demand a 'utopian city'. The nature of the advertisement of the city and the criticisms toward it give out important signs of disagreements about the meaning of the space, both at the institutional and the public level. This reflects the multiple faces of Mardin's locality, which are linked but challenging towards one another.

The transformation of Mardin society has had its multidimensional character with all the continuities and discontinuities within the culturalisation and identification processes in the national context of Turkey. However, the social setting of Mardin has reached a threshold; in other words, its social organisation is in a new period of transition. This is because the dynamic arena of local, national and global power relations, which is sometimes reconciling and sometimes conflicting, has the potential not only to maintain but also to deteriorate the social cohesion and current 'multicultural' experience in the city.

7.1 Summary of the argument of the thesis

The dominant discourse on the culture of Mardin has highlighted cultural and religious diversity in its local context. Adopting this discourse, many Mardinites have also expressed that they have a mutual respect that has been constructed by religious tolerance. In contrast to the emphasis on Mardin's religious diversity, there is an ignorance to analysing the role of religion in the socio-cultural interaction of the Mardinites. The acceptance of the other who follows a distinct religion has been constructive in the relations of Mardinites since Mardin has been a space that consists of different religious components. This religious diversity of Mardin's locality has been indicated in recent studies, but it has not been discussed in terms of its effects on inter-group relations.

By way of overview, it may be best to address each analysis chapter in sequence. Chapter 4 analysed the notion of engagement in the examples of spatial closeness and socio-cultural interaction. Both the narrations of participants and the findings of participant observations were used in underlying the positive effect of religion on the interaction of the Mardinites. This chapter seemed to support the dominant discourse on Mardin's culture. This was because this research aimed to show the double sided effects of religion in the case of Mardin. To analyse the negative side, chapter 5 discussed examples of cultural prejudices and reactions to inter-religious marriages. Thus, the chapter highlighted the significance of religion in protecting diverse entities in the case of Mardin. Also, chapter 5 argued that spatial disengagement to support religion is not as strong a boundary as social class to create social distance between the Mardinite groups. After evaluating the fact of engagement, Chapter 6 furthered analysis on the role of religion, considering the recent developments and changes in national policy, and the transnational connections of the Mardinites. This analysis chapter showed that the emphasis on ethnic and linguistic aspects of communities diminished the contribution of religion in maintaining intercultural interaction in Mardin.

In the beginning, the argument of this thesis was that religion has played a [positive] role in the intercultural engagement of diverse components in Mardin. To demonstrate its argument, this doctoral thesis has attempted to analyse the socio-cultural relation of the Mardinites. Although religion is not only social fact in constructing and maintaining social cohesion in Mardin society, it has functioned in two ways in the case of Mardin. First, it has had a positive role in combining diverse components. It constructs social relations between the ethno-religious groups, as analysed in Chapter 4. Second, religion functions as a distinguishing fact. It helps every religious community draw its boundaries and protect its existence in the local context of Mardin, as illustrated in Chapter 5. In two ways, religion becomes a significant factor of intercultural engagement. Its negative role guarantees the necessary distance between diverse entities. As a social fact, religion supports the boundaries of different communities and engages them with each other through some rituals or institutions, such as condolence visits and virtual kinships. Consequently, this doctoral dissertation has mainly focused on the contribution of religion to the intercultural engagement of diverse component in Mardin, bearing in mind the double function of religion. It has also considered the national and transnational factors that have had a negative impact on the role of religion in Mardin society.

What is observable in Mardin is that there is a sensitive balance among the networks of its diverse groups and this sensitive balance can be negatively affected by ethnic demands, as discussed in Chapter 6. Many young Mardinites seem to have acquired a negative approach toward the contribution of religion in their lives. This can eventually lead them to not consider the positive aspects of religious practices and ceremonies in the interaction of the diverse groups. Therefore, the role of religion in the intercultural engagement of diverse components in Mardin has been under the threat of ethnic nationalism.

