Memory, Modernity and Nostalgia:
The Narratives of Muslim and Christian *Mersinli* Women

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Abstract

"Memory, Modernity and Nostalgia: The Narratives of Muslim and Christian Mersinli Women"

Esen Ergin, Master's Candidate at the Atatürk Institute
for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University, 2019

Associate Professor Berna Yazıcı, Thesis Advisor

This study aims to explore how a group of Muslim and Christian women of Mersin remember and narrate their life experiences in relation to modernity, the Republican reforms and the intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians in Mersin. Through the oral history method, the narratives of these 'ordinary' middle class Mersinli women are scrutinized on: 1) how these women remember and narrate the Republican reforms and modernity; 2) how they perceive their hometown Mersin and construct a nostalgic understanding of modernity in the face of recent demographic changes and 3) how they perceive the intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians of Mersin. Interviewees' strong affiliation with the local identity of being Mersinli is evaluated in the framework of the nostalgia they cultivate for the past. The narratives regarding the intercommunal relations and marriages between the Muslim and Christian communities in Mersin, are examined in order to reveal the experience of living in one of the very few cosmopolitan and multi-religious cities of Turkey. A particular focus on the narratives of the Christian women aims to unravel their experiences about being a member of an ethno-religious minority in Mersin, and overall in Turkey.

96,000 words

Özet

"Hafıza, Modernlik ve Nostalji: Mersinli Müslüman ve Hristiyan Kadınların Anlatıları"

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Doçent Berna Yazıcı, Tez Danışmanı

Bu çalışma, Mersinli bir grup Müslüman ve Hristiyan kadının anlatılarını, modernlik, Cumhuriyet reformları ve Mersin'deki Müslüman ve Hristiyan toplulukları arasındaki ilişkiler üzerinden incelemektedir. Sözlü tarih yöntemi aracılığıyla, bu 'sıradan' ve orta sınıf Mersinli kadınların anlatıları; 1)modernlik ve Cumhuriyet reformlarını nasıl hatırladıkları ve algıladıkları, 2) memleketleri Mersin ve Mersin'in son yıllarda geçirdiği sosyal ve demografik değişimler üzerinden kurguladıkları nostaljik bağlam ve 3)Mersin'deki Müslüman ve Hristiyan toplulukları arasındaki ilişkileri nasıl algıladıkları yönünden ele alınacaktır. Bu çalışma, modernlik ve Cumhuriyet reformlarının görüşmecilerin Mersin'de kadın olma deneyimi üzerindeki etkisini inceleyecektir. Görüşmeci kadınların yerel kimliklerine ve Mersinli olmaya atfettikleri önem, geçmişe ve geçmişteki Mersin'e duydukları yoğun nostalji üzerinden araştırılacaktır. Mersin'deki Müslümanlar ve Hristiyanlar arasında gerçekleşen karma evlilikler, görüşmecilerin anlatıları üzerinden incelenecektir. Mersin'deki Müslüman ve Hristiyan toplulukları arasındaki ilişkiler, günümüzde Türkiye'de hala kozmopolit ve çok-dinli bir nüfus barındıran çok az sayıda şehirden biri olan Mersin'de yaşama deneyimini anlamak açısından araştırılacaktır. Hristiyan kadın görüşmecilerin anlatıları üzerine ayrıca eğilerek onların Mersin'de ve genel olarak Türkiye'de 'azınlık' olma deneyimi ile ilgili algıları araştırılacaktır.

96.000 kelime

To the memory of my dear grandmother Fatma Nurcan
and
my lovely mother Aygün

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I want to thank my former advisor Prof. Duygu Köksal who supported and guided me through this process for her encouragement and insightful feedback. Her mentoring has been very influential in figuring out how to conduct this study. I also would like to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude for my advisor Associate Prof. Berna Yazıcı for accepting to be my advisor only a couple of months before the deadline. Without her assistance, guidance and critical insights, I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Her constructive feedback helped me a great deal, especially in the last couple of weeks before the deadline. I also thank Prof. Asım Karaömerlioğlu and Assistant Prof. Dr. Gözde Orhan for agreeing to be members of my committee and their valuable feedback. Also, I would like to thank Prof. Arzu Öztürkmen for her support and assistance.

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Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my dear family for their endless support and love. I want to offer my special thanks to my mother for always believing in me and being there for me. I also would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to my father whose memory is still well and strong in the minds of his acquaintances in Mersin. I want to dedicate this study to my lovely mother and to the memory of my dear grandmother who would have been one of the interviewees of this study if she were here today. This study

made me realize and appreciate once again her resilience and strength for going back and forth from Tarsus to the teacher training school in Adana everyday and graduating to be a teacher in spite of the hardships she grew up with. Her life story is always an inspiration and a solid enough reason to feel gratitude for the Republican reforms and the Republican modernity.

1

Introduction

The early Republican years have borne witness to several changes and transformations in almost every aspect of public life of which the legal reforms for women were only one among many. The lives of women throughout the country have transformed immensely and the enfranchisement of women was only one of the striking and newly introduced changes in political life. Thanks to this newly found enfranchisement in 1930 in local elections and then in 1934 in national elections, and the opportunities to receive a secular education, and participate in professional life in order to play active parts in public life, a serious number of women who came of age in the early decades of the new Turkish Republic experienced an extensive transformation in their lives which perpetuated its after-effects on the successive generation as well. There is a considerable amount of research conducted on the first generation of the women of Republic who have also been known as 'Cumhuriyet Kızları'1 (daughters of the Republic), and the political rights they were granted with in the wake of the new Turkish Republic; but how the successive generation has interiorized the change their mothers had experienced is lacking for most part. Furthermore, most of the research was focused on the lives of the women

1 Elif Ekin Akşit, "Yürümek," in *Hatırladıklarıyla ve Unuttuklarıyla Türkiye'nin Toplumsal Hafızası*, ed. Esra Özyürek, (İstanbul, İletişim, 2006), 301-324. Arat, Zehra, "Educating the Daughters of the Republic," in *Deconstructing Images of Turkish Women*, ed. Arat, Zehra, (eds.) New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, 157-180.

living in the big urban centers. Thus, little is known about the influences of the newly established regime on the lives of the second generation of Republican women living in the peripheral regions of the country. Furthermore, Turkey's non-Muslim women remains as a significantly understudied group.

My interest in the lives of the second generation of women of the Republic and the question of whether the experiences of the Christian women were in any way similar to those of the Muslim women's, impelled me to conduct this thesis which focuses on the narratives of the Muslim and Christian women living in Mersin, a coastal city in the southern region of Turkey with a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious population.

For the study, I conducted oral history interviews with seven Muslim and six Christian women of Mersin, a Mediterranean city on the southern coast of Turkey, whose ages vary between 70 and 84. They come from the bourgeois middle and upper middle class and belong to the second generation of Republican women. They have become members of the professional class with Western and secular aspirations through their own merits. They were all born, raised and have lived a considerable amount of their lives and still do live in Mersin.

Thanks to its history as an Eastern Mediterranean port city which prospered in the late nineteenth century, Mersin has distinct cosmopolitan characteristics, rendering this study a more intriguing background. Mersin evolved to be a cosmopolitan port city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; yet, has gradually lost its cosmopolitanism after the foundation of the Republic, in spite of still encapsulating a Christian community and representing a multi-ethnic and multi-religious harmony.

Drawing upon oral history interviews and focusing on the lives of a group of women living in a specific place (Mersin), this thesis will elaborate the effects of the Republican reforms on the lives of the interviewed women who were all born, raised and have lived most of their lives in the same city.

Through the oral history interviews I conducted, I aspire to explore and analyze 1) how Mersinli women remember and narrate Republican reforms and modernity; 2) how they perceive their hometown Mersin and construct a nostalgic understanding of modernity in the face of recent demographic changes and 3) how they perceive the intercommunal relations between the

Muslims and Christians of Mersin. In other words, one objective of the study is to reach a comprehension on the perception of the women about the impact of modernity and the Republican reforms on their lives. Their narrations and interpretations about their experiences are going to shed light on how these women relate to and perceive their life stories and their relationship with their hometown. These narratives will also reveal the perceptions of the Muslim and Christian women have about each other and the intercommunal relations between the two ethno-religious communities of Mersin.

Given the topical interests outlined above, one of the two main questions this study is going to target is the perceptions of modernity and hometown Mersin in the narratives of the interviewed women. Thus, the topic of how modernity is perceived in Mersinli women's narratives will constitute the first main question of the study. For this purpose I will first focus on women's perceptions about the Republican reforms and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. Along with the life stories of the interviewees, the narratives about the Republican modernity is going to constitute the first layer of the analysis. For this analysis, the narratives of the Muslim and Christian interviewees will be discussed separately under different sections. This distinction between the narratives of the Christian and Muslim interviewees is necessary because in spite of convergences between the narratives at certain points, there are also differences which should be addressed.

The second sub-question the study is going to address in relation to the topic of modernity is how these women have perceived the recent social and demographic change in Mersin and how it has influenced their narratives and nostalgic feelings about the old days of Mersin. The present demographics of Mersin is shaped by migration and immigration as it had been in the turn of the twentieth century. While Turkey's population exhibited a growth of 4.2 times between 1935 and 2000, the population of Mersin in the same period displayed a growth of 20 times.[2] The Kurdish migration wave that Mersin has received since the early 1990s and the most recent immigration wave which

2 Tolga Ünlü, "Mersin'in Mekansal Biçimlenme Süreci ve Planlama Deneyimleri", *Gazi Üniversitesi Mühendislik Mimarlık Fakültesi Dergisi*, cilt 22, no: 3, (2007): 434.

began in 2011 after the civil war in Syria has reverberated through the demographical, cultural and socio-economic context of the city. The flux of migrants and immigrants is considered to be one of the main reasons of the decay and deterioration in the socio-culture structure of Mersin in the narratives of these women. So, studying their perceptions about this social and demographic change is necessary in that regard. Due to the heavy migration wave which has been going on for the last couple of decades, there is an increasing number of Kurdish population in the city. The Syrian immigrants who have been arriving in the city have generated another serious demographic change. Today, Mersin harbors a heterogeneous population consisting of several ethnic groups of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Romans, and *yörük*s, and religious groups of Sunnis, Alawites and Christians, all of whom have different political connotations that was once again displayed in the results of the latest general elections in 2018 in which all political parties received close voting rates to each other; Justice and Development Party (AKP) 28.64%, Republican Public Party (CHP) 26.76%, People's Democratic Party (HDP) 16.94%, Good Party (İyi Parti) 13.56% and Nationalist Action Party (MHP) 12.76%.[3] Every political party has a following base in Mersin which demonstrates the heterogeneity of its population.

The second main question the thesis will address is the perceptions of intercommunal relations between the Muslim and Christian ethno-religious communities in Mersin. The approximate population of the Christians in Mersin is assumed to be around 2,000[4] whereas the total population of the city was officially declared as 1.814,468 in 2018.[5] As it is going to be predicated in the upcoming chapters, the real number is presumed to have surpassed 2 million, though. Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century when the city was newly founded, the approximate half of the population used to be comprised

3 "Türkiye Geneli 2018 Seçim Sonuçları - Mersin 2018 Seçim Sonuçları," CNN TÜRK. Accessed June 6, 2019. https://www.cnnturk.com/secim-2018/cumhurbaskanligi-secimi/mersin

4 Personal interview with the priest and leader of the Orthodox Church in Mersin, July 4, 2017.

5 TÜİK http://www.tuik.gov.tr/HbGetir.do?id=30709&tb_id=1 Accessed 5 February, 2019. "Türkiye'nin Nüfusu Açıklandı (2018 TÜİK Verileri)," NTV, last modified 01.02.2019, accessed 19 February, 2019. https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/son-dakika-turkiyenin-nufusu-aciklandi-2018-tuik-verileri,QzFOktjusUex4xpyjjDRaw

of non-Muslims. Therefore, the intercommunal relations between the two ethno-religious communities have engendered a significant part of the urban culture of Mersin. The perceptions of the interviewees pertaining to intercommunal marriages, namely the practice of exogamy between the two communities, is going to constitute the first sub-question at this point. The second one will be focusing on the perceptions regarding the intercommunal relations between the Muslim and Christian communities in Mersin, with a particular focus on the narratives of the Christian interviewees to unravel their experiences about being a member of an ethno-religious minority in Mersin, and overall in Turkey.

Studying history on a micro level allows us to direct more attention on local events that influence people's lives and experiences. The house that a person grows up in, the school a person goes to, the streets a person wanders on and the relations a person has with other people all have impacts on how that particular person experiences his/her life which establishes a direct connection with local history. The thirteen women interviewed for this study have lived most of their lives, if not all, in Mersin; therefore, the extent of influence that Mersin has had on their lives is self-evident. The recent local history of Mersin inevitably has shaped their lives and since they still live in Mersin today, it keeps doing so. The solid identification they have established with locality, through which concepts of religion and ethnicity are transcended, constitutes what creates their sense of belonging with Mersin. However, it should be noted that these are 'ordinary' women; meaning that while they have participated in public life, they have not been famous or well-known in a national or global sense. Their life narratives are surely different than that of, let's say, Müfide İlhan, who was the first provincial female mayor of Turkey and Mersin between the years 1950 and 1951. A woman who had become the first provincial female mayor in a country has unquestionable influences on history on a macro level. Nevertheless, since we have long known that 'personal is political', studying the narratives of the women interviewed for this study is definitely not less political than studying the narratives of political figures and is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to micro history.

§ 1.1 The Research and Personal Involvement

For this study, I conducted oral history interviews with thirteen women who currently live in Mersin. Six of the women are Christians and seven of them are Muslims. Among the Christians, two women are Orthodox Christians whereas the other four are Catholics. These women were all born, raised and still live in Mersin. The age range of the interviewed women vary between 70 and 84. Accordingly, the range of their birthdates vary between 1934 and 1947. They have all spent their childhood and adolescence in Mersin. Some have always lived in Mersin. Some left for education and came back after graduation whereas some went on living in other cities due to work and marriage. However, they all returned for good at some point in their adult lives and have lived a better part of their lives in Mersin. They still live there today. I contacted the interviewees through snowball sampling. All the interviews were conducted in Mersin in a time frame between July 2017 and February 2018. The quotes of the interviewees are categorized either with the letter M, to indicate the ones who are Muslims, or as Orthodox and Catholic Christian to portray the denomination to which the Christian interviewees belong. Their ages are written inside the brackets as (Muslim, 74) or (Orthodox Christian, 72).

The main reason I wanted to study a subject regarding the women from Mersin is I am myself from Mersin, too. Even though my father's family had no connections with Mersin, my maternal grandmother and her family were from Tarsus. My great-grandmother lived in Tarsus her entire life and my grandmother lived there until she got married at 23 years old. Afterwards, she regularly visited Tarsus with her children. Years later, after my parents got married, as a coincidence they decided to move to Mersin in 1989 due to economic reasons. I grew up there which is why I consider myself to be from Mersin even though I was born in Adana. Accordingly, I was also aware that most of the people currently living in Mersin are not originally from there, just like me and my family. Most of the residents of Mersin today moved there from other places either for work, for education or for other reasons, just like my family did. Whenever my maternal grandmother and the locals of Mersin who had been living in the city for decades mentioned how the city used to be, it was difficult to wrap my head around because the current Mersin is much more

different than the one they talked about. The fact that the sea shore of the city was filled with concrete for land reclamation to build roads and buildings have changed the outlook of the city to a great extent. It is hard to imagine that the old locals used to go to the beaches at the city center for swimming because those beaches they talked about are turned into roads today. In spite of the long coastline, one has to go tens of kilometers away from the city center in order to swim in the sea.

My grandmother especially had great stories about how the old Mersin and Tarsus used to be. For instance, she used to tell that the neighborhood we were living in did not exist when she was a young girl and Mersin used to be a much smaller city. She talked about the beaches and the citrus gardens right in the middle of the city center. She was a graduate of the Adana Teacher Training School; therefore, she had a lot of things to tell about Adana, too. But the main theme of her narratives centered on Mersin since she couldn't help but compare the present of the city in which her daughter and grandchildren lived with the past she herself knew as a child, a teenager and a young woman. She was born in 1937 in Tarsus and was in the same age range with the interviewees of this study. I am sure that if she were alive today, she would have told me a lot of anecdotes about the subject of this thesis.

Another reason I chose this topic is that it was always weird to me that there weren't much academic research done on the Christian population in Mersin whereas I personally knew and was acquainted with several of them. Most people in Turkey are not aware of the presence of the Christian community in Mersin. I met people from Adana who did not know about the Christian population in Mersin up until then. I had a friend from Adana who came to Mersin for a day to give her condolences and visit the family home of another friend whose father recently passed away. That friend and his family were Christians and I have known them since childhood. When I took my friend from Adana to their house, there were a lot of people inside, including the elderly. They spoke in different languages all at once. Arabic, French, Greek and Turkish were spoken altogether and they switched from one language to another in the middle of their sentences and seemed to have no difficulty with understanding each other. Hearing this for the first time, my friend from

Adana was astonished and thought they were foreigners whereas having witnessed it several times since my childhood, I was quite used to it. I told her that they were not foreigners but locals just like us. I remember her asking me "Why are they speaking like this?" She did not know that the mother tongue of most of the elderly of the Christians in Mersin was Arabic. She did not know that most of them spoke French fluently because they studied at the French schools in Syria and Lebanon. She did not know that some of them had Greek origins as Orthodoxies and were able to speak Greek. When I tried to explain, she again asked "But why do they switch from one language to another? Is one language not enough?" For her, who has never heard of such a thing, it seemed hard to comprehend these people spoke more than one language in their houses and amongst themselves. The astonishment of my friend was not peculiar to her; most of the Turkish citizens do not have the slightest idea about the Christian community in Mersin.

When I decided that I wanted to study on a subject regarding women and Mersin at the same time, I thought of the locals of Mersin whose population is gradually declining. Then, the Christian women of Mersin, who are often referred as "madams" in the vernacular of the city, and whose population is declining even at a faster pace, crossed my mind. I got really excited at the prospect of a thesis subject which would bring these altogether. I was sure that through the acquaintances of my family and myself, I would be able to reach women who would be willing to sit for an oral history interview with me. It turned out that it was not as easy as I hoped it would be. People were very willing to help but when it came to interviewing, they were quite hesitant to talk about their own lives. They were much more eager to talk about the Mersin of their childhood and more than ready to share their opinions about the social and demographic change in Mersin. But when it came to talking about their own life experiences and perceptions, they were considerably reluctant, insisting that their lives did not have much to be talked about. It was even more difficult to reach and convince the Christian interviewees to state their opinions and perceptions about the intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians. Understandably, they were determined that there has never been any kind of disagreement between the two communities in Mersin and they are always approached with tolerance and respect.