7.2 The essentials of intercultural engagement in Mardin

Cultural engagement is seen as connections between different cultural components in Mardin society during this study. The notion of engagement refers to areas that are interlaced in social and cultural life and is used to indicate the relations of ethnic/cultural groups with others considering the links between local, national and international structures. The intercultural engagement in Mardin has been strengthened with the help of some significant social rules. These rules infer that Mardin society has an unwritten social contract in order to be in communication with others. As the basis of dialogue, the Mardinites expect respect from other religious groups about the sensibilities and boundaries of their communities. When a person from a different community crosses these boundaries or acts against their sensibilities, they see this action or attitude as betrayal from a 'neighbour'.

The dissertation indicated the culture of *tahammül* instead of the culture of tolerance in the introduction. After presenting the findings, this term can be more appreciated. As is seen, the context of Mardin is very complex, including many mechanisms and conflicts as well as promising examples of peacefully living together. However, differences create tensions between the parties. To overcome these tensions in interaction, the Mardinites seem to construct a social balance. This balance requires mutual responsibilities and understanding. Since Muslim and Christian communities accept this requirement, they become equal parties in the process of dialogue. Instead of tolerating or ignoring the other's religion, ritual and culture, they accept differences and tensions created by them. This culture is obviously related to the unwritten social contract of Mardin society and it can be accepted as an aspect of intercultural engagement. Still, this *tahammül* culture fails to include the Ezidi community. Besides Muslim's and Christian's understandings of the Ezidis, this may be because this community has not been eager to interact with other groups until recently.

The case of Mardin shows that spatial closeness is significant to be in communication with the other. It helps to reduce tensions created by the religious differences; therefore, it supports the functions of religion in Mardin society. However, Mardin has experienced a spatial disengagement between its urban and rural spaces, which does not seem to have distanced the different ethno-religious identities from one another. Rather, this spatial disengagement has collected the rural dwellers from different communities within a social category and separated them from the urban class of the capital. Therefore, both spatial closeness and distance can be seen the aspects of the intercultural engagement in Mardin since they have forced the residents of Mardin to gain knowledge about the other. Also, they do not prevent the Mardinite groups from continuing their socio-cultural relations with other groups through religious practices and ceremonies.

The locality of Mardin has provided a kind of recognition for ethnically and religiously diverse groups. However, this social setting was not desirable in regard to the social transformation of modern Turkey. For this reason, Mardin society was re-shaped by the social engineering of the Turkish Republic in its first decades. In addition, the emphasis on Turkishness, ethnicity, has created tensions between the Mardinite groups and brought the problem of ethnic recognition to the new country. This led the Kurds to demand ethnic and linguistic nationalism. As a result, ethnic identity has eventually become prominent for the Kurdish people who believe the Turkish State especially targeted them. The political activities of the Kurdish nationalists triggered local ethnic nationalism among the people, as is seen in the case of Mardin. Following the paths of the Kurds, the Syriac Christians of Mardin have demanded to be recognised as a separate ethnic group and their discourses have become more visible in recent years. After the Syriac Christians, the Mhallemi Arabs of Midyat have become involved in this process and demanded to be accepted as an ethnic group. Considering

these recent changes, it can be said that stressing ethnic identity and ethnicity can gradually result in diminishing the effects or contributions of religion to intercultural relations.

Religion is not the only factor in the integration and disintegration of diverse groups in Mardin. However, it has been a significant essential for the maintenance of intercultural engagement in the city. Religious rules or rituals seem to have become cultural practices in the context of Mardin, which has unique characteristic features in terms of its multi-layered culture. The traces of diverse religious systems – Islam, Christianity, Judaism, the Shamsie and the Ezidi religions – can be observed in both its material and spiritual cultural aspects. In addition, Mardin society has not encountered social distance created by religious fanaticism among its diverse groups, which has a potential to undermine common cultural heritage.

Consequently, religion has a double function in the case of Mardin considering the relations between religion, culture and identity. It distinguishes the Mardinite groups who live in the same cultural text; however, this does not prevent it from combining them through religious rituals and practices. Although Mardin society has benefitted from the uniting aspect of religion, the depreciatory attitude toward religion can be a threat for the dissolve of its engaged parts because the emphasis on ethnicity has the potential to dissolve the social relations of the Mardinites. Moreover, some social and cultural practices that are supported by religious understandings can be abandoned because the residents do not see any reason for continuing these practices. This can lead the intercultural engagement of cultural components that are *sui generis* in the multi-layered context of Mardin to dissolve. By the effects of recent political discourses, Mardin society can be turned into an imagined cultural paradise and this can lead the Mardinites to be more suspicious about living together with the other.