§ 1.2 Theoretical Contribution

One of the most significant pillars of the Turkish modernization process and the Republican reforms was the instigation of the emancipation of women and their participation in public life. Some of the legal reforms pledged to make this happen were the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, the enfranchisement of women in 1930 and 1934 and the abolition of polygamy. Along with the socially introduced reforms, such as the encouragement of the education of girls, the Republican reforms overall generated remarkable changes in Turkish women's lives. These all have been macro changes which were introduced on a national level. In spite of the presence of the extensive literature on legal and political rights that women achieved after the Republic, qualitative micro studies focusing on the transformation that women's personal and daily lives went through also remain inadequate.

The lives of ordinary women of the middle class is a rarely studied subject in the literature. The women who do not live in the metropolises but in the peripheral regions of the country are studied much less. Studying the extent of the change their lives had gone through after the Republic via their own accounts and narratives would be innovative for the literature. Furthermore, Turkey's non-Muslim women is another understudied group. The question whether the changes experienced by the Muslim women after the foundation of the Republic reached the same level of impact for the Christian women, who were part of a minority group of which the population has been subsequently decreasing in Turkey, particularly after the Republic, needs to be pursued.

In the Turkish academia, studying non-Muslim citizens of Turkey corresponds to studying the non-Muslim minorities in İstanbul and İzmir[6] as these

6 İlay Romain, Örs, ed., *İstanbullu Rumlar ve 1964 Sürgünleri: Türk Toplumunun Homojenleşmesinde Bir Dönüm Noktası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019). İlay Romain Örs, "Beyond the Greek and Turkish Dichotomy: The Rum Polites of Istanbul and Athens," *South European Society and Politics*, 11:1, (2006), 79-94. İlay Romain Örs, "Capital of Memory: Cosmopolitanist Nostalgia in Istanbul" in *Diaspora of the City*, (New York: Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Amy Mills, "Narratives in City Landscapes: Cultural Identity in Istanbul," *Geographical Review* 95, no. 3, (2005): 441-462. Amy Mills, "The Place of

two metropolis centers were the cities with the highest number of population of the non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire. These cities do still encompass non-Muslim communities today and İstanbul is the city with the highest population of non-Muslims in Turkey. So, research about the current status of non-Muslim communities is compelled to concentrate on İstanbul. When the geographical scope of research about the current status of non-Muslims is shifted beyond İstanbul and İzmir, it usually focuses on either Hatay[7]

Locality for Identity in the Nation: Minority Narratives of Cosmopolitan Istanbul," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, (2008): 383-401. Özgür Kaymak, *İstanbul'da Az(ınlık) Olmak: Gündelik Hayatta Rumlar, Yahudiler, Ermeniler* (İstanbul: Libra, 2017). Nurdan Türker, *Vatanım Yok Memleketim Var – İstanbul Rumları: Mekân, Bellek, Ritüel* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2015). Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in 21st-Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). Göksu Günay Özdoğan, Füsun Üstel, Karin Karakaşlı, and Ferhat Kentel, *Türkiye'de Ermeniler: Cemaat-Birey-Yurttaş* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009). Leyla Neyzi, "Remembering Smyrna/Izmir: Shared History, Shared Trauma," *History & Memory* 20, no. 2 (2008): 106-127. Henri Nahum, *İzmir Yahudileri: 19.-20. Yüzyıl* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000). Kornilia Çevik Bayvertyan, *21. Yüzyılın İstanbul'unda Rumlar* (İstanbul: Paros Yayıncılık, 2018). Su Erol, *Mazlum ve Makul: İstanbul Süryanilerinde Etno-Dinsel Kimlik İnşası ve Kimlik Stratejileri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016). Bülent Şenocak, *Levant'ın Yıldızı İzmir: Levantenler, Rumlar, Ermeniler Ve Yahudiler* (İzmir: Şenocak, 2008). Sara Pardo, *Dünden Bugüne İzmir Yahudileri – Sevgili İzmir Beni Tanı* (İzmir: Etki Yayınları, 2007).

7 Leyla Neyzi, "Fragmented in Space: The Oral History Narrative of an Arab Christian from Antioch, Turkey," *Global Networks* 4, no. 3, (2004): 285-297. Özgür Kaymak and Anna Maria Beylunioğlu, "Çelişkili Kimlikler: İstanbul'da Yaşayan Antakyalı Ortodoksların Etnik/Dini Aidiyet Algıları," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, Cilt 73, No. 4, (2018): 959 – 989. Fulya Doğruel, "Multiple Identities on the Border: Christian and Muslim Arab Minority Communities in Turkey," in *In-Between Spaces: Christian and Muslim Minorities in Transition in Europe and the Middle East*, ed. Christiane Timmerman, Johan Leman, Hannelore Roos, and Barbara Segaert, (Peter Lang, 2009), 79-100. Fulya Doğruel, "An Authentic Experience of 'Multiculturalism' at the Border City of Antakya," *Journal of Modern Turkish History Studies*, XIII/26, (Spring 2013): 273-295. Esra Demirci Akyol, "Memory and Strategy of Identity Formations in Hatay," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1&2, (2015): 117-136. Fulya Doğruel, *'İnsaniyetleri Benzer…' Hatay'da Çoketnili Ortak Yaşam Kültürü* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005).

or Mardin[8] since these two cities in southeastern Turkey are known to historically have ethno-religious diversity. Even though Mersin, a city on the eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey, has had a cosmopolitan population which is the remnant of its prior status as a significant port city in the Eastern Mediterranean region in the late Ottoman era, it is not included in these studies as a city with non-Muslim denizens.

Thus, this thesis will contribute to the theoretical literature by exploring the experiences and narratives an understudied group (second generation Republican women including non-Muslim minorities) in an understudied city (Mersin). A micro-level comprehension and comparison of how the daily lives of the Muslim and Christian women were altered after the introduction of Republican reforms is unmistakably going to contribute to the overall understanding of the impacts of these reforms. Shifting between the details of the lives of the interviewed women and the broader concerns of the nationwide reforms and the modernization process will provide a framework of the marriage between the micro and the macro. It will also accommodate a contribution to the comprehension of how the Christian women living in a cosmopolitan Eastern Mediterranean port city, which is now an urban center in the peripheral region of Turkey, have perceived their experiences of the modernization process and in what ways their perceptions are similar to and different than those of the Muslim women. This kind of a hard task calls for an interdisciplinary study aggregating differing methodological and theoretical approaches, including ordinary women's studies, feminist oral history and a generational perspective, all of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

8 Zerrin Özlem Biner, "Retrieving the Dignity of A Cosmopolitan City: Contested Perspectives on Rights, Culture and Ethnicity in Mardin," *New Perspectives on Turkey,* 37, (2007): 31-58. Zerrin Özlem Biner, "Acts of Defacement, Memories of Loss: Ghostly Effects of the "Armenian Crisis" in Mardin, Southeastern Turkey," *History & Memory* 22, no. 2, (2010): 68-94. Ramazan Aras, "Migration and memory: Assyrian identity in Mardin Kerboran/Dargeçit" (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2005).

§ 1.3 Thesis Outline

Following this introduction, the second chapter will discuss the main theoretical and methodological perspectives on which this study builds. I will argue where this study is going to stand in women's studies literature, since it is going to follow an unconventional path and focus on the narratives of the 'ordinary' women who have not been politically active or have not been renowned figures in public life in the national or global sense. Following that, I will discuss the research methodology, oral history and feminist oral history, and elaborate on the background of how these methodologies have come to provide significant sources for studying women's narratives. Lastly, I am going to explain how this interdisciplinary study is going to avail of social memory and narratives.

In the third chapter, at first, I will discuss the socio-economic development of Mersin starting from the second half of the nineteenth century. I aspire to provide the historical, social and demographic background of how Mersin thrived as a major trade center and an important Eastern Mediterranean port city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Following that, I will address the demographic evolution which rendered the city a cosmopolitan characteristic as it came to the fore as a significant trade center and how the demographics has changed since then. Then, I will argue the urban identity of the city which was irrevocably ruptured after the construction of the modern port in the 1960s and turned the city from a 'port city' into a 'city with a port.'

In the fourth chapter, firstly, I will analyze the narratives of the interviewees in regard to their educational, social, professional and family lives. Then, I am going to examine their perceptions regarding their public and private roles. I also aim to disclose their narratives about the Republican reforms and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After concentrating on the specific perceptions of the Christian interviewees about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, I am going to focus on the narratives of the Muslim interviewees in regards with religion and Islam. In the last part of the chapter, I am going to explore the perceptions of the interviewees on the effects of the French occupation in the region during the Independence War.

In the fifth chapter, I aim to concentrate on the perceptions of the interviewees about the socio-cultural and demographic change that Mersin has been going through for the last couple of decades. After focusing on their narratives about the rural migration and immigration the city has received, I am going to examine their perceptions about the cosmopolitan structure of Mersin. Since these narratives include nostalgic perceptions about how Mersin used to be, they are going to portray the strong sense of longing the interviewees have for the past. Pertaining to the newcomers of the city and the former residents who left, I will discuss their narratives about modernity and in which ways they perceive themselves to be modern. Afterwards, I am going to concentrate on the narratives about the intercommunal marriages between the Muslims and Christians. Through the narratives on practices of endogamy and exogamy, I intend to comprehend their perspectives in regards with the plural and multicultural population of the city. Lastly, I am going to analyze the perceptions of the interviewees regarding the intercommunal relations between the Christian and Muslim communities in the city. Through the analysis of narratives about the neighboring practices and common celebrations of religiously festive days, I will delve into the perceptions of the Christian interviewees about being a female member of an ethno-religious minority in Mersin and in Turkey in general.

In the conclusion chapter, I am going to provide a brief summary of the study so far and present the findings I have come up with after studying the perceptions and experiences of the Muslim and Christian women of Mersin in my sample. I am also going to delve into what kinds of academic contribution this study is going to make to the literature pertaining to women's studies, feminist oral history, social memory and local history.

2

Theoretical and Methodological Approach

In this chapter, the theoretical and methodological approach of the study is going to be discussed. The categories through which the interviewed women's narratives will be analyzed in detail. At first, I will argue where this study is going to stand in women's studies literature, since it is going to follow an unconventional path and focus on the narratives of the 'ordinary' women who have not been politically active or have not been renowned figures in public life in the national or global sense. Then, as the interviewed women are from the second generation of Republic, I will briefly focus on the generational perspective the study is going to avail of. Following that, I will discuss the research methodology, oral history and feminist oral history, and elaborate on the background of how these methodologies have come to provide significant sources for studying women's narratives. After that, I am going to explain how this interdisciplinary research is going to avail of social memory and nostalgia and narratives.

§ 2.1 Ordinary Women in Women's Studies

There is an extensive literature on women's studies in Turkey.[1] There is also plenty of research on the women and the early feminist movement of the late Ottoman era.[2] Also, there is an abundant number of studies focusing on the legal and educational reforms regarding women in the early Republican era and their participation in education and public life as well as studies questioning the fabricated female identity of dutiful and enlightened mothers of the nation most of which were produced after the 1980s.[3]

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1 For reviews and different periodizations of this literature, see Özbay (1990), Sirman (1989) and Arat (1993).

2 For more please see: Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1994). Serpil Çakır, "Tarih Yazımında Kadın Deneyimlerine Ulaşma Yolları", *Toplumsal Tarih*, (Mart 2002): 28-35. Serpil Çakır, "Kadınlar Dünyası," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, (Leiden, Koninklijke: Brill NV, 2018). Serpil Çakır, "Feminism and Feminist History Writing in Turkey: The Discovery of Ottoman Feminism," *Aspasia*, vol. 1, (2007): 61-83. Duygu Köksal, and Anastasia Falierou, ed. *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives* (Brill, 2013). Zafer Toprak, "The Family, Feminism and the State during the Young Turk Period, 1908-1918", *Premiere Rencontre Internationale sur l'Empire Ottoman et la Turquie Moderne*, (İstanbul-Paris: Editions ISIS, 1991). Ekrem Işın, "Tanzimat, Kadın ve Gündelik Hayat," *Tarih ve Toplum*, 9, no. 51, (1988): 150-155. Aynur Demirdirek, *Osmanlı Kadınlarının Hayat Hakkı Arayışlarının Hikâyesi* (Ankara: İmge, 1993). Melissa Bilal, and Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Bir Adalet Feryadı - Osmanlı'dan Türkiye'ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar 1862-1933* (İstanbul: Aras, 2016).

3 Some of the prominent works are as follows: Afet İnan, *Atatürk ve Türk Kadın Haklarının Kazanılması* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1964). Afet İnan, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Kadının Hak ve Görevleri* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1975). Tezer Taşkıran, *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında Türk Kadın Hakları* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1973). Nermin Abadan Unat, "The Impact of Legal and Educational Reforms on Turkish Women," in *Women in Middle Eastern History*, ed. Nikkie Keddie, and Beth Baron (Yale, 1991), 177-194. Nermin Abadan Unat, "The Legal Status of Turkish Women," in *Women, Family and Social Change in Turkey*, ed. Ferhunde Özbay (UNESCO, 1990), 13-27. Ayşe Durakbaşa, *Halide Edip: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2000). Duygu Köksal, "1930'lar 40'larda Kadın, Cinsiyet ve Ulus," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 51, (1998): 39. Ayşe Durakbaşa, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Kadın ve Erkek Kimliklerinin Oluşumu: Kemalist Kadın Kimliği ve Münevver Erkekler," in *75. Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, ed. Ayşe Berktay Hacımirzaoğlu, Ayşe, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 29–50. Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız Inkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*

Though there were ethnographic and sociological village monographs which devoted at least one chapter to the family and kinship relations in the rural communities or studied power relations and rituals among women[4], they were "by no means on women"[5] and therefore, they do not really belong to the women studies literature. Fertility and family planning surveys which were conducted and the ethnographic and demographic researches focusing on the education of rural women and the structure of the Turkish family, which served to highlight the status of women in the family and household, were

(İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003). Zafer Toprak, "1935 İstanbul Uluslararası Feminizm Kongresi ve Barış," *Toplum- Düşün*, no. 24, (1986): 24–29. Zafer Toprak, "Halk Fırkasından Önce Kurulan Parti: Kadınlar Halk Fırkası," *Tarih Toplum*, no. 51, (1988): 30–31. Kathryn Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation: İstanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 4, Number 1, (Winter 2008): 31-52. Ayşegül Baykan, and Belma Ötüş-Baskett, *Nezihe Muhittin ve Türk Kadını 1931* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1999). Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Yeni Hayat: İnkılap ve Travma 1908-1928* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2017).

4 For more please see: Niyazi Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (Ankara: Uzluk Basımevi, 1942). Behice Boran, *Toplumsal Yapı Arastirmaları – İki Köy Çeşidinin Mukayeseli Tetkiki* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1945). İbrahim Yasa, *Hasanoğlu Köyü'nün İçtimai-İktisadi Yapısı* (Ankara: Doğuş Matbaası, 1955). Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (University of California Press, 1991). Lale Heckman-Yalçın, *Kürtlerde Aşiret ve Akrabalık İlişkileri,* çev. Gülhan Erkaya, Gülhan (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002). Barbara C. Aswad, "Visiting Patterns among Women of the Elite in a Small Turkish City," *Anthropological Quarterly*, (1974): 9-27. Barbara C. Aswad, "Women, Class and Power: Examples from the Hatay, Turkey," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Beck Lois, and Nikkie Keddie (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), 473-482. Nancy Tapper, "Changing Wedding Rituals in a Turkish Town," *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, (1985): 305-313. Mübeccel Kıray,, *Ereğli – Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1964). Mübeccel Kıray, "Küçük Kasaba Kadınları," in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, ed. Nermin Abadan Unat (İstanbul: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği., 1982) Peter Benedict, "The Kabul Günü: Structured Visiting in an Anatolian Provincial Town," *Anthropological Quarterly*, (1974): 28-47. Fallers, Lloyd A., and Margaret C. Fallers, "Sex Roles in Edremit," in *Mediterranean Family Structures,* ed. Peristiany, J. G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.1976), 243-60.

5 Özbay, 1990, p.3.

enlightening as to contemplate the women in Turkish society as well.[6] Nonetheless, the major development occurred after the 1980s with the impact of feminism and the feminist movement that contributed to emergence of a literature completely devoted to women and gender studies.[7] The women studies

6 For more please see: Serim Timur, *Türkiye'de Aile Yapısı* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yayını, 1972). Çidem Kağıtçıbaşı, ed., *Sex Roles, Family and Community in Turkey*, (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1982). Ferhunde Özbay, "Türkiye'de Kırsal Kentsel Kesimde Eğitimin Kadınlar Üzerinde Etkisi," in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, ed. Nermin Abadan Unat (İstanbul: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, 1982). Ferhunde Özbay, "Women's Education in Rural Turkey," in *Sex Roles, Family and Community in Tu*rkey, ed. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1982). Mübeccel Kıray, "The New Roles of Mothers: Changing Intra-Familial Relationships in a Small Town in Turkey," in *Mediterranean Family Structures*, ed. Peristiany, J. G. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976), 261-271. Nusret Fişek, "Türkiye'de Demografinin Evrimi," in *Türkiye'de Sosyal Bilim Araştırmalarının Gelişimi*, ed. Sevil Atauz (Ankara: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, 1986). Ferhunde Özbay, "Nüfusbilim Araştırmaları Oturumu Üzerine Yorum," in *Türkiye'de Sosyal Bilim Araştırmalarının Gelişimi*, ed. Sevil Atauz (Ankara: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği, 1986). Nükhet Sirman, "Köy Kadının Aile ve Evlilikte Güçlenme Mücadelesi," in*Kadın Bakış Açısından 1980'ler Türkiyesinde Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim, 1990). Nükhet Sirman, "State, Village and Gender in Western Turkey," in*Turkish State, Turkish Society*, eds. Andrew Finkel, and Nükhet Sirman (London: Routledge, 1990).

7 Some prominent works are as follows: Şirin Tekeli, *Kadınlar ve Siyasal Toplumsal Hayat*, (İstanbul: Birikim, 1982). Deniz Kandiyoti, "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, Lila (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 270–87. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2, (1987): 317–38. Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan, and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 95–112. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Urban Change and Women's Roles in Turkey: An Overview and Evaluation" in *Sex Roles, Family and Community in Turkey,* ed. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1982), 101–120. Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler Bacılar Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1997). Deniz Kandiyoti, *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996). Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1991). Yeşim Arat, "Feminizm ve İslam: Kadın ve Aile Dergisinin Düşündürdükleri," in*1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim, 1990). Feride Acar, "Türkiye'de İslamcı Hareket ve Kadın," in*1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli

literature flourished along the women's movement and illuminated "the significance of women's issues in Turkey."[8] Women evolved to be the central subjects of the study rather than being parts of it. Studies criticizing the androcentric and patriarchal structure of the Turkish society began to be conducted. Also, women who had been adopted[9], who were students of the Girls Institutes

(İstanbul: İletişim, 1990). Fatmagül Berktay, *Tarihin Cinsiyeti* (İstanbul, Metis, 2003). Şirin Tekeli, *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader (*London; Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Zed Books, 1995). Fatma Gök, "Women and Education in Turkey," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader,* ed. Şirin Tekeli (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), 131–140. Zehra Arat, ed. *Deconstructing Images of Turkish Women*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Yıldız Ecevit, "The Status and Changing Forms of Women's Labour in the Urban Economy," in-*Women in Modern Turkish Society*, ed., Şirin Tekeli (London: Zed Books, 1995), 81–88. Serpil Çakır, and Necla Akgökçe, ed., *Kadın Araştırmalarında Yöntem* (İstanbul: Sel, 1995). Ayşe Berktay Hacımirzaoğlu, ed. *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998). Aynur İlyasoğlu, *Örtülü Kimlik* (İstanbul: Metis, 1993). Aynur İlyasoğlu, and Necla Akgökçe, ed., *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru* (İstanbul: Sel, 2001). Zehra Arat, "Turkish Women and the Republican Reconstruction of Tradition," in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek, and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Colombia University Press, 1994), 54–77. Yeşim Arat, *Patriarchal Paradox: Women Politicians in Turkey (*N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989). Ferhunde Özbay, "Changes in Women's Activities Both Inside and Outside the Home," in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (London: Zed Books, 1995), 89–111. Yeşim Arat, *Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy: Islamist Women in Turkish Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Ferhunde Özbay, "Gendered Space: A New Look at Turkish Modernisation," *Gender & History* 11, no. 3, (1999): 555-568. Sancar, Serpil, *Erkeklik: Imkaˆnsız Iktidar* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2009).

8 Arat, 1993, p.126.

9 Ferhunde Özbay, "Adoption and Fostering: Turkey," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures 2*, ed. Joseph Suad (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 5-6. Ferhunde Özbay, *Turkish Female Child Labor in Domestic Work: Past and Present* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Print Office, 1999).

or at technical vocation schools[10], who were parts of a political movement[11] and who were among the first generation of the Republic women[12] were thoroughly studied as well. Another group which was extensively studied are the working women who have been a part of the work force and participated in public life.[13] Nevertheless, the lives of ordinary middle and upper middle class women have not been addressed enough until today and there is a gap in in the literature in regards with studying the lives of ordinary women, especially in the peripheral regions.

In this study, my claim is to examine the lives of the ordinary middle and upper middle class women of the two ethno-religious communities of Mersin among whom some has worked until retirement, some has worked for a while and then quit and some has never worked at all. None of them are politically active and aside from stating how they feel about women rights and women's status in society, none of them are parts of the feminist movement, either. So, in this study, I aim to explore the roles of the traditional urban secular middle and upper middle class Muslim and Christian women of Mersin in the household and the family as well as in the educational, urban and professional life through their personal experiences and narratives. My endeavor is to reach an understanding of their perceptions of their life stories, their local identity regarding Mersin, modernization and the Republic and intercommunal relations between the two communities and I intend to do that through their personal narratives.

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10 Elif Ekin Akşit, *Kızların Sessizliği: Kız Enstitülerinin Uzun Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005). Şule Toktaş, and Dilek Cindoğlu, "Modernization and Gender: A History of Girls' Technical Education in Turkey since 1927," *Women's History Review,* 15, no. 5, (2006): 737-749. Dilek Cindoğlu, and Şule Toktaş, "Empowerment and Resistance Strategies of Working Women in Turkey: The Case of 1960-1970 Graduates of the Girls Institutes," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 31, (2002): 31-48.

11 Emel Akal, *Kızıl Feministler: Bir Sözlü Tarih Çalışması* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2003). Birsen Talay Keşoğlu, "Socialist Women's Organizations inTurkey 1975-1980" (Phd Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007).

12 Mine Göğüş Tan, Özlem Şahin, Mustafa Sever and Aksu Bora, *Cumhuriyet'te Çocuktular* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007).

13 Ayşe Öncü, "Turkish Women in the Professions: Why So Many?" in Women *in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

The women interviewed for this study are all educated to some extent. Some of them had active work lives whereas some of them worked intermittently. All of them, except one, have been married and have children which indicates to the active role they have undertaken in private life. They were born and grew up in Mersin. They have spent most of their lives, if not all, in Mersin and still live there. Their lives are certainly not ordinary. However, their ordinariness comes from the fact that they haven't been active in the political sense or haven't worked at prominent positions which might have made them well-known in their own right.

Shifting the lens to the personal narratives of the ordinary middle and upper middle class women will undoubtedly shed light on the daily life of women and the life in a particular city in the local context. I aspire to disclose their perceptions of the Republic and modernity in order to reach an understanding of how these secular middle class women, who have also been members of the professional class with Western aspirations through their own merits and efforts, internalized the modernization project and the legal and educational reforms introduced for women. I also aim to demonstrate their perceptions regarding the past and the present of their hometown, Mersin. The nostalgic context through which they interpret their own past and, at the same time, the past of Mersin, unavoidably leaves a considerable impact on their interpretations of the present. Finally, their perceptions in regard to the relations between the Muslim and Christian communities is going to contribute not only to minority studies, but also to the women's studies literature for bringing to the fore the narratives and perceptions of women exclusively on this issue. So, once again, concentrating on the narratives and perceptions of only ordinary women for analyzing intercommunal relations between two ethno-religious communities is going to bring along a new perspective into the women's studies literature in Turkey.

2.1.1 *Modernity and Middle Class Women*

Watenpaugh, who studies the emergence of an urban Arab middle class in the Middle East with the historical background and experience of modernity in the Eastern Mediterranean, reveals that in the consciousness and praxis of the members of the newly forming and emerging middle classes, being modern

and being middle class were perceived as intertwined, if not as the same thing.[14] Drawing upon his assertion, Tuncer also argues that the distinctive characteristics of middle classes in developing countries like Turkey are not merely their education and professions and so on but also their claim of being modern.[15] Through a coalescent of manners and tastes which are ascribed with Western middle class culture, the emergent Turkish middle class families, like the ones of the interviewed women for this study, have endeavored to be as modern as possible which again resonates with Watenpaugh's explanation that being middle class is the evidence of being modern first and foremost in the cultural aspect.[16]

One of the most highlighted concepts in the narratives of the women I interviewed for this study is modernity and how modern and contemporary they are. Their emphasis on the modern environment, and especially the modern city to begin with, in which they have been brought up, constitutes one of the most significant parts of their narratives. Aside from the socio-cultural ideals and practices, the economic patterns and consumption habits, their accent on being modern is another factor in their middle class roots. Yet, these women are not well-known or famous. They neither are politicians nor politically active. They are also not rural women whose education levels and marriage patterns have been copiously studied, as it will be demonstrated below. Thanks to their own merits, they have become members of the professional class with secular and Western motivations. They are ordinary women from traditional urban secular middle and upper middle class who have not been studied adequately in the women studies literature in Turkey.

14 Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10.

15 Selda Tuncer, "Going Public: Women's Experience of Everyday Urban Public Space in Ankara across Generations Between 1950-1980" (PhD Dissertation, Middle East Technical University, 2014), 155.

16 Watenpaugh, 2006, p.22.

§ 2.2 Generational Perspective

The birth dates of the thirteen women interviewed for the study have a range between 1934 and 1947. They were all born and raised in Mersin. Although some of them left for education and did not return after graduation and/or marriage, at some point in their lives they came back permanently. Two interviewees, of whom one is Muslim and one is Christian, have lived in Mersin throughout their whole lives. Another interviewee left for high school education and after returning at the age of eighteen, she has been living there since. In fact, all the interviewees have been living in Mersin for at least thirty-five years. Seven of the interviewees are Muslims and six of them are Christians. Among the Christians, two women are Orthodox Christians whereas the other three are Catholics.

The age range of the interviewed women are between 70 and 84, as it is mentioned above. My intention was to interview women of Mersin who were over the age 70 so that they would be able to reflect their perceptions of the Republican Mersin. So, I should add that the ages of the interviewees were determined by taking into account their encounter with common cultural and historical conditions and events in particular time periods through their childhood, youth and adulthood. Therefore, in the scope of this study, the age group of the interviewees should be evaluated in terms of generation and life story. Operationalizing the ages of the interviewees by focusing on their generational patterns related to historically significant events and circumstances will better expound their generation's "specific chronological location"[17] through historical time which is what the research question of this study is about.

Following Mannheim's pioneering mode of thought about generation, what needs to be underlined about generation is that location should be considered both in cultural and geographical sense which requires an exposure to common historical experiences. Mannheim asserts both the geographical and cultural experience of sharing a similar location is what embodies the essence

17 June Edmunds, and Bryan S. Turner, *Generations, Culture, and Society* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002), 6.

of generation; however, he also urges that this advent of a generation is not solely based on chronological progress but, even more significantly, on shared historical experiences.[18] Sharing and experiencing certain social, cultural and historical circumstances at the same place in the same time period is what defines a generation. Therefore, the thirteen women interviewed for this study belong to the second generation of women who have been born in Mersin in the early Republican era during the single party regime. They have experienced the similar dominant impact of the Republican reforms and the multi-ethnic and multi-religious socio-cultural characteristic of Mersin within the same social and cultural context. Be that as it may, they might not have been influenced by the same events and circumstances in the same way; so, their narratives and anecdotes about how they perceived and experienced all this in the first place will serve to discern the decisive conditions regarding their life courses.

§ 2.3 Methodology

Since I intend to include the voices of the ordinary middle and upper middle class women of Mersin who have not been adequately studied so far, oral history is going to be the most fitting method since "oral histories seek to give voice to what would otherwise remain voiceless even if not traceless, by re-constituting the life histories of individuals."[19]

Oral history, in general, "collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews."[20] Since I aim to study the perceptions of a group of women living in Mersin about certain concepts, hearing their first-hand narratives through oral history interviews is going to provide the utmost insight. Besides, as oral histories provide "a context in

18 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Karl Mannheim (London: Routledge 1952), 290-291.

19 Paul Connerton, "Social Memory," *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18.

20 Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History – A Practical Guide* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 19.

which identity is practiced,"[21] my research questions focusing on the perceptions of women regarding their constructions of identity, would avail the most of oral history methodology. These questions require to conduct an interdisciplinary research combining feminist oral history, social memory and narrative.

The main method of the study is going to be oral history integrated within feminist methodology. Social memory and study of narratives are going to be conceptualized as sub-methodologies to support the main methodology. For the rest of the chapter, I'm going to give information about how I will employ these methodologies. At first, I will expound oral history as a method and talk about how it has evolved to be an effective methodology for feminist studies. Then, I will explore how feminist theory can be incorporated within oral history for analyzing women's lives and narratives. Later on, I will elaborate social memory and its linkage with oral history. Finally, I am going to explain the significance that studying narratives is going to constitute for this study.

2.3.1 *Oral History*

Despite the popularity it gained as a method in the twentieth century, the past of oral history goes way back before than that. In fact, Thompson emphasizes that oral history is as old as history itself.[22] Oral history had been defined as "what the source [narrator] and historian [interviewer] do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview" by Portelli, a prominent figure of the oral history field.[23] So, the narrator and the interviewer are both involved in

21 Jonathan Friedman, "The Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identity," *American Anthropologist,* 94, no. 4, (1992): 840.

22 Paul Thompson, *Geçmişin Sesi: Sözlü Tarih*, çev. Şehnaz Layıkel (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), 19.

23 Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as a Genre," in *Narrative and Genre*, eds. Mary Chamberlain, and Paul Thompson (London & NY: Routledge, 1998)a, 23.

the process. Neyzi summarizes it as "spoken memories about the past recorded by oral historians in a dialogue with individuals providing testimony."[24] Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner use a definition within a feminist perspective as to state it as "a basic tool in our efforts to incorporate the previously overlooked lives, activities, and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and of the present."[25] Although Neyzi estimates it to be a "fledgling research area in Turkey,"[26] it is not the case in other parts of the world.

Oral history has been a widely used research method in the twentieth century, especially for Holocaust studies, since the slow but steady acknowledgement of oral evidence and the increasing use of tape recorders implicated its rise after the Second World War.[27] Rather than posing an alternative to the existing historical knowledge, oral history resorts to new methods and techniques, the collaboration between the oral historian and the narrator in particular. Aside from having to learn the skills required for creating and documenting recorded interviews, the oral historians also had to conduct interdisciplinary analyses in order to "better understand the narratives of

24 Leyla Neyzi, "Oral History and Memory Studies in Turkey," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem, and Philip Robins (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 443.

25 Kathryn Anderson, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack, and Judith Wittner, Judith, "Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History," *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Spring 1987), 104.

26 Neyzi, 2010, p.443.

27 Allan Nevis of Columbia University was the first scholar to introduce oral history as a method for a research project in 1948 (Perks and Thomson, 1998, p.1-2) when he decided to do interviews with the 'great men' of the United States and record their oral accounts for his project (Starr, 1996). Although Nevins produced the first project in which oral history was used as a method, his focus was merely on white male elites. Therefore, it seemed unavoidable that calls for 'history from below' (Thompson, 1966) and 'from the bottom up', which was "a form that seemed to fit the object of transcending evidential biases that sustained the elitist perspective" (Frisch, 1998, p.32) would pave the way for instigating a new approach in oral history to surpass the elitist perspective and focus more on 'ordinary' people.

memory."[28] On a side note, oral history is also often associated with micro history "because of its focus on individual lives and its mode of transmission."[29]

The interviewees for an oral history interview should not be selected on their ability to adhere to statistical norms but to "typify historical processes."[30] The validity of oral testimonies should be dissected through the relevance of their narratives for exemplifying the historical and social atmosphere of the time they are talking about because "the real issues are historiographical, not statistical."[31] Therefore, instead of judging any story as true or untrue, the interpreters should seek "the reasons why narrators tell their stories."[32]

Oral history interviews are manufactured by the direct mediation of the oral historian which distinguishes them from any other kind of historical sources. An oral testimony is not a source until a historian calls it into existence and turns it into one and it is the historian "who produces the final account" and "provides the dominant interpretation"[33] and decides which parts of the narrative to include and to leave out. Correspondingly, Frisch suggests that there should be a middle ground, "a shared authority," which indicates that both sides, the interviewee and the oral historian, are in charge of what is going to be produced.[34] What's more, the content of an oral source is contingent on what the interviewer contributes to it "in terms of questions, dialogue

28 Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, "Introduction to second edition", in*The Oral History Reader, Second Edition*, eds. Robert Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson (London & NY: Routledge, 2006), ix.

29 Portelli, 1998(a), p.34.

30 Ronald J. Grele, "Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," in *Oral History R*eader, eds. Robert Perks, and Alistair Thomson(London: Routledge, 1998), 41.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Personal Narratives Group, "Whose Voice?" in *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives,* ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 203.

33 Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method," in*The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks, and Alistair Thomson, Alistair (London: Routledge, 1998), 85

34 Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx-xxiii.

and personal relationship."[35] Thus, for analyzing an oral history interview in a proper way, the analysis of psychological and social relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee should be incorporated within the historical analysis.[36] The impact of "class, gender, culture or political worldview on memory may reveal themselves through both content and the narrative form of the interview."[37]

The core of oral history is memory "from which meaning can be extracted and preserved."[38] The appeal of memory for oral history derives from the fact that memories are living histories.[39] For instance, Ferrante and Wickham assert that what defines and sets oral history apart from the other branches of history is its reliance on memory rather than texts.[40] Errante, on the other hand, explains that what distinguishes oral history from oral narratives and other kinds of interviews is that its dynamics are interceded by the nature and context of remembering.[41] After all, "oral historical sources are narrative sources."[42] Moreover, as "history evokes a narrative of the past" and "oral history indicates a medium of expression," this assigns oral history a specific form of discourse.[43]

What is worthy of note at this point is that memory is not about a passive preservation of facts but a dynamic process of production of meanings; therefore, in the case of oral sources, the changes constructed by memory are more crucial than the capability to retain the past. The narrators' attempts at making

35 Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1991), 54.

36 Grele, 1998, p.43-44.

37 Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks, and Alistair Thomson (London & NY: Routledge, 1998), 89.

38 Ritchie, 1995, p.19.

39 Perks and Thomson, 1998, p.1.

40 James Fentress, and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 1.

41 Antoinette Errante, "But Sometimes You're Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling," *Educational Researcher*, 29, no. 2, 2000, 16-27, p.17.

42 Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *The Oral History Reader,* eds. Robert Perks, and Alistair Thomson (London & NY: Routledge, 1998)b, 67.

43 Portelli, 1998(a), p.23.

sense of their own past and setting their narrative in a historical context lie in these changes constructed by memory.[44] This is a significant point because as much as memory is constructed in various ways by the social environment, "the act and art of remembering is always deeply personal."[45] Likewise, Passerini underlines that the raw material of oral history amounts to not just factual statements but to dominant "expressions and representations of culture," which means that along with literary narratives, it also includes "the dimension of memory, ideology and subconscious desires."[46] The worth of an oral testimony is reliant on not how much it complies with facts but how much it indicates the emergence of 'imagination, symbolism and desire' which confers a different kind of credibility to oral sources.[47]

The advent of one specific difficulty within the method of oral history interviews takes place when the oral sources get taciturn and turn down answering certain sorts of questions, even if they were more voluble while answering others. In such cases, Portelli lays out that the most significant information "may lie in what the informants hide, and in the fact that they do hide it, rather than what they tell."[48] In a similar vein, it could be said that "oral historians struggle more with what is not said than what is said."[49]

2.3.2 *Feminist Oral History*

Leydesdorff defines the field of oral history to be "the field in which feminist theory has been linked to memory" and cater a useful perspective within

44 Portelli, 1991, p.52.

45 Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 57.

46 Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks, and Alistair Thomson (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 54.