Under the threat of globalisation, a locality like Mardin faces difficulties in protecting its unique aspects. Mardin is no longer a closed society. Rather, it has very strong transnational linkages because of the Mardinites who live in European countries. This means Mardin society is in rapid transition more than ever before. The diaspora Mardinites foster ethnic demands and identity, and this means intercultural engagement in Mardin is vulnerable to distortion because there is a negative correlation between ethnicity and religion in the case of Mardin. The more the Mardinites demand ethnic and language rights, the less they consider the significance of religion in their lives.

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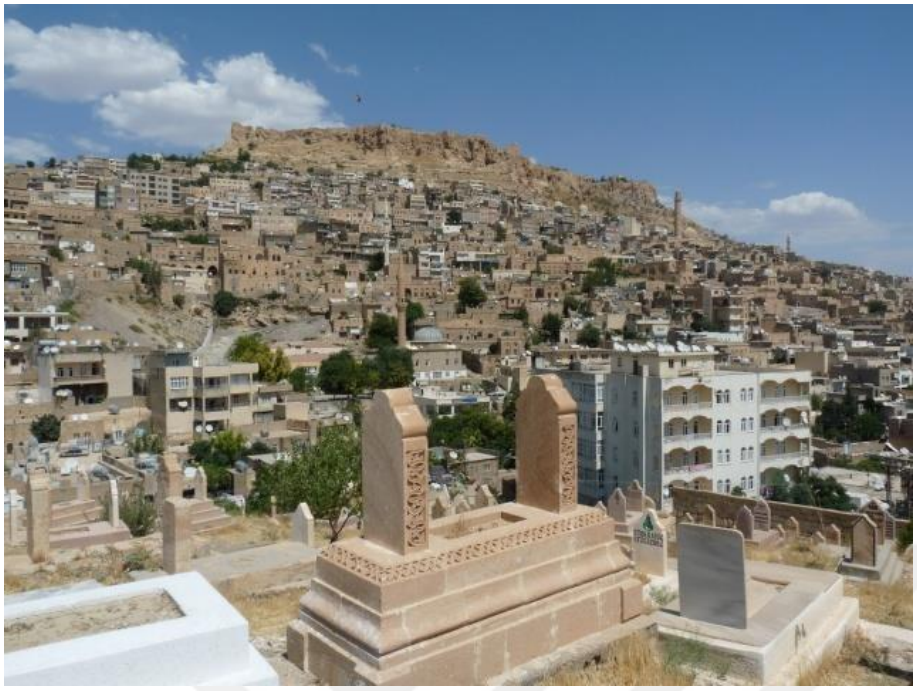
APPENDIX A: PHOTOS OF MARDIN AND MIDYAT



Mardin city centre, the old settlement

The old settlement of Mardin taken by Albert Gabriel

The Mesopotamia Plain, the capital of Mardin

The remnants of the castle

Abbaras

1st Street and the market place of Mardin's capital

The end of 1st Street

Bazaar, the capital of Mardin

The marketplace of Midyat's centre

Bazaar, Midyat

Silversmiths, Midyat

Marketplace, Estel

The Kırklar Church in the capital of Mardin

A Syriac language course, the capital of Mardin

A textbook in Syriac

The Mor Gabriel Monastery

The Mor Gabriel Monastery

The Mor Gabriel Monastery

The Mor Gabriel Monastery

The festival organised by the Mhallemi associations in Estel in 2011

The centre of Midyat

A workplace in the centre of Midyat

An Ezidi couple

An Ezidi man, having local tattoos

A female tattoo in the shape of millipedes

The new houses of the diaspora Syriacs in the village of el-Begendi (Kafro)

The new houses of the diaspora Syriacs in the village of el-Begendi (Kafro)

The village of el-Begendi (Kafro)

On the wall of an Armenian Catholic family's house, the capital of Mardin

A Syriac couple, the village of Anitli

The graduation ceremony of the Syriac language course

Saliba Ozmen, the *Metropolitan* (Bishop) of Mardin

How happy who says I am a Turk written on the hill