47 Portelli, 1998(b), p.68.

48 Portelli, 1998(b), p.69.

49 Nanci Adler, Nanci, Selma Leydesdorff, Selma, Mary Chamberlain, and Leyla Neyzi, "Introduction," in *Memories of Mass Repression: Narrating Life Stories in the Aftermath of Atrocity*, eds. Nanci Adler, Nanci, Selma Leydesdorff, Selma, Mary Chamberlain, and Leyla Neyzi (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2009), xiii.

which cultural memory could be studied.[50] Similarly, Sangster surmises "the feminist embrace of oral history" as having "emerged from a recognition that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship."[51] The use of oral history for uncovering women's history has been widely discussed by scholars[52] and the two movements might be considered to have collaborated for progress, inducing scholars to assert they were "growing up together."[53] In the late 1960s, around the time that the new social historians engendered a second generation of oral historians who intended to conduct researches on the lives of ordinary Americans, "feminist historians were seeking to add women's voices."[54] While oral historians were concentrated on coming up with a new 'history from below' to include the voices of underprivileged groups, feminist history was focused both on reconstructing the past to expose and present the crucial parts women have played in the past and projecting the spotlight on women's role throughout the history.[55] Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* is one of the early works to recognize these goals on both sides.[56]

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50 Selma Leydesdorff, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition – Gender and Memory Ten Years On," in *Gender and Memory*, eds. Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini, and Paul Thompson (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), viii.

51 Sangster, 1998, p.87.

52 Joanna Bornat, "Women's History and Oral History: An Outline Bibliography," *Oral History*, 5/2, (1977). Sherna Berger Gluck, "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, eds. David K. Dunaway, and Willa K. Baum (London: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 221-237. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai, ed. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London, 1991). Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner, a.g.e., 1987.

53 Mary Stuart, "You're A Big Girl Now: Subjectivities, Feminism and Oral History," *Oral History*, (Autumn 1994): 56.

54 Sherna Berger Gluck, "From California to Kufr Nameh and Back: Reflections on 40 Years of Feminist Oral History," in *Oral History off the Record: Toward an Etnography of Practice*, ed. Anna, Zembrzycki Sheftel, Springer, (2013), 26.

55 Leydesdorff, Passerini and Thompson, 2005, p.4.

56 Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto, 1973).

The shift of emphasis from early working class oral history studies to "subjectivity, identity, narrativity, performance and memory," which pertained to the influence of feminism, resulted with turning the spotlight to several forms of power both within the process of research in oral history and in the life of the interviewee. As a result, the enhancement of identity formation reinforced "the project of integrating ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality into working-class history."[57] Gluck refers to a 'special rhythm,'[58] which has governed women's lives whether they played out public roles or undertook traditional female roles in private space and oral history has been used by women "to explore this rhythm of women's lives."[59]

The prospect of putting women's voices at the center and revealing their experiences avails of oral history interviews significantly. Nonetheless, feminist oral history only becomes a feminist methodology when it's used in a particularly feminist systematization and uses feminist objectives for collecting the oral data.[60] Those feminist objectives require the incorporation of gender 'as a defining category of analysis' because women evaluate the past in a much different light than men[61] which demonstrates the necessity to study them in order to fill the gaps in knowledge.[62] The restoration of the said knowledge is imperative as it concerns the compensation for "a basic discontinuity," that was created by the "suppressed, trivialized, ignored" perspectives of women which were sometimes diminished to the rank of "gossip and folk wisdom" even in academic literature and disciplines.[63]

Feminism and oral history have met in a common ground in the development of both methodologies and interpretations by recognizing "personal

57 Sangster, 2013, p.65.

58 Gerda Lerner, *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), xvi-xviii.

59 Gluck, 1996, p. 222.

60 Susan Geiger, "What's So Feminist About Women's Oral History?", *Journal of Women's History*, 2:1, (Spring 1990):170.

61 Sangster, 1998, p.89

62 Anderson, Armitage, Jack, Wittner, 1987, p.106.

63 Ibid.

feeling as an important focus of investigation" and by highlighting the importance of "everyday patterns of behavior and experience"; also, they both underscore the value of subjectivity in comprehending those behaviors and experiences.[64] Since oral sources transmit the narratives of people "in their own subjectivity," Portelli denotes that the subjectivity in oral source provides a unique and invaluable element that no sources other than oral ones can obtain.[65] Even the chronological order the interviewees tell their stories and the organization of their narrative implies how they relate to their own histories.[66] Therefore, as it involves at least two subjectivities, the subjectivity of the interviewee and that of the interviewer, oral history brings along a new aspect to the concept of work by women.[67] A positive appraisal of the subjective is inherent in feminist claims and political strategies.[68] In fact, the problem of subjectivity has been "rethought as much in feminist theory as in oral history."[69] Therefore, the claim on "the emphasis on the discovery of new social realities through hidden voices" moved to a new realization which brought forth the "recognition that their subjective dimension is fundamental to understanding them."[70]

As women are not only the transmitters of societal norms but also "take active role in the process of producing, reproducing, and transforming social relations,"[71] women's personal narratives accommodate important sources for analyzing the effect of gender in their lives and in society in general. Etter-Lewis discusses that women's narratives are more liable since women under-

64 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.5.

65 Portelli, 1998 (b), p.72.

66 Portelli, 1998 (b), p.67.

67 Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai, "Introduction," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (London: Routledge, 1991), 2.

68 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.263.

69 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.6.

70 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.5.

71 Melissa Bilal, and Amy de la Bretèque, Amy, "The oror and the lori: Armenian and Kurdish lullabies in present-day İstanbul," in *Remembering the Past in Iranian Societies*, eds. Christine Allison, and Philip G. Kreyenbroek (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 126.

state themselves and refrain from the first person point of view in their narratives. Other reasons for the accountability of women's narratives are the scarce addresses of personal accomplishments and implicit accounts of personal power.[72] It has also been remarked that women are more apt to minimize the importance of their own achievements and highlight the role of their family members by staying away from positioning themselves at the heart of the public events.[73] It has been demonstrated that women traditionally advert to personal and family matters and their relationships with others.[74] Furthermore, Geiger affirms that women's perspectives about life, and even their consciousness of historical time to some extent, might be devised by their 'embeddedness in familial life.'[75] Sangster's study follows a similar pattern which leads her to observe that her female interviewees reconstruct their past in accordance with their families' cycle of life.[76] These findings exhibit the necessity of defining gender as a categorical analysis for oral history because it serves as a major influence on how women remember and tell their lives. Since women's personal narratives are "stories of how women negotiate their 'exceptional' gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime,"[77] they also display the dynamics of gender more coherently than those of men.

Another reason for why women's personal narratives would yield effective results has to do with the construction of gender. Even though personal narratives might be considered as merely intrinsic to the individual, it follows a

72 Gwen Etter-Lewis, "Black women's life stories: reclaiming self in narrative texts," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1991), 48.

73 Sangster, 1998, p.94.

74 Kristina Minister, "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1991), 31.

75 Susan Geiger, "Women's life histories: Method and content," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 11, no. 2, (1986), 348.

76 Sangster, 1998, p.89.

77 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.4

plot and contains embedded themes which resonate with the cultural narratives that are imposed on individuals at any time.[78] Interpretation of women's narratives as "counter-narratives," which are elements of narrative that diverge from self-images and experiences in the prevailing socio-cultural models,[79] would allow the development of challenging insights to the dominant androcentric and patriarchal social order. The counterhegemonic insight derived from those counter-narratives are also going to exhibit the limited viewpoint interwoven in the dominant ideology and androcentric hegemony, and demonstrate that it is particularistic rather than universal.[80] Plus, memories of subordinate groups, like those of women, are more likely to demonstrate resilience and should be transmitted "from the boundaries between the public and the private."[81] This is why unraveling women's agency and voices was deemed to be a counter-hegemonic practice that was likely to disclose "the hidden power relations of official narratives" during the early years of second wave feminism.[82] For that reason, every kind of narrative belonging to women, either of that of acceptance of or defiance against gender codes, reflects that women's lives are lived "within and in tension with systems of domination" because they are responses to "the system in which they originate"[83] and thus, unfold the inner dynamics of that system.

While acknowledging the decisive effect of individual agency, studying the personal narratives of women also recognizes the social construction of gendered self-identity. For instance, Harlow notes that the autobiographies or oral histories of resistance of Third World women are inclined to indicate that the private and domestic experiences of the narrator are linked with the historical

78 Mary Chamberlain, and Selma Leydesdorff, "Transnational Families: Memories and Narratives," *Global Networks*, 3, (2004), 230

79 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.7 and p.11.

80 Ibid, p.7.

81 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.8.

82 Rebecca Bryant, "Writing the Catastrophe: Nostalgia and Its Histories in Cyprus," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 26, no. 2, (2008), 416.

83 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.8.

and public context of their social-political struggles.[84] In fact, Personal Narratives Group paraphrases a sentence of Marx to clarify the situation further: "Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing."[85] In short, careful interpretation of women's personal narratives portray the reasoning between the individual behavior and the repressing factors on social and systematic level in which those behaviors are shaped.

Cultural context also affects how people chronologically reminiscence their pasts and which events they prioritize in their memories as well as their perceptions of fact and fiction.[86] Joan Scott bespeaks that "experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted," which makes the interpretations and narratives of experience crucial for analyzing political and historical context because "what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political."[87] Since focusing on the importance of experience has altered the attention on the distinction between the public and private space, it also illustrated the construction of the gender identity of women and that narrative is constitutive of women's memory rather than being a reflection of it.[88]

With women's oral history, women's experiences and the need to record them are more at the forefront. When the common experience of being a woman is shared among the interviewer and the interviewee through the research subject, it adds a whole new level into raising a new awareness for female consciousness. As Gluck accentuates, women's oral history is "… the validation of women; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots; it is the development of a

84 Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Cited in Claudia Salazar, "Third World Women's Text: Between the Politics of Criticism and Cultural Politics," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai (London: Routledge, 1991), 94.

85 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.5.

86 Portelli, 1998(b), p.69.

87 Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry*, 17, (Summer 1991), 797.

88 Akşit, 2005, p.191.

continuity; which has been denied to us in traditional historical accounts."[89] Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu concur that women's oral history differs from traditional oral history due to its dependence on narratives, rather than on public rhetoric and discourses, to uncover women's voices. As they underline, "women's own self definitions, perceptions, their own theories of self and moral social conduct, however, can best be understood studying their own accounts and analyzing their own constructions of their lives and life histories."[90] So, there are contextual and structural differences between women's oral history and traditional oral history.[91] Unlike men's life stories, those of the women's are not solely engaged in the relation between the self and the social sphere, but also in women's condition and in the collective representations of women because they have been constructed by the society against which the interviewed woman must be struggling.[92] Therefore, it is safe to state that oral history is indeed a feminist encounter.[93]

Studying the silences is even more important in regard of women's narratives. Sangster also affirms that revelations are likely to be found in silences and omissions in the stories of women.[94] Passerini suggests to approach the inconsistent and irrelevant answers and silences with caution because oral sources seek to be taken as 'forms of culture' whose narratives and testimonies might alter over time.[95] A woman's life story encompasses two separate but usually conflicting points of view; whereas one is defined in the reflection of the values and concepts of men's dominant position in culture, the other is

89 Gluck, 1996, p.223.

90 Ayşe Durakbaşa, and Aynur İlyasoğlu, "Formation of Gender Identities in Republican Turkey and Women's Narratives as Transmitters of 'Herstory' of Modernization," *Journal of Social History,* 35, no. 1, (2001), 195.

91 Gökçe Bayrakçeken Tüzel, "Being and Becoming Professional: Work and Liberation Through Women's Narratives in Turkey" (PhD Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2004), 159.

92 Marie-FrançoiseChanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative and Socio-Symbolic Analysis", in*Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai (London: Routledge, 1991), 78.

93 Gluck, 1996, p.223.

94 Sangster, 1998, p.90.

95 Passerini, 1998, p.60.

embodied by the more direct realities of a woman's personal experience.[96] So, in such cases where the experiences of women do not conform to the traditional connotations, women might unwittingly silence their own feelings, thoughts and experiences as they attempt to manifest their life stories in a more familiar and less controversial context.

Since one of the linchpins of feminist oral history has been the exploration and appreciation of women's experience,[97] making memory "the subject of study"[98] has required the acknowledgement of the disparities in the ways women and men remember. The way people remember their pasts heavily depends on those people's ethnicity, class, race and gender.[99] Isolating women by restraining them with housework and forcing them to stay home-bound led women to be one of the most marginalized segments of the society throughout the history which incited the lives of women to be considered as out of the scope of history.[100] This disparity between the ways in which women and men remember is not unexpected given the sharply differentiated life experiences of the members of the two sexes in most societies and the common inclination for men to dominate in the public sphere whereas women's lives are more likely to focus on family and household.[101] However, as the definitions of femininity and masculinity have been reframed, the domains of public and private experience have been redefined as well. So, through the discovery of the lives of women, feminist oral history is going to "relate directly to changing perspectives, expectations, and meanings of the relation between the public and

96 Kathryn Anderson, and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck, and Daphne Patai (London: Routledge, 1991), 11.

97 Sangster, 1999, p.89.

98 Michael Frisch, "The Memory of History", *Radical History Review*, 25, (1981, 16.

99 Sangster, 1998, p.89.

100 Serpil Çakır, "Feminist Tarih Yazımı: Tarihin Kadınlar İçin, Kadınlar Tarafından Yeniden İnşası," in *Birkaç Arpa Boyu… 21. Yüzyıla Girerken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar – Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan Unat'a Armağan*, ed. Serpil Sancar, Cilt I, (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 512.

101 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thomspon, 2005, p.1

private spheres."[102] The prevalence of some memories over others depicted the effect of the power relations between men and women on memories, which shows that "the gendering of memory makes a strong impact on the shaping of social spaces and expressive forms;" therefore, "memories are gendered."[103]

Since the process of gender construction is a fundamental element in the use of oral history for memory construction,[104] it was a necessary method for this thesis. The most significant contribution that using feminist oral history method has made for my study is the exploration of "dimensions of plural truths, the truths of experience, history and perceptions embodied in personal narratives."[105] Aside from maintaining the different perspectives of the interviewees, their narratives will also reveal "multiple truths of a life."[106] The subjectivity of the narratives, "the rootedness in time, place, and personal experience, and their perspective-ridden character",[107] is the reason why narratives are fundamental to dissect the perceptions of the women in this study.

2.3.3 *Social Memory and Nostalgia*

The common ground between oral history and memory studies constitutes the point where oral history unfolds to be an interdisciplinary field.[108] Memory, which initially served as a source for oral history, evolved to be the subject of it as well. Memory serves as "the tool we have in order to give meaning to our lives … in the sense of an inter-subjective (or inter-human) word that connects different generations, times, and places."[109] Since oral history is intrinsically embedded within and frequently works with memories,[110] the

102 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.8.

103 Leydesdorff, Passerini, Thompson, 2005, p.14.

104 Sangster, 1998, p.93

105 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.262.

106 Ibid.

107 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.264.

108 Neyzi, 2010, p.444.

109 Luisa Passerini, "Introduction," in *Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. Luisa Passerini (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 3.

110 Perks and Thomson, 1998, p.5

past is being brought to public realm through oral history and memory studies. The interdependent relation between memory and oral history and between collective and individual memory encompasses the core of oral history studies.

Boym defines collective memory as "the common landmarks of everyday life which, constitute shared social frameworks or individual recollections."[111] Memory studies concentrate on forms of remembering and forgetting but who introduced the idea of social or collective memory was Maurice Halbwachs by arguing that that an individual cannot remember what has not been collectively imprinted in his/her memory; and for that reason, memory is collective.[112] The collective context of the communication between the members of a group facilitates a social construction which ensures that the forms memory take are socially assigned as well. The members of a group acquire a common history through the "vicarious memory of their forebears' experiences."[113] Hence, memory contains personal aspects which makes it appear as an individual entity but in fact, remembering occurs within a collective context and through collective memory.[114] Thus, the process of remembering and forgetting is socially structured and constructed.[115] Therefore, I will follow Halbwachs' and others' approach whom underline the collective aspect of memory while analyzing the accounts and memories of the interviewees. The individual accounts of the interviewees have several commonalities, particularly about the old Mersin, in a way that is the consequence of their being members of a group of *Mersinli*s (being from Mersin or Mersin-ian). Their local identities as and being a member of *Mersinli*s constitute a significant part their narratives which inevitably affects how they articulate their memories about the Mersin of the past. Halbwachs claims that memory of the group is

111 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 53

112 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1925]), 40.

113 James, E. Young, "Memory and Monument after 9/11," in *The Future of Memory,* eds. Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland (Berghan Books, 2010), 80.

114 Halbwachs, 1980 [1950], p.83.

115 John Urry, "How Societies Remember the Past," in *Theorizing Museums,* eds. Sharon Macdonald, and Gordon Fyfe, (Cambridge, 1996), 50.

actually the knowledge which is distributed to the members; therefore, the memory of Mersin in a group of *Mersinli*s is virtually the knowledge about Mersin which was distributed within the group members and this explains why their memories about Mersin are more or less similar to each other. The same point holds for being members of the Muslim and the Christian community as collective memory is essential for the conservation of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups and communities.[116] However, such an approach overlooks the distinctions within the society. What is of importance to bring to the fore at this point is that collective memories are coherent for most of the members in a group but this does not imply that all the members of that certain group share or agree with those memories.[117] Therefore, I will also address these differences as they come up in the analysis.

I will also pay attention to the intricate link between identity and memory as underlined by other scholars. Neyzi presumes that the interest in identity and accordingly, in the past, is another development which has created the momentum to memory studies in the last decades.[118] The close relation between memory and identity is a given. Claiming and remembering the same things over time and space is the requirement of the construction of both individual and group identity.[119] Identity is not a composition of "a fixed set of memories" but it rather "lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting."[120]

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116 Zerrin Arslan, and Sonyel Oflazoğlu, *Antakya'da Yaşayan Arap (Rum) Hıristiyanlar: Antakya'da Yaşayan Arap Hıristiyanların Ekonomik, Kültürel ve Sosyal Sorunlarının Tespiti* (Antakya: Ortadoğu Arap Halkları Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 2017), 97

117 Esra Özyürek, "Introduction: The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey," in *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, ed. Esra Özyürek (Syracuse University Press, 2007), 9.

118 Leyla Neyzi, "Giriş," in *Nasıl Hatırlıyoruz: Türkiye'de Bellek Çalışmaları*, ed. Leyla Neyzi (İstanbul, Türkiye İş Bankası, 2011), 3.

119 Jonathan Boyarin, "Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory," in *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994), 1-37. John R. Gills, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Cited in Özyürek, 2001, p.11.

120 Paul Antze, and Michael Lambek, *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), xxix.

2.3.3.1 Nostalgia

Nostalgia for the old times is a common feeling shared by millions of people worldwide. People immensely miss and yearn for the past more and more. Originally stemmed as a term to name the symptoms of the homesick Swiss soldiers[121], nostalgia is a global phenomenon shared by people from every nation today. Correspondingly, Bryant notes that the etymological meaning of nostalgia is the feeling of longing to return because *nostos* means a return whereas *alghos* means pain or longing.[122] However, today it means much more than just a longing for return; it is "a selective way of narrating the past that produces such a longing."[123] According to Susan Stewart, like all the other narratives, nostalgia is always ideological as well.[124]

Lowenthal urges that nostalgia "has become a state of mind."[125] Idealizing the past makes people believe that life back then was much better compared to the present because they were young. Unhappiness with the conditions of the present leads people to deem the past as far better than it actually was and might make them believe that the hard times of the past were in fact not so dissatisfactory at all.[126] Because of that, Lowenthal assumes that "nostalgia is memory with the pain removed" and that pain is the present.[127] Drawing upon the name of his work, he goes on to assert that "if the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it 'the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all.'"[128] Furthermore, Kathleen Stewart defines nostalgia to be not a given content but a cultural practice whose "forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present."[129] It is assumed that the widespread feeling of nostalgia is derived from

121 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, 1985),10.

122 Bryant, 2008, p.404.

123 Ibid.

124 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

125 Lowenthal, 1985, p.11

126 Ritchie, 1995, p.34-35.

127 Lowenthal, 1985, p.12.

128 Lowenthal, 1985, p.4.

129 Kathleen Stewart, "Nostalgia – A Polemic," *Cultural Anthropology*, 3:3, (March 1998): 227.

the disappointment that modernity brought along when it failed to fulfill the promises of a better life.[130]

Boym assesses nostalgia as remaining as "an intermediary between collective and individual memory," but exhorts that collective memory should be considered "as a playground," and "not a graveyard of multiple individual collections."[131] She also offers two kinds of nostalgia to define one's relationship to the past and self-perception. Thus, in order to interpret the correlation between individual and collective memory, she suggests restorative nostalgia which she construes as rebuilding "the lost home and patches up the memory gaps," and, then, with reflective nostalgia which she explains as dwelling "in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance."[132]

Therefore, it might be said that the nostalgic theme which is dominant in the narratives of the interviewees of this study inclines to be more in line with reflective nostalgia which exists in longing and loss as these are the most frequently seen themes in the narratives about the good old Mersin in the perceptions of the interviewees.

Another prevalent point about memory which is revealed through this study is underlined by Pierre Nora. Nora claims that what is called as memory today is not memory but already history and "the quest for memory is the search for one's history."[133] This is also in line with what Benjamin asserts by noting that memory is actually about telling and retelling of a story that "creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation."[134] This is evident in the narratives of the interviewees about what they had heard from their family members about the pre-Republic Mersin. The memories they were told about their families, the Republican modernity and Mersin are what establish the foreground of their "knowledge" about these issues. The memories that the interviewees had heard from the prior generation is what they regard as their own history.

130 Özyürek, 2007, p.7.

131 Boym, 2001, p.54.

132 Boym, 2001, p.41

133 Nora, 1989, p.13.

134 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 97-98.

§ 2.4 Narratives

Since this study is going to be focused on the narratives of thirteen women on their personal lives and experiences regarding a number of concepts, it is crucial to address the significance of narrative and personal experience in this context because "narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative."[135] Narratives centering on experiences is defined by Patterson as "texts which bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience."[136] So, experience should not be considered as something people own or have but rather, as something that constitutes people to be what they are. However, Joan Scott expresses that such a viewpoint on experience "leads us to take the existence of individuals for granted (experience is something people have) rather than to ask how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced."[137] This incites the operationalization of experience within an "ideological construction that not only makes individuals the starting point of knowledge, but that also naturalizes categories such as man, woman, black, white, heterosexual and homosexual by treating them as given characteristics of the individuals."[138]

Yuval-Davis is another scholar who mentions the impact of narratives on the construction of identities by asserting that "identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)"[139]; and adds that it does not make a difference whether these identity narratives are individual or collective. What matters is that they "relate, directly or indirectly, to self and/or others' perceptions of what being a member in such a grouping or collectivity (ethnic, racial, national, cultural, religious)

135 Jerome Bruner, "Life as Narrative," *Social Research*, 54, 1, (1987), 13.

136 Wendy Patterson, "Narratives of Events: Labovian Events Analysis and its Limitations, in *Doing Narrative Research*, eds. Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou (London: Sage, 2008), 43.

137 Scott, 1991, p.782.

138 Ibid.

139 Denis-Constant Martin, 'The Choices of Identity', *Social Identities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, 5/16. Cited in Nira Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 40, No.3, (2002), 202.

might mean."[140] Moreover, as Chamberlain and Leydesdorff illuminate, although memory is considered to take up the central place in our identity, it is in fact the narratives that "show the manifold shifts that people make, even within a story."[141] Generated between an experience of a certain event or feeling and the shown effort to describe that event by putting it into words, a narrative "substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted."[142]

In this vein, the narratives of the women interviewed for this study are going to explain their perceptions about their identities in regards with being a woman, being a Turkish woman, being a woman in Mersin and finally being a Muslim woman or a Christian woman in Mersin. As Connerton stresses "the narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity."[143] Therefore, when studying narratives, it is essential look at the bigger picture to connect one's life narrative to the set of narratives of which it is a part, because one's life narrative is entrenched in the narrative of the group which, as an instrument, guided the individual to construct his/her identity on.

The interviewed women for this study, and people in general, try to make sense of their lives by telling stories in a subsequential order. They relay their personal experience in an order which they find to be meaningful. This narrative form in which they express their personal experiences are critical because they specify which aspects of their life made the most sense to the narrators.[144] In other words, narration of a life story contains significant insights to personal experience as well as a subjective perspective on the life of the narrator.[145]

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140 Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.202.

141 Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004, p. 231.

142 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 2.

143 Connerton, 1989, p.21.

144 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in Social Sciences and History* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 3.

145 Tuncer, 2014, p.105.

Equivalently, White stresses that "the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates the absence or refusal of meaning itself",[146] which implicates that narratives provide hints about what kind of meaning the narrators draw out of them. Blumer accounts the capacity of life histories and personal documents to attribute importance to 'the subjective in social life' as their strongest feature.[147] For that reason, experience, narratives and life stories are influential for establishing women and women's experiences as legitimate subject matters. Positing individual agency at the center, this kind of approach allows the inclusion of the process of rationalization of the collective experiences of people. Moreover, women's narratives are key players for contemplating the construction, expression and perpetuation of gender roles in terms of social sciences.

Serving as an instrument for the narrators to assign meanings to their experiences, narratives are also pathways to detect people's communication with the social world via their perceptions and sense making. The lives and experiences of people are interwoven within the historical and socio-cultural context they have lived in. The stories and experiences they tell about their lives have historical reflections as they inevitably correspond to respective time periods in history. The importance of historical context in human development is acknowledged by scholars.[148] Accordingly, the historical periods in which people grow up bear crucial influences on their identity processes. The fact that generational cohort plays a significant role in the developmental process is evident;[149] however, this does not mean that the narratives of people belonging

146 White, 1990, p.2.

147 Herbert Blumer, *Critiques of Research in the Social Sciences: An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Vol. 44, (Transaction Publishers, 1979), 81

148 Philip L. Hammack, and Bertham J. Cohler, "Narrative Engagement and Stories of Sexual Identity: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Sexual Lives," in *The Story of Sexual Identity: Narrative Perspectives on the Gay and Lesbian Life Course*, Philip L. Hammack, and Bertham J. Cohler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

149 Judith C. Barker, "Lesbian Aging: An Agenda for Social Research," *Gay and Lesbian Aging: Research and Future Directions*, (2004), 35.

to the same generation resemble each other whatsoever. On the contrary, factors such as class, ethnicity, gender and culture are essentially decisive in determining how people experience social life and formulate a narrative of it. Correspondingly, Bruner attests to the role of narratives and evinces that "one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life."[150] Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the same experiences might have different effects on people depending on when that experienced event has occurred.

The interviewed women of this study conveyed stories they heard from their mothers, aunts and other female members of their families which served as an essential oral source for understanding the past experiences women had been through. Those second-hand narratives the interviewees heard from the other women in their families also induced an understanding of the culture transmitter and tradition bearer roles that women have undertaken. The narratives of the interviewees about Mersin as their hometown were utterly significant since the study is going to concentrate on their perceptions regarding and how they relate themselves to Mersin, too. Since they are expressed from memory, place narratives are bound to be subjective and partial.[151] Plus, Mills refers to the concept of geography memory which is "the social space through and upon which memory is constructed," and argues that this is why it is a complex concept which is "constituted together with the making and the telling of the memory itself." Since the development of a relationship to a place serves as a constitutive of identity, "memory and narrative are always grounded in locality."[152] Accordingly, Mersin takes up quite a significant role in the interviewed women's narratives. Mersin is a part of their identity; in fact it has become "a significant sociospatial locator of identity"[153] in their narratives.

All the same, it should be taken into account that the context in which the interviewees relayed their narratives has the potential to leave an impact on

150 Bruner, 1987, p.15.

151 Dena Eber, and Arthur Neal, *Memory and Representation: Constructed Truths and Competing Realities (*Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 2001), 5.

152 Mills, 2008, p.396.

153 Mills, 2008, p.387.

their interpretations. They speak of the past and especially the Mersin in the past in such a loving way that there is the possibility that their present interpretation of the past might lead them to evaluate it that way. Their praise of the interactions between the people in the past and the unproblematic intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians sometimes sounds too good to be true. Likewise, their positive perceptions regarding the modernity and the Republic might have been affected by the present conjuncture in the country. They look at the past through a viewpoint from the present which might make them interpret the past through a contemporary context.

It is important to remember that "the truths of personal narratives are the truths revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan stands."[154] Therefore, the narratives of the interviewed women for this study display what they consciously chose to remember and narrate and have strong ramifications pertaining to why they chose to narrate certain memories in certain ways.

154 Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p.263.

3

Mersin

Located in southern Turkey as a coast city right on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, Mersin had been a small fishing town with no more than a couple of huts on the shore until the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, as Yenişehirlioğlu and Özveren point out, Mersin is historically a latecomer among other Mediterranean port cities.1 Other scholars also point out that Mersin followed an unconventional path of development because while it used to be a substantial settlement in the Cilicia region in the ancient times, especially in Hellenistic and Roman periods, it had experienced a rupture throughout history which might be described as a discontinuity.2 This is why literature on Mersin and Mersin's recent history regarding its port city status happen to be seriously lacking, if there is any at all. Even though it's linked to the Çukurova region which is known for the historically more renowned urban centers such as ancient Tarsus with an access to the sea and Adana with

1 Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, and Eyüp Özveren, "Introduction," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü (Springer, 2019), 1.

2 Tolga Ünlü, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, "20. Yüzyılın Başında Mersin'de Ticaretin Gelişimi: Ticaretin Ana Omurgası Olarak Uray Caddesi," in *3. Tarih içinde Mersin Kolokyumu: Mersin, Akdeniz Dünyası ve Yirminci Yüzyıl – Kesişen Yollar, (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), 77.

its agrarian potential, Mersin had been somewhat overlooked until its rise as a trade center and a major port city in the Eastern Mediterranean in the nineteenth century. In this sense, Mersin is considered to have belonged to the same group of port cities such as Alexandretta, Haifa and Port-Said which all thrived at a relatively later period between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first couple of decades of the twentieth century.3 Özveren and Gürpınar define these cities, including Mersin, as the second-generation port cities which followed the example that the first-generation ones such as İzmir, Alexandria, Beirut, Salonica and Trabzon set ahead.4

In this process of development, Mersin became an urban center with a cosmopolitan population comprising of immigrants coming from several places in less than a hundred years.[5] As a newly founded urban center, it attracted groups of immigrants from several places which gradually rendered the city a multicultural and multiethnic population. With the break of the First World War, the Independence War and the proclamation of the Republic which followed, Mersin also went through a transformation process just like the rest of the Anatolian cities. In tandem with the fragmentation and restructuring of the global economy and the establishment of the nation states, the viability of port cities which relied on the commercial and cultural networks of trade was ruptured.[6] As nationalism came to the fore as "the opposite of the nineteenth century world order," the denizens of port cities had to be absorbed in the new national societies,[7] and Mersin could not avoid the fate which awaited ahead, either. Notwithstanding, it has managed to preserve its

3 Ibid.

4 Eyüp Özveren, and Erkan Gürpınar, "Competition as Rivalry: İzmir during the Great Depression," in *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, eds., Biray Kolluoğlu, and Meltem Toksöz, Meltem (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 184.

5 Evangelia Balta, "The Greek Orthodox Community of Mersina (mid-19th century-1921)", in *19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları 2002), 39.

6 Çağlar Keyder, "Port-cities in the Belle Epoque," in *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, eds., Biray Kolluoğlu, and Meltem Toksöz, Meltem (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 20-21.

7 Ibid.

cosmopolitan characteristics, at least to some extent, which being an Eastern Mediterranean port city had brought along, and has stood at a distinctive place than the other Turkish cities.

The concept of cosmopolitanism implies "… the opposite ends of a spectrum, with claims to universality on one, and parochialism on the other."[8] Sifneos defines it as an essential characteristic of mercantile ethos "which was further reinforced through a certain 'internationalization' of an economic ethic and world view."[9] She goes on to state that it is more than just the distinctive feature of Mediterranean ports between the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but "also a specific cultural phenomenon that characterized commercial diasporas" which played significant roles in international trade and acted as the agents of transformation in urban and social development of Mediterranean cities.[10] As she claims that this type of cosmopolitanism flourished and thrived in the age of empires and declined as nation states came to the fore[11], Kolluoğlu and Toksöz adopt a similar discourse and assert that it is a "spatial phenomenon that mediates between the local and the global." Eastern Mediterranean cities such as Mersin are considered to be cosmopolitan "by their placement in the world economy and nexus of flows of peoples and goods."[12] The attachment and belonging of varied religious, lingual and ethnic communities contribute to their connectedness. However, it is necessary to make the distinction that these cities are not rendered cosmopolitan merely because of their multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious communities but "because they occupied relatively autonomous spaces that

8 Biray Kolluoğlu, Meltem Toksöz, "Mapping out the Eastern Mediterranean toward a Cartography of Cities of Commerce," in *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, eds., Biray Kolluoğlu, and Meltem Toksöz, Meltem (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 8.

9 Evridiki Sifneos, ""Cosmopolitanism" as a Feature of the Greek Commercial Diaspora," *History and Anthropology*, 16, no. 1, (2005): 100.

10 Sifneos, 2005, p.97.

11 Ibid.

12 Kolluoğlu and Toksöz, 2010, p.8.

mediated between different worlds."[13] Equivalently, the increasing commercial activity and the growth of trade volume drew people from various regions to migrate to Mersin to settle and the city acquired a cosmopolitan structure and new denizens from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

Özveren urges that while all the Mediterranean port cities, particularly the Eastern Mediterranean ones, display demographic diversity attributions when it comes to population, Mersin sets a unique showcase in that regard. Mersin attained plurality and diversity in demographics much more rapidly than other port cities such as Beirut, Alexandria or İzmir in which the similar demographic plurality was achieved in over a century.[14] Yet, in the case of Mersin, it was achieved during the course of a couple of decades. So, one again, Mersin stands out as a unique case not only among the other Anatolian cities but also among its counterparts among the Eastern Mediterranean port cities in the case of the rapid demographical transformation it has realized.

In this chapter, I intend to delve into Mersin's evolution as an Eastern Mediterranean port city starting with the mid-nineteenth century and the consequential socio-economic, cultural and demographic influences engendered in the city. Then, I am going to dissect the demographic transition the city had gone through starting with the mid-nineteenth century. I will explore how the city had acquired a cosmopolitan population and how various communities, including the families of the interviewees of this study, came to settle in Mersin and witnessed the evolution of the city to an Eastern Mediterranean port city. Lastly, I am going to examine the urban identity of the city which was irretrievably tarnished after the reconstruction of the modern port in 1962 and changed Mersin into a 'city with a port' rather than a 'port city' like it used to be.

§ 3.1 The Rise of a Port City

As a port-city of the Ottoman Empire which reflected the growing prominence of the export trade in the nineteenth century, Mersin emerged as a city

13 Ibid.

14 Özveren, 2019, p.13.

of vital importance. The city's evolution to a cosmopolitan port town in the eastern Mediterranean was likely to have had several implications for the world economy. Mersin was geographically the closest city to the Çukurova plain of which the cotton surplus had a growing importance for the international economy in the aftermath of the American Civil War. The increasing demand of the international markets in the 1860s, especially Britain's need for potential new regions for cotton production, contributed to the formation of a period of dramatic agricultural change in Çukurova.[15] However, it also encompassed a crucial turning point for the socio-economic infrastructure of Mersin as a newly emerging town. As the increasing trade from the Mersin port served to link Çukurova to the world economy, Mersin was considered to be one of Eastern Mediterranean port cities which had great potential to become commercial centers.[16] Just as the İzmir port with the inner Aegean region as its hinterland turned out to be a major trade center, Mersin port with the Çukurova region as its hinterland embodied one of the significant port cities of the Empire such as İzmir, İstanbul and Beirut which served to accelerate the integration of the Ottoman trade with the world economy.[17]

Kasaba, Keyder and Tabak indicate that the Mediterranean region's importance in world trade, which was lost after the mid-seventeenth century, was reclaimed in the second half of the nineteenth century.[18] The increase in trade between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers led to the emergence of multi-ethnic and multi-religious polyglot societies in the Eastern Mediterranean port-cities due to the merchants arriving from abroad and the non-

15 Meltem Toksöz, "The Çukurova: From Nomadic Life to Commercial Agriculture, 1800-1908" (PhD Disstertation, State University of New York, 2000), 67.

16 Ayşe Aydın, *19. Yüzyıl Mersin Kiliseleri* (Mersin: Pitura, 2011), 27.

17 Şerife Yorulmaz, "Yabancı Tüccar ve Gayri Müslim Tebaanın Mersin Ekonomisindeki Rolü (1830-1918), in *Sırtı Dağ, Yüzü Deniz: Mersin*, ed. Filiz Özdem (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 315.

18 Reşat Kasaba, Çağlar Keyder, and Faruk Tabak, "Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities and Their Bourgeoisies: Merchants, Political Projects, and Nation-States," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center),* Vol. 10, No. 1, Anniversary Issue: The Work of the Fernand Braudel Center, (Summer 1986): 121.

Muslim Ottoman communities.[19] Accordingly, Keyder depicts that in the port-cities of the time, which he exemplifies as İzmir, Salonica, Trabzon, Mersin, Beirut and Alexandria, the primary population consisted of merchants.[20] The merchants living in these cities were the wealthiest people residing there and their taste and culture were key elements to shape those of the cities.[21] In fact, Keyder, Özveren and Quataert address that "port-cities in the periphery emerge as the privileged locales of contact with the world capitalist economy"[22] which perfectly sums up the history of Mersin starting with the mid-nineteenth century, although the research concentrating on its port-city status was somewhat overshadowed by the research conducted on more prominent port-cities such as İzmir and Salonica in that respect.

Up until the second half of the 1800s, Mersin had been a fishing village on the coast of the Mediterranean in southern Anatolia.[23] Founded in the nineteenth century, Mersin's essential development took place after 1860. The external social conjuncture generated political and economic transformations in the Mediterranean world which inevitably affected Mersin as well.[24] In Mersin's rise to prominence, two historical events had been influential in the emergence and development of the city in the nineteenth century: the American Civil War and the Crimean War.[25] The eruption of the civil war in American in 1861 gave rise to a crisis which deprived the European countries of their

19 Sifneos, 2005, p.98.

20 Keyder, 2010, p.15.

21 Çağlar Keyder, "Peripheral Port-Cities and Politics on the Eve of the Great War," New *Perspectives on Turkey*, 20, (Spring 1999): 42.

22 Çağlar Keyder, Eyüp Özveren, and Donald Quataert, "Port-Cities in the Ottoman Empire: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Port-Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean 1800-1914, (Fall 1993): 519.

23 Şerife Yorulmaz, "Doğu Akdeniz'de Bir Osmanlı Liman Kenti Olarak Gelişen Mersin'de Yabancı Tüccarın Rolü ve Mersin'de Levanten Kültürü (19. Yüzyıl)," in *19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları 2002), 4.

24 Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, "Why Mersin," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Filiz, Eyüp Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Springer, (2019), 3.

25 Toksöz, 2000, p.108-110.

cheapest cotton supplier, and ergo, accelerated their search for alternative cotton sources which was how Çukurova came to the fore and its cotton production was provided with an exceptional boost.[26]

Between 1865 and 1908, Mersin thrived as an Ottoman port-city in the Eastern Mediterranean which evolved into a major outlet for trade. As the Ottoman economy inaugurated the process of incorporation with the world economy, Mersin undertook its part in the expansion of the world trade. A new socio-economic and cultural network, which led the city to undergo an exceptional transformation, flourished. In fact, Toksöz refers to the role of Mersin in the restructuring of Çukurova's economy for increasing cash crop production as she urges that the cultivation of Mersin was essentially based on one foreign commodity; cotton.[27] The export of cotton largely undertook a huge part of Mersin's foreign trade and encapsulated a remarkable element of the development of the city. Yet, the main deficiency of Çukurova at the time lied in its lack of an adequate port which happened to be one of the most important elements in the emergence of Mersin as a port and then, as a city; and likewise, in the changing role of Tarsus in the region.[28]

Tarsus and Adana were two of the significant cities of the region which was known as Cilicia in the ancient era. Tarsus especially had been an important site for settlement due to its geographical location and even was the center of limited commercial activity through its port in the early 1800s.[29] The

26 Ehud Toledano, "Where Have All the Fellahin Gone? Labor in Mersin and Çukurova (Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Filiz, Eyüp Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Springer, (2019), 133.

27 Meltem Toksöz, "An Eastern Mediterranean Port-town in the Nineteenth Century," in *19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları 2002), 15.

28 Tülin Selvi Ünlü, "Bir İskeleden Liman Kentine Doğu Akdeniz'in Önemli Bir Limanı Olarak On Dokuzuncu Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Mersin'de Mekânsal Gelişim," *Planlama Dergisi* 3, no. 4, (2009): 6.

29 Şenay Özdemir, "Osmanlı Döneminde İçel'in Deniz Olanakları," in *19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 105-109. Songül Ulutaş, "Kapitalistleşme Sürecinde Çukurova Bölgesi'nde Yaşanan Ticari Merkez Kaymalar (19. yy) - Economic Changes in the Çukurova Region during the Process of Capitalization in

Kydnos River, which is known as Berdan or Tarsus River today, and the linking Rhegma Lake rendered a convenient inland port status to Tarsus.[30] It was also the residence of foreign consulates in the 1850s.[31] However, Tarsus had to gradually relinquish its port status when the Rhegma Lake[32] was filled with alluvial deposit and turned into a swamp.[33] As a result of this geographical change, the Tarsus Port was eventually replaced with the port of Kazanlı, which was a town closer to Mersin.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the residents of Mersin earned their living through agriculture and fishing.[34] A traveler described it in 1818 as not much more than "a few huts on the shore,"[35] and another traveler disclosed the population of the town to be no more than 100 residents before the Crimean War.[36] Mersin was first discovered during the Egyptian occupation and the following reign of İbrahim Pasha, who was the son of Mehmet Ali Pasha and occupied Çukurova region in 1832-1841.[37] İbrahim Pasha used

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the Nineteenth Century," *History Studies: International Journal of History*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (July 2012), 343-360.

30 Selvi Ünlü, 2009, p.7. Ünlü and Selvi Ünlü, 2008, p.77.

31 Toksöz, 2000, p.107

32 Today, the location of the lake which eventually turned into a swamp is known as Aynaz Swamp and the Karabucak Forest is located there. Levent Zoroğlu, *Tarsus Tarihi ve Tarihsel Anıtları* (Adana: Kemal Maatbası, 1995), 10.

33 Songül Uluta, "Şer'iye Sicillerine Göre Tarsus'ta Ekonomik Yapı" (MA Thesis, Mersin University, 2006), 30. Tolga Ünlü, "Mekansal Planlamanın Kentin Biçimlenmesine Etkisi: Mersin Örneği," *Planlama Dergisi* 3, no. 4, (2009): 29. Selvi Ünlü, 2009, p.7.

34 Emine Dingeç, "19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında ve 20. Yüzyılın Başında Mersin'in Ekonomik Yapısı," (MA Thesis, Anadolu Üniversitesi, 1998), 95.

35 Francis Beaufort, *Karamanya*, çev. Ali Neyzi and Doğan Türker (Antalya: Suna-İnan Kıraç Akdeniz Medeniyetleri Araştırma Enstitüsü, 2002), 266.

36 Theodor Kotschy, *Reise in den cilicischen Taurus uber Tarsus* (Gotha, 1858), 26. Cited in Toksöz, 2010, p.109.

37 Şerife, Yorulmaz, "Doğu Akdeniz'de Bir Cemaat Serüveni: Liman Kenti Olma Sürecinde Mersin'de Gelişen Marunî Taifesi," in *II. Tarih İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 71.

Mersin as the gateway to Çukurova and transformed it "into Tarsus's port village."[38] In addition, Toksöz also discusses that the promotion of Mersin was instigated by İbrahim Pasha as he cultivated the natural port at Kazanlı which was later expanded to reach Mersin, and consequently, introduced Mersin to an expeditious development sooner than expected.[39] However, the functioning of the Kazanlı port eventually came to an end since it was not considered to be a secure location, either.[40]

Nevertheless, the shift of commercial transactions to Mersin was mainly ensued through the increase in trade prompted by the developments in international affairs.[41] Featuring the requirements for a safer and accessible port in the region, Mersin Port was realized to have met the expectations in the 1850s.[42] Initiated by the move of the consulates, even before the Crimean War, from Tarsus to Mersin in winter because of its warm climate, many other residents of Tarsus began to migrate to Mersin due to better trade opportunities and better climate conditions.[43] Another historical development attributed to have impacted the transformation of Mersin was the construction of the Suez Canal as Egypt imported large quantities of limber produced from the trees cut in the forests of the Taurus Mountains and shipped from Mersin in the 1860s.[44] The 1870s had become a cornerstone for the city as its export and import rates started to exceed those of the other ports in the region.[45]

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38 Ehud, Toledano, "19. Yüzyılda Mersin'de Ticaret," in*19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 22.

39 Toksöz, 2000, p.108.

40 Yüksel Akkaya, "19. Yüzyıldan 20. Yüzyıla Mersin Ekonomisi," in *Sırtı Dağ, Yüzü Deniz: Mersin*, ed. Filiz Özdem, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 335.

41 Meltem Toksöz, "Family and Migration: the Mavromatis' Enterprises and Networks." *Cahiers de la Méditerra*née 82, (2011): 360.

42 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.324.

43 Viktor Langlois, *Eski Kilikya*, çev. Rahmi M. Balaban (Mersin: Yeni Mersin Basımevi, 1947), 35.

44 Toledano, 2002, p.26.

45 Meltem Toksöz, *Nomads, Migrants and Cotton in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Making of the Adana Mersin Region, 1850-1908,* (Brill, 2010), 89.

Addressing that Mersin was incorporated into the global economy through a mercantile commercial network, Toksöz urges that the merchants of Mersin "…served as intermediates between European wholesalers and regional retailers, and they also acted as brokers between cultivators and foreign merchants; they spoke both local and foreign languages and they knew the needs and tastes of both sides."[46] In the lack of a reliable banking and credit system, the merchants had to run their businesses on the elaborate relations they established with the foreigners which assisted the promotion of cooperation between the ethno-religious communities of the city. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity of the city did not create any tensions between the communities; instead the city managed to transcend such divisions.

Notwithstanding the presence of a land route between Adana, Tarsus and Mersin which was constructed in 1867[47], the essential boost that the region was in need of was provided by the construction of the railroad which rendered the facilitation of the commercial exchange with the global economy.[48] The railway was constructed in 1886 and improved the transactions of the merchants of Mersin even more. Correspondingly, Hastaoglou-Martinidis argues that the construction of new harbors, followed by railways and other infrastructure facilities, served as a "catalyst for multiple changes in the cities of the Eastern Mediterranean and entailed their radical transformation within just a few decades."[49] Thanks to the railway, Tarsus and Adana which were crucial in the cotton production, were now linked to the port of Mersin for exporting the produced cotton. After the railway connected Mersin to the hinterland, the city was to become the major port of the southern region of Anatolia.[50] The railway did not only link Mersin to its hinterland but it also served to

46 Toksöz, 2011, p.370.

47 İbrahim Halil Aytar, *Mersin Limanı: İskeleden Modern Limanın İnşasına* (Mersin: Mersin Deniz Ticaret Odası Yayınları, 2016), 50.

48 Toksöz, 2002, p.16.

49 Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, "The Cartography of Harbor Construction in Eastern Mediterranean Cities: Technical and Urban Modernization in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Cities of the Mediterranean: From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, eds. Biray Kolluoğlu, Meltem Toksöz, Meltem (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 79.

50 Toksöz, 2000, p.100

establish a connection with the inner Anatolian cities through the Gülek *Boğazı*.[51] In that regard, Mersin evolved into a partial port for the rural cities in inner Anatolia such as Konya, Kayseri and Niğde.[52]

The interconnection between the railway station and the piers had been critical in the urban development and modernization of the city.[53] For instance, the opening of the railroad paved the way for the municipality in Mersin to launch a project in order to construct a light railway between the railroad station and the customs houses in 1889.[54] The goal behind the construction of this light railway was to facilitate the shipment of goods between the piers and the train station.[55] The tram line was the only direct connection between the main street of the city, *Uray* Street, the station and the piers, linking all three to each other.[56] The route of the light railway line was parallel to the coast which demonstrates that the urban growth of the city was in line with the piers and the port.[57] Considering that there is no rail transport system in Mersin even today, this is quite extraordinary.

In the light of these developments, Mersin "superseded İzmir even in the export of grains" in 1889.[58] After the Germans bought the Adana-Mersin rail-

51 Nükhet Adıyeke and Nuri Adıyeke, "Modernleşmenin Doğurduğu Kent: Mersin," in *Sırtı Dağ, Yüzü Deniz: Mersin*, ed. Filiz Özdem, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 74.

52 İbrahim Bozkurt, "Salnamelere Göre XIX. Yüzyılın Sonları ile XX. Yüzyılın Başlarında Mersin'in Demografik Etnik ve Dinsel Yapısı," in*19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 30.

53 Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, and Emel Göksu, "Osmanlı'dan Ulus-Devlete Doğu Akdeniz Liman Kentlerinde Mekâna Müdahale Ve Kent Kimliğindeki Değişim-Mersin ve Volos Örneği (1)," *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 35, no. 1, (2018): 66.

54 Şinasi Develi, *Dünden Bugüne Mersin* (Mersin: Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası, 2001), 89-90.

55 Şinasi Develi, *Eski Mersin'de Yaşam* (Mersin: Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası, 2007), 174-175.

56 Tülin Selvi Ünlü, and Tolga Ünlü, "Ticaretin Omurgası: Uray Caddesi," *İstasyon'dan Fener'e Mersin = from Railway Station to the Lighthouse* (Mersin: Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası, 2009), 74.

57 Songül Ulutaş, and Ozan Arslan, "Yarım Kalmış Bir Modernleşme Projesi: Mersin Tramvay Hattı*," Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 33, no. 1, (2018): 244.

58 Toksöz, 2010, p. 104.

road from the British who provided the capital for the railroad to be constructed, the influence of Germans had started to diffuse to the region.[59] Thanks to the renovations implemented by the Germans, the Adana-Mersin railroad was now linked to and became a part of the İstanbul-Baghdad railroad which established a connection for Mersin to the outer world not only through the port but also through the railroad as well.[60] The transport costs decreased while the financial gain of the producers increased. Plus, the opening of both the land route and the railway between Mersin and Adana altogether point out to the increasing development of the region as a trade center.[61] The improvement of transport facilities led to an increase in cotton exports, and thus, to a more efficient incorporation with the world economy.

Trade regulations and networks in Mersin also portrayed quite an improvement which paved the way for the opening of banks, trade and insurance companies and consulates in the city.[62] Following the railroad, the Ottoman Bank opened up a branch in Mersin in 1892.[63] The cities in which the branches of the Ottoman Bank were opened were usually the ones with considerable economic importance for the Ottoman Empire which insinuates that Mersin was one of them.[64] The opening of the branch of Ottoman Bank propelled Mersin to have an even more active commercial life and "… effectively helped the growth of Mersin, and not other ports of the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean."[65] For instance, in İskenderun, another eastern Mediterranean port, the opening of an Ottoman Bank branch did not take place until

59 Şevket Pamuk, "Commodity Production for World-Markets and Relations of Production in Ottoman Agriculture, 1840-1913," in *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy*, ed. Huri İslamoğlu-İnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 199.

60 Burak Beyhan, and Selçuk Uğuz, "Modernity's Imprints on Mersin: A Reinterpretation," in *19. Yüzyılda Mersin ve Akdeniz Dünyası Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 90.

61 Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2009, p.77.

62 Toksöz, 2000, p.159.

63 Toksöz, 2011, p.376

64 Selvi Ünlü, 2009, p.19.

65 Toksöz, 2000, p.162.

1901 because of the commercial life's dependency on Alexandria. So, compared with the other ports in the region, Mersin was materialized into a commercial center of its own.[66] Following the establishment of a banking system, the Chamber of Commerce in Mersin was founded in 1898[67] and it was the fourth chamber of commerce to be founded in the Empire.[68]

The increasing trade volume of the city reached a peak in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The French merchant shipping company Messageries Maritimes even opened an office in Mersin[69] which betokens that Mersin as a port city was part of a network that involved not only the closer region but the whole Mediterranean region.[70] Furthermore, a branch of Deutsche Orient-Bank was opened in Mersin in August 1909, which was followed by other branches in Tarsus and Adana.[71] Besides, Mersin had telegraphic services by then[72] and it provided the means for efficient communication; in fact it was one of the few places in the Ottoman Empire to have a telegraph office.[73]

By 1908, Mersin was the most crucial trade center of the region.[74] Since these economic developments required the presence of new groups of people to settle in Mersin to take part in the accommodation of a new trade route between the agrarian hinterland and the port, it was no surprise that large groups of people from several places began to migrate to Mersin and eventually generated the human network of the commercial circuit.[75] In other words,

66 Toksöz, 2010, p.130

67 Toksöz, 2011, p.398

68 Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2009, p.106

69 Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie*: *Géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et Raisonnée de chaque Province de l'Asie-Mineure*, vol. II (Paris: E. Leroux, 1892), 51. Cited in Toksöz, 2011, p.362.

70 Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2008, p.100.

71 Meltem, Toksöz, "Ottoman Mersin: The Making of an Eastern Mediterranean Port-town," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 31, (Fall 2004): 86.

72 Toksöz, 2010, p.91.

73 Toksöz, 2011, p.368

74 Toksöz, 2004, p.78.

75 Toksöz, 2011, p.360.

the changes elicited in Mersin had not only altered the economic infrastructure and commercial network, but they impacted the demographic structure as well. As it is observed in most port-cities, the cosmopolitanism introduced by the migrants and the Levantines was a decisive factor in the constitution of the demographics of Mersin.[76]

§ 3.2 The Changing Demographics

With the start of the exportation of timber for the construction of the Suez Canal between 1859 and 1869, Mersin began to attract immigrants from Egypt and Lebanon, mostly from Beirut, as the Taurus Mountains provided a very efficient source for that.[77] Greek Orthodox and Maronite families from Lebanon comprised another group of newcomers to Mersin after the civil unrest in Mount Lebanon around 1840 and 1860.[78] Correspondingly, the archives of the Mersin Latin Catholic Church reveal that the Maronites coming from Aleppo and Lebanon between 1854 and 1894 engendered a considerable portion of the Catholic community in Mersin.[79] Much before these groups, the workers and farmers, known as *fellahin*, were already settled in the region during the reign of İbrahim Pasha around the 1830s.[80] On top of those, the British intervention in Cyprus triggered the migration of Greek Orthodox and Muslim families to Mersin.[81] After the construction of new roads which linked inner land cities

76 Adıyeke and Adıyeke, 2004, p.77.

77 Yenişehirlioğlu, 2019, p.3.

78 Şerife Yorulmaz, "Maronites in Mersin Through Its Process of Becoming an Important Port City (the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century), in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp, Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, Springer, (2019), 96-97.

79 Yorulmaz, 2002, p.5.

80 However, it should be noted here that although these workers and farmers are widely presumed to have come from Egypt, Toledano asserts that in fact most of them were from northern Syria, mainly from Latakia and Nusayri Mountains and many of them were Alawis. (Toledano, 2019, p.141) Traveler Wilson also refers to them as "Ansariyeh from Syria" whose number was increasing every year. (Wilson, 1884, p.314)

81 Yenişehirlioğlu, 2019, p.3.

to the coastal ones such as Mersin, new groups of people from the central Anatolia began to arrive as well. Finally, after the nomadic Turkish tribes which used to live on the Taurus Mountains, who are often referred to as *yörük*s, started to go down the mountains and shifted their settlements to the plain[82], Mersin evolved into a port city with a plural population. However, aside from the officials, very few Turks resided in Mersin but "the floating Turkish population" was large in the province.[83]

These citizens coming from several distinct places and cultural backgrounds surely assembled different socio-economic classes. While the middle classes were formed by the shop owners and manufacturers, the workers at the port and the *fellahin* workers at the fields assembled the lower classes.[84] As the city underwent a process of urban modernization and development, banking institutions, maritime agencies, insurance companies and hotels were opened of which the employees formed the working class. The wealthy entrepreneurs and merchants who acted as the agents of the European countries and undertook positions of vice-consuls at the European consulates in the city, formed the upper and upper middle classes which introduced the city to an active social life. In the end, as Yenişehirlioğlu suggests, the plurality of the population paved the way for the construction of an inter-communal society in Mersin.[85]

As it had started on its journey to become a major port town in the eastern Mediterranean, the first exporting merchants in Mersin were mostly Greeks and Christian Arabs. According to the data of 1891, the population of the Greeks in the city was increasing[86] which attests to the development of the commercial transactions in the city since the Greeks had major economic power.[87] While Mersin was gradually evolving into a major player in the commercial network, the minority group which displayed the highest increase in

82 Wilson, 1884 p.314.

83 Edwin John Davis, *Life in Asiatic Turkey: a Journal of Travel in Cilicia (Pedias and Trachoea), Isauria, and Parts of Lycaonia and Cappadocia* (London: Edward Stanford, 1879), 14.

84 Yenişehirlioğlu, 2019, p.4.

85 Ibid.

86 Adıyeke and Adıyeke, 2004, p.80.

87 Selvi Ünlü, 2007, p.91.

population was the Armenians.[88] After the Greeks, the Armenians were the second most populated minority community in the city.[89]

Another group of power players in the city were the Levantines which encompassed the Latin Catholics and the groups of people coming from Europe. It is reported that even though the majority of the population comprised of Christian Syrians and Greeks,[90] the number of Levantines with Latin origin who began to arrive in the city in the 1850s was rapidly increasing as well.[91] The roots of the first Levantine families residing in Mersin displayed a considerable variation, going back to Marseilleans, Maronites, Gauls, Cypriots and *Adanalı*s (from Adana.)[92] On the side of founding logistic companies, these families mostly focused on trade and investment. Aside from these communities, the city was also home to Jewish, Protestant, Chaldean and Assyrian communities.[93]

The domination of the Greeks in the commercial network of the hinterland and the port-town is palpable since the merchant whose leadership was influential in the trade circuit in Mersin was Konstantin Mavromati,[94] the patriarch of a Greek Orthodox family which pioneered the urban and economic development in Mersin. The ascent of this particular family[95] depicts the opportunities that a migrant family of not more than twenty years ago got to

88 Adıyeke and Adıyeke, 2004, p.78.

89 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.321.

90 Davis, 1879, p.13.

91 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.321.

92 Adıyeke and Adıyeke, 2004, p.77-80.

93 Bozkurt, 2001, p.56.

94 Toksöz, a.g.e, 2011. Irini Reineri, "Industrial Growth in the Sancak of Adana (19. Century): The Business Activities of the Local Orthodox Community," in *II. Tarihin İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 110-114. Candan Ülkü, "Mersin & Konstantinos Mavrommatis Ailesi," in *II.Tarihin İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu, (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 96-105.

95 For instance, Mavromati and his sons, who already worked as moneylenders and gave loans to several people (Aytar, 2016, p.73), eventually established their own bank which was named *Mavromati et Fils*. Their bank grew into being the second most significant bank in the city after the Ottoman Bank (Toksöz, 2011, p.378.) Moreover, through the marriage alliances he

seize in the active commercial and mercantile transactions in Mersin. As a result, the Mavromati family was the most prominent representation of the prototype of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie class which was seen mostly in İstanbul in the Ottoman Empire.[96]

Toksöz delineates the preeminence of the Greek community in the formation of the commercial network not only in Mersin but in Tarsus and Adana as well.[97] For instance, the famous merchant of Tarsus was another Greek named Elias Avania[98] who was linked to trading house of the Mavromatis. *Karamanlıca* speaking *Rum*s from Cappadocia and other Greeks from Cyprus and the Greek islands had started to migrate to the region, and especially to Mersin, in the 1840s.[99] Indeed, Balta evokes that in the Greek literature, the emergence of Mersin, called as *Mersina*, is mapped out back to 1842 when the *Rum*s from Cappadocia and the Greek islands moved to Mersin and came to be the founders of the city.[100] Afterwards, 350 families from Cappadocia, 150 families from Chios and 150 families from Cyprus migrated to Mersin.

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ascertained for his children and grandchildren which served to strengthen his family's communal and personal relations, Hacı Konstantin Mavromati reinforced the impact of his business and permeated it into a much wider margin which surpassed Mersin and reached Beirut, İstanbul and even Chios. One of his daughters was married off to a German financier, named Christmann, who served as the general manager of the Adana branch of the Ottoman Bank and the British and German vice-consul of Mersin later on (Reinieri, 2005, p.110.) Although the Mavromati family and the rest of the Greeks had to leave Mersin after the population exchange with Greece, the two Christian families he married off his daughter and grandson, Tahinci (Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2009, p.188) and Barbur (Reinieri, 2005, p.111 and Toksöz, 2011, p.369) respectively, still have members who live in Mersin today and are active players in the business life of the city. This is a demonstration of the long term effects that Mavromati family and their marriage alliances have had on the future of the business life of the city. These familial networks also engendered a newly constructed circuitry of production and exchange and elicited an extension through familial ties which went beyond Mersin (Kolluoğlu and Toksöz, 2010, p.10)

96 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.331.

97 Toksöz, 2000, p.122

98 Davis, 1879, p.35. Renieri, 2005, p.11.

99 Balta, 2002, p.39.

100 Evangelia Balta, "The Greek-Orthodox Community of Mersin (Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1921," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to*

Other places the Greeks came from included Crete, Santorini, Lesbos, Paxoi and Piraeus.[101] Along with substantiating the strong attachments between the commercial cities in the Mediterranean, this diversity in the origins of migrants also affirms Mersin's potential as a trade center-to be in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean region.

Prior to the construction of the railroad, the close ties between the ethnic and religious communities fortified the merchants against the risks that the lack of banks and a credit system brought along. In such a background, Toksöz elucidates that explaining the predominance of Christians and the rise of Christian mercantile classes in the commercial and trade networks of the Ottoman Empire as a result of the European protectionism is not valid in the case of Mersin. Because the trade network and the mercantile classes in Mersin were already built to a large extent by the Christian immigrants in the first place, there was no need for any kind of extra European protectionism or assistance that would favor the Christians,[102] which once again portrays the peculiar characteristic of Mersin.

As Mersin came into fruition as a port-city in the Eastern Mediterranean, the consular offices in the region had vital significance in commercial relations. After the 1838 Baltalimanı Treaty and the following similar treaties, the Empire acquiesced to give privileges as well as profits to the European countries.[103] Consequently, local merchants were led to engage in trade transactions in the name of foreign companies to avoid taxes imposed on them as the subjects of the Empire.[104] Availing of the privileges required the Europeans to establish strong ties with the local merchants to whom they offered consular protection in exchange. The compelling ties between the two sides paved the way for the consuls to appoint local people as vice-consuls when they were

Modernity, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp, Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, Springer, (2019), 111.

101 Toksöz, 2010, p.107. Also for more on the Greek Orthodox community in Mersin please see Balta, a.g.e., 2002 and Balta, a.g.e., 2019.

102 Toksöz, 2000, p.107.

103 Keyder, Özveren, and Quataert, 1993, p.528.

104 Toksöz, 2011, p.371

away from Mersin. This relationship between the merchants, who initially had arrived in the city as migrants, and the consular offices illustrates that the migrants managed to achieve such high positions both in the economy and in the administration of the city. The number of the consulates in Mersin exhibited a profound rise which indicates the development of the commercial structure of the city.[105]

Apart from the Greeks, the Christian Arabs who are stated to be the remnants of the reign of İbrahim Pasha[106] were heavily involved in the trade network of the city, too. By the mid-nineteenth century, Orthodox Arabs arrived in Mersin from Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Belonging to the same church with the Greeks, the Orthodox Arabs had strong relations with the Greek community which played a determinant role in the commercial activities of the city.[107] By the end of the century, there were 195 Arab Orthodox families living in Mersin.[108] Following the lead of the Greek Mavromati family, one Christian Arab family from Syria, the Boutros, of whom some members are still in maritime trade business in Mersin, conceived to assemble a fortune in the course of two generations through their commercial activities between Çukurova and Damietta.[109] The merchants who did not have as much as resources and networks as Mavromati's and other powerful families, gathered at fairs, exhibitions and markets for networking.[110]

105 Ibid.

106 Toksöz, 2000, p.123.

107 Due to mostly having Arabic as their mother tongue, there is a confusion regarding the descendants of the Greek Orthodox community in the Eastern Mediterranean region of Turkey, in Mersin and Hatay, on the point that whether they should be identified as Arab Orthodoxies or Arabized Greek Orthodoxies today. Balta refers to the ancestors of the ones in Mersin as "Arab-speaking Orthodox Christians, whose church was dedicated to Archangels Michael and Gabriel" which is the name of the standing Orthodox Church in Mersin (Balta, 2002, p.39). For more on this issue please see Haris Rigas, Haris, ed., *Üç Milliyetçiliğin Gölgesinde Kadim Bir Cemaat: Arapdilli Doğu Ortodoksları* (İstanbul: İstos Yayınları, 2018).

108 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.319.

109 Toksöz, 2010, p.108.

110 Toksöz, 2010, p.112.

The distribution of the administrative posts in the city, other than the ones in the consulates, demonstrates a plural administrative culture in which members of different multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities were free to undertake positions. For instance, the Court of Trade included Greek members, a Levantine was in charge of the light house and most members of the *Menafi Sandığı* (regional funds) were Christian Arabs in the late 1870s.[111] As a consequence of the growing volume of trade, Mersin's population displayed a considerable increase as well. Where it was only 900 in the 1870s, it rose to 8000-9000 in 1890s.[112]

Also, the abundance of religious buildings in the city alludes to the religious diversity of the population. According to the dates of the constructions of the monumental religious buildings of the city, the Latin Catholic Church is actually the first religious sanctuary to be built in 1853[113] in Mersin, since the first mosque of the city, Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan mosque, was built much later in 1870.[114] The Maronite Church (1878),[115] the Armenian Orthodox Church (1870)[116], the Arab Greek Orthodox Church (1878)[117], the Greek Orthodox Church built by Mavromati (1885),[118] the Greek Orthodox church in Hırıstiyanköy (literally meaning the village of Christians) which is presumed to have been built after 1890[119], the Armenian Catholic Church (1896)[120], the Armenian Protestant Church (1898)[121] and the synagogue (1906)[122] demon-

111 Toksöz, 2010, p.123.

112 Adıyeke and Adıyeke, 2004, p.77.

113 Hanri Leylek, *Mersin Katolik Kilisesi - 1853 , 150. Yılında Katolik Kilisesi* (Mersin: 2003).

114 Ülkü, 2005, p.103.

115 Develi, 2001, p.116.

116 Yenişehirlioğlu, 2019, p.4.

117 Aydın, 2011, p.94.

118 Balta, 2019, p.114.

119 Aydın, 2011, p.107.

120 Aydın, 2011, p.108.

121 Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, and Fatih Müderrisoğlu, *Mersin Evleri* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1995), 28.

122 Develi, 2001, p.117.

strate the religious diversity of the population as well as depicting the collective plurality in the construction of religious buildings in the city. Today, the only religious buildings which still have a community and are still in service are the Latin Catholic Church and the Arab Greek Orthodox Church.

Although Muslims and Arab Muslims, mostly composed of the farmers known as Fellahin, were in the majority, the Christian population which was comprised of Greeks, Armenians and Catholic Arabs added up to more than one third of the whole population of the city. Armenians had been one of the first communities to have arrived in the city. Indeed, the construction of the first Armenian Church in Mersin in the early 1870s, which was mentioned above, indicates the early migration of Armenians to the city.[123] According to the *Adana Salnamesi* of 1877-1878, Mersin had a population of 595 Muslims, 183 Greeks, 40 Armenians and 47 Catholics.[124] The Public Debt Administration officer Cuinet, who visited the Çukurova region in 1890s, noted that the city had a total non-Muslim population with 260 Latin Catholics, 860 Armenians and 2700 Greek Orthodoxies by the time he visited in 1892. In other words there were approximately 3700 Christians and 6300 Muslims in the city center.[125] So, while the Muslims, including Arab Muslims, comprised the majority, approximately one third of the population was formed by the Christians.[126] This is in line with Davis' observations in which he states "Greeks and Christians of Syria are the principle inhabitants."[127]

When the twentieth century started, Mersin was truly a cosmopolitan urban center. According to the census held in 1906-1907, there were 4,173 Armenians and 3,450 Greeks. Furthermore, there were 101 Latins, 586 Protestants, 632 Catholic Armenians, 208 Greek Catholic, 72 Chaldeans, 70 Jews[128] and 134

123 Toksöz, 2000, p.121.

124 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.318.

125 Cuinet, 1892, p.50.

126 Toksöz, 2004, p.78.

127 Davis, 1879, p. 13.

128 The presence of the Jews was first mentioned in the census of 1892. İbrahim Bozkurt, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Mersin Tarihi (1847-1928)* (Mersin: Mersin Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2012), 73.

Assyrians.[129] By 1908-1909, Balta assumes that there must have been around 3.000-4.000 Orthodox *Rum*s in Mersin by 1908-1909.[130]

Just around the start of the First World War, 31.434 people lived in the city of which 27.484 were Muslims and 3590 were non-Muslims. The largest non-Muslim community belonged to the Greeks with the population of 2273.[131] During and after the First World War, most of the non-Muslims left the region. After the end of the Independence War in 1922 and the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, the demographic transformation gained momentum not only in the Çukurova region but in Anatolia in general. The Greeks were sent to Greece in 1923 and 1924 as a result of the population exchange agreement clause of the Lausanne Treaty. However, the Greeks of Mersin, and Cilicia in general, started to leave much earlier than that as Balta presumes that an estimation of 6500 Greeks left Cilia after the French occupation in the region came to end with the Ankara Agreement in 1921.[132] Keyder signifies that the cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic population which defined port cities had to be chased out because the existence of the new population of the emerging nation states was predicated on the cleansing of the territory which was previously preoccupied with the denizens of the port cities.[133] Subsequent to the departure of most of the Christian Arabs, the number of the Catholic families in Mersin in the early years of the Republic were around 40 and the number of the Catholic families belonging to the Maronite Church around the same time were 70.[134] The results of the census held in 1935 demonstrate that there were 1075 Christians and Jews in total living in the city. According to the 1940 census, this number increased and reached 1429.[135]

The demographics of the city regarding the non-Muslim population has changed a lot since then. The priest and the leader of the Orthodox Church of

129 İbrahim Bozkurt, "Salnamelerde Mersin" (MA Thesis, Mersin Üniversitesi, 2001), 56.

130 Balta, 2002, p.39.

131 Bozkurt, 2002, p.32.

132 Balta, 2002, p.42.

133 Keyder, 2010, p.19.

134 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.321

135 Şekip Alpsoy, "Varlık Vergisi'nin Mersin'e Etkileri," in *II.Tarihin İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 126-127.

İskenderun contemplates that by 2009, 10-12,000 Orthodox Arabs in total lived in Mersin and Hatay of which only %15 is considered to live in Mersin.[136] Today, the Orthodox Church in Mersin, led by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, is presumed to consist of 350 families and 120-150 families are registered in the Latin Catholic Church.[137] However, roughly 90% of the Orthodox families are considered to be originally from Hatay and have migrated to Mersin for economic reasons. Taking into account that towards the end of the nineteenth century, there used to be 195 Orthodox families in Mersin[138], the numbers display a stark contrast with those of the present.

Although the Maronite population in the city is in a decline which is seen in the whole Christian population in general, one of the Catholic Christian interviewees of this study is a Maronite. Another Christian interviewee's husband is a Maronite as well. The Christian interviewee who is a member of a Maronite family tells an anecdote that even though the thought of expressing her identity as a Maronite does not occur to her in daily life, she was invited as a Maronite to a convention organized by the United Nations in Mersin a couple of years ago. She was shocked that they learned about her Maronite identity and invited her as a speaker to talk about the Maronite community of Mersin.

Just like İstanbul and İzmir which completed their transformation long before, Mersin was also one of the Ottoman cities in which the impacts of the ethno-cultural identities of various communities were highly visible but those impacts were embodied in a much more characteristic way which alludes to the peripheral factors of Mersin's specific location and development. For example, whereas the Greek Orthodox population of İzmir was much higher than that of Mersin, the Christian Arab population of Mersin was considerably higher than that of İzmir, which was a remarkable demographic difference between the two port-cities. However, the foundation of a *Frenk* (used as an implication for a Westerner/European) neighborhood in close proximity to the Latin Catholic Church in Mersin, just like the one in İzmir, points out to

136 Ersin Kalkan, "Aziz Petrus'un Torunları," *National Geographic Türkiye*, (Haziran 2009): 128.

137 Personal Interview

138 Yorulmaz, 2004, p.320-321.

the presence of similarities between the two port-cities.[139] Additionally, just like in İzmir, many European countries had consulate offices in Mersin; there were the Dutch, British, French, German, Spanish, Belgian, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Austrian and American consulates in the city.[140] So, a comparison of İzmir and Mersin as port cities would lead to the result that they shared commonalities in terms of "…demographical diversity and cosmopolitanism, the role of Levantine culture and architecture in the definition of respective urban identities, and the development of port facilities and transportation networks under the aegis of foreign capital."[141] These similarities prompt Özveren to suggest that while Mersin reiterated the trajectory of İzmir, it did it "…with a delay but to a greater extent and at an accelerated speed."[142] The rise of no other Ottoman port city studied in the literature had been as expeditious as Mersin's which took place in less than fifty years.

As exhibited by the history of Mersin as a coming-of-age port city from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, a port city had the intrinsic potential to create a bourgeoisie in its own right. The inhabitants of a port city, Mersin in this case, constituted a new community of people from different ethno-religious backgrounds who managed to break away from the culture and traditions of the Empire and come up with the culture and traditions of their own, manifesting the city's peculiar features. In fact, "the development of capitalism and of a bourgeoisie were correlated with the evolution of port-cities"[143] which is why Keyder, Özveren and Quataert suggest that the identification of a port city should be considered as the spatial expression of the core-periphery relationship.[144] The development of the world

139 Yorulmaz, 2002, p.6-8.

140 Lothar Rothar, *Die Stade der Çukurova: Adana, Mersin, Tarsus*,(Im Selbsverlag des Geographiscen Instituts der Universitat Tübingen, 1971), 82. Cited in Yorulmaz, 2002, p.10.

141 Eyüp Özveren, "Mersin as a Mediterranean Port City: A View from the Sea," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp, Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, Springer, (2019), 12.

142 Ibid.

143 Keyder, Özveren, Quataert, 1993, p.524.

144 Keyder, Özveren, Quataert, 1993, p.520.

economy shaped the standard of the commercial activity in port cities. Likewise, the prosperity which the port cities ended up acquiring, shaped the emergence and development of a bourgeois class. The migrant communities, which were in contact with the representatives of the foreign companies that were looking to improve the mercantile transactions they had with the Çukurova region, had become the agents of the transformation Mersin went through. It was such a powerful transformation that a city which was unknown approximately thirty years ago had reached to be one of the best known in the Mediterranean by the turn of the twentieth century.[145]

§ 3.3 The Changing Urban Identity

Since Mediterranean is not purely geography, the peculiar Mediterranean traits "penetrate large areas of mainland and have a vast and varied impact" in some places[146] which resonates with the case of Mersin. Matvejević predicates that "the peculiarity of the Mediterranean's position and homogeneity of its space make it seem a world in and of itself or the center of the world."[147] Matvejević's assertion about the differentiation between cities with ports and city-ports also clarifies the expeditious progress Mersin had displayed since the mid-nineteenth century. "Cities with ports differ from city-ports, the former building their piers out of necessity, the latter growing up around them by the nature of things. In the former they are a means and afterthought; in the latter, starting point and goal."[148] The case of Mersin, again, fits the second explanation as its foundation and development were instigated by the nature of things due to the increasing volume of trade and commerce.

Since Mersin as a city has been found in a relatively later time period, it lacked "organic urban patterns" that are discernible in the old neighborhoods

145 Cuinet, 1892, p.51. Cited in Toksöz, 2010, p.92.

146 Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape* (University of California Press, 1999), 12.

147 Matvejević, 1999, p.7.

148 Matvejević, 1999, p.14.

of the Ottoman cities which were found much earlier than the nineteenth century.[149] Mersin's urban development had followed a dissonant path in contrast to the urban patterns of the other Ottoman cities in Anatolia because the city in the first place was found out of necessity to respond to the growth of global trade in the region in the late nineteenth century.[150] Mersin's path into creation of urban space, where the the commercial activity and socio-economic life of the city concentrated around the port and the piers, followed a similar path as well.

In parallel to the other port cities, Mersin had a characteristic and dynamic daily life. The rich cosmopolitan culture of the city was demonstrated in the construction of modern facilities such as hotels, restaurants and casinos. Beyhan conveys that along with its cosmopolitan culture, the basic socio-economic characteristics of Mersin, which overlapped with those of the other Eastern Mediterranean port cities, were the abundant social and cultural facilities, the financially affluent residents and the significance of trade and industry.[151]

Until the foundation of the Republic, Mersin displayed an outstanding urban development "where congregational relations and international trade relations shaped the urban fabric."[152] Since this swift development was not planned beforehand, the city had no construction plan whatsoever. Things had changed when the plan devised by Hermann Jansen came into force in 1938.[153] This served as a breaking point in the urban planning and urban spatial development of Mersin as it was the first construction plan of the city.

149 Burak Beyhan, "Entrepreneurial Spirit and Modernization of a Port City: The Case of Mersin," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp, Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, Springer, (2019), 200.

150 Tolga Ünlü, "Changes to Urban Form in Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: Formation and Transformation of the Çamlıbel Neighborhood in Mersin," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp, Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Tülin, Springer, (2019), 235.

151 Beyhan, 2019, p.199.

152 Yenişehirlioğlu, 2019, p.5.

153 Ünlü, 2009, p.28.

Professor Hermann Jansen became the architect of the first urban development plan of the Republic with the plan he devised for Ankara in 1932.[154] He went ahead to devise plans for other cities such as Tarsus (1940), Adana (1940), Ceyhan (1939), Gaziantep (1938) and İzmit (1938).[155] He was invited by the mayor of Adana to Çukurova region[156] which led the mayor of Mersin at the time to ask him to design a plan for Mersin as well. According to the plan Jansen came up with, the two elements which would designate the characteristics of Mersin were the port and the sea. The port would enable the city to develop as a commercial center and, likewise, the sea would allow Mersin to preserve its characteristics as a coast city. The most important design element in the plan was the sea itself. During the period in which Jansen's construction plan was in effect, Mersin depicted an urban development towards the west while the urban origins of the city was managed to be maintained. The relationship between the city and the sea was embraced as an essential part of the peculiarity and identity of the city.[157] Therefore, the urban context of the city which was created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the coastal silhouette was preserved until the 1960s.[158]

However, Mersin manifested an urban development much more expeditious than predicted. The plan designed by the Bank of the Provinces that came into effect in 1963 was not fully implemented as it was envisaged to be, and had also been subjected to several modifications to build roads.[159] The silhouette of Mersin, which was considered to be a key element of the identity of the city, began to deteriorate with the multi-storey buildings. After 1985, although there was an evident quantitative increase in construction plans, these

154 Gönül Tankut, "Jansen Planı: Uygulama Sorunları ve Cumhuriyet Bürokrasisinin Kent Planına Yaklaşımı," *Tarih İçinde Ankara*, 2, (2000), 301-316.

155 İlhan Tekeli, "Türkiye'de Şehir Planlamasının Tarihsel Kökenleri," in *Türkiye'de İmar Planlaması*, ed. Tamer Gök (Ankara: ODTÜ Mimarlık Fakültesi Baskı İşliği, 1980), 78.

156 Beyhan, 2019, p.192.

157 Tolga Ünlü, and Tolga Levent, "Mersin'de Kentsel Mekanın Biçimlenmesinde Jansen Planın Etkileri," in *II.Tarih İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 170-172.

158 Ünlü, 2009, p.34.

159 Ünlü, 2009, p.34-37.

plans were being subjected to modifications very frequently. These modifications eventually got to serve as an instrument for issuing building permits for even more high-rise buildings at the city center which impacted the transformation of the urban context. The urbanization of the city has gained a new momentum in the 1980s and new areas of housing have emerged. Ünlü states that 74% of the settlements in Mersin by 2000 was actually constructed after 1980, according to a study conducted by the State Statistical Institute.[160]

When it comes to the influence of trade on the urban growth of the city, the construction of the new port sets a milestone. After the Republic, the expansion of the trade volume of Mersin was sustained and it was the third port of Turkey, after İstanbul and İzmir, in terms of exports in the 1930s.[161] Besides, the fact that İskenderun was left out of Turkish borders until 1939 earned Mersin the title of being the only port of the country in the south.[162] As the trade volume was assumed to expand even more after the reconstruction of the port to provide a more modern outlook, the port was decided to be re-constructed by a Dutch company.

The reconstruction was finished in 1962. The wide land reclamation, which caused filling a large part of the sea with concrete to build a road alongside the shore, generated a massive transformation in the urban fabric the city. Because of the land reclamation, all the piers were demolished which paved the way for the customs buildings that were considered to be the center of the commercial activity to be left ineffective.[163] As the new port was built in a more confined place in the eastern part of the city, much far away than the formerly prominent piers, the relation between the city and the port, which is the main elemenet of the identity of a port city, was irrecoverably ruptured. This leads Selvi Ünlü and Göksu to reveal that rather than being a port city like it used to be, Mersin was now only a city that has a port which irreversibly hindered

160 Tolga Ünlü, 2007, 434.

161 Melike Kara, "Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Mersin Limanı'nın Gelişimi," in *II. Tarihin İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 133.

162 Halil Mithat Karagülle, Mersin Liman Ehemmiyeti ve Faaliyeti," *İçel,* 2, (14-5), (1939): 4-5.

163 Selvi Ünlü and Ünlü, 2009, p.128.

the former urban structure of the city that was based on the port and the sea.[164] Therefore, Matvejević's differentiation about cities with ports and city-ports once again comes to the fore in the case of Mersin. Nevertheless, this time it has turned from a city-port into a city with a port, which has built the port out of necessity as a means and afterthought, rather than as the starting point and goal like it had done in the late nineteenth century.[165]

Following the changes and developments, the construction of the new port irretrievably impacted the urban structure of the city. The relation of the city with the sea and the port was decisively fractured.[166] Initiated by the construction of the new port, the city and the sea were disconnected and isolated from one another which caused "a loosening in the relationship of the city to the sea" and consequentially reduced the former Eastern Mediterranean port city Mersin to "a city with a port."[167] Although it had been a medium scaled Mediterranean settlement with a distinct urban identity and peculiar characteristics until the mid-twentieth century, after the construction of the new port in 1960s, Mersin started to resemble the other Turkish cities and eventually lost its former urban identity.[168]

Starting with the 1960s, urban planning has remained inefficient to render Mersin a distinct characteristic and effectively control the urban growth and development. For the last decade, the urban development of the city has shifted towards the northern part where the rapid constructions of high-rise buildings, gated communities and new roads are going on. The interviewees of this study are all unhappy and disgruntled with the multi-storey buildings which are visible even from many kilometers away and with the new context the urban growth of the city has adopted. The Mersin they narrate in their

164 Selvi Ünlü and Göksu, 2018, p.72-73.

165 Matvejević, 1999, p.14.

166 Tülin Selvi Ünlü, "On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıldan Yirminci Yüzyıla Doğu Akdeniz Liman Kentlerinde Mekanın Dönüşümü: Volos, Patras ve Mersin" (PhD Thesis, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, 2016), 233.

167 Tülin Selvi Ünlü, and Melike Kayam, "The Port of Mersin from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth Century," in *Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities: A Study of Mersin, Turkey – From Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Filiz Yenişehirlioğlu, Eyüp Özveren, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, Springer, (2019), 175.M

168 Ünlü, 2009, p.27.

anecdotes belongs to the period before the 1980s when most of the high-rise buildings had not been built yet. Likewise, the land reclamation and filling the sea with concrete to build new roads constitute a significant part of the narratives in this study. The interviewees relentlessly talk about how much nicer Mersin had been prior to the land reclamation and where the sea would end in those times and how there used to be a beach where there is a road today. For instance, one interviewee actually calls upon this issue by asserting that the construction of the new port was what destroyed Mersin in the first place. However, it needs to be underlined here that the place narratives are not evidences of historical facts because the "physical world exists independently of our perceptions of it"[169] but they are significant sources to reflect the perceptions of the interviewees regardless.

"The biggest disservice to Mersin has been the construction of the port right in front of Mersin in the times of Menderes. You know what, the shore of Mersin used to nothing but sand. … There were historical remnants of the rocks of the piers there. It used to be sand all over again after that. … If only the port had not been built… The port was initially supposed to be built in Karaduvar, closer to Kazanlı. It should have been built there. Mersin would have been so beautiful then. It would have been a touristic city, it would have been in competition with Antalya. They brought the port, put it right in front of Mersin and filled it with concrete. Unfortunately." (Catholic Christian, 71)

§ 3.4 Chapter Conclusion

As it has been illustrated throughout the chapter, the Eastern Mediterranean port cities had more or less followed a similar pattern. Aside from trade, cultural impacts and migration also played a major role in the formation of the port cities in this region. As all the Eastern Mediterranean port cities have connections with one another, they embodied a peculiar kind of network and cosmopolitanism. In a very recently published editorial book on the specific study of Mersin as an Eastern Mediterranean port city, Özveren underlines Mersin's emergence as a port city with the characteristics inferred from the

169 Eber and Neal, 2001, p.5.

parameters of the Mediterranean world and highlights what the conspicuous peculiarities of Mersin signify for the Mediterranean world of which it is an essential part.[170] He states that if the Mediterranean world is a logically conceived theoretical construct, "… then its characteristics could be traced back to the observable characteristics and traits of certain realities manifest in the concrete space of Mersin." Besides, port cities such as Mersin are considered to be "…where modern ideas and practices become visible and tangible, where the contradictions with the traditional modes of thought and behavior are the most evident."[171] The introduction of modern ideas and practices instigated and triggered in this era have diffused into the city and its residents in such an extent that the narrative of Mersin's characteristic modernity is quite influential in the oral history interviews conducted with the women of Mersin for this research. While a new city was founded from scratch in the mid-nineteenth century, this new urban formation was affiliated with a plural population which comprised of the settlers that migrated to the city from several different geographical locations and created a collective plural culture peculiar to Mersin.

In this chapter, I reflected on the port city status of Mersin and explored how it came to be a major Eastern Mediterranean port city in the late nineteenth century. After giving the socio-economic background of this transformation, I examined the demographic transition the city went through during process of its evolution into a port city. In the last part of the chapter, Then, I discussed the urban development of the city in order to emphasize the urban change which transformed the city from a port city to a city with a port. The mismanagement of the urban plans after 1960s led to rapid urbanization. On top of that, the construction of the port which paved the way for land reclaimation, demolishing the piers and filling a part of the sea with concrete transformed the urban fabric of the city for good. A port city, which came to the fore in the mid-nineteenth century as one of the most prominent in the Eastern Mediterranean with a dynamic commercial activity and high trade

170 Özveren, 2019, p.10

171 Keyder, Özveren, Quataert, 1993, p.522.

volume, was permanently reduced to being a different city which only happens to have a port.

4

Modern Women of a Modern City

When I first contacted the interviewees through snowball sampling, I initially told them that I was doing a research on the local women of Mersin who were over a certain age. So, as I was introducing myself before the interviews began, not surprisingly almost all the interviewed women asked if I myself were truly from Mersin. Upon learning my maternal grandmother and her family were from Tarsus, they answered "Oh so you, too, are from Mersin after all," despite my informing them that my nuclear family moved to Mersin in 1989 which makes me one of the newcomers myself. A familial connection proving the interviewer's association with Mersin before the 1990s seemed to give them enough assurance to voice their criticism against the newcomers even though my nuclear family wasn't one of the true *Mersinli*s like theirs. According to them, the residents of the city who arrived in the last three or four decades without having a familial connection to Mersin before, are not truly considered to be from Mersin. Both the Muslim and Christian women find it necessary to express that theirs are one of the oldest families of Mersin who have been living there for a very long time rather than being one of the new ones who have moved to the city in the last two or three decades. The Muslim women accentuate the roots of their families belonging to Mersin and Çukurova region whereas Christian women use the expression of "the founding family of Mersin" since Mersin used to be a fishing town of a few hundreds before their families and other Christians migrated from several

parts of the Middle East and Northern Africa, as it has been discussed in detail in the last chapter.

The narratives reveal that the modernity of Mersin has two origins. One is the modernity that the port city past of Mersin has imprinted on the city and the denizens and the other is the Republican modernity. The Christian interviewees ascribe to and associate themselves with the port-city modernity whereas the Muslim interviewees underline the modernity which was introduced to the city through the Republican reforms. These two sources of modernity sometimes overlap and sometimes diverge from one another. Nonetheless, there is a compatible co-existence between the two. The Christian interviewees decisively accolade the Republican reforms. Likewise, the Muslim interviewees appreciate the presence of the Christian community in the city which they attribute with the pre-Republican era and regard them as the source of Mersin's distinction from other cities. Therefore, the two sources of modernity do not seem to be at conflict with each other.

One common striking point in the narratives is that they tend to define their memories of the past through their experiences in public space in Mersin. Even when they are talking about marriage and motherhood, they advert to the social activities they used to attend with their husbands and children. The Merchants Club takes up a significant part of the narratives as it was an important urban space in the city. However, the narratives of the Muslims and Christians in regards with the Club include different contexts as they attributed different meanings and memories to it.

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the narratives of the interviewees in order to comprehend their perceptions about the life stories of their mothers. At first, I am going to discuss the narratives about the education, marriage life and social life. Then, I will delve into the perceptions of the interviewees in regard to their own life stories. I will argue to what extent their lives were affected by the Republican reforms in terms of private and public space. By focusing on their narratives about Mersin and the social life in the city, I aim to unravel their perceptions about nostalgia and modernity.

§ 4.1 Backgrounds

The Muslim interviewees draw attention to the roots of their families which have been in Mersin for at least a couple of generations. Their families have moved to Mersin more than a hundred years ago. While some interviewees have had familial connections with close towns such as Adana and Tarsus, some others have come from places further away. However, what needs to be pointed out here is that they have all come from somewhere, either close or far away, to Mersin.

"My mother's paternal grandmother got married and came to Mersin. ... My father is from Adana, too. I mean, if you look for a true *Çukurovalı*, it is us." (Muslim, 74)

"We have been in Mersin for seven generations." (Muslim, 73)

"Our paternal side is from Denizli. They came as *kadi* during the French occupation. And my mother's side is Cretan emigrants, they came from Crete to Mersin with the population exchange." (Muslim, 80)

"My mother's side of the family are Cretan emigrants. They arrived in Mersin from Crete after the population exchange with the Gülcemal ferry." (Muslim, 77)

"My family is not from Mersin. I mean, my mother and father were born in Mersin but the ancestors, our grandmothers and grandfathers were Cretan emigrants. They came during the reign of Abdülhamid. Not after the Republic; long before than that. It has been more than a hundred years since my family came. We are considered *Mersinli*; I was born and grew up in Mersin. So were my mother and father." (Muslim, 80)

As it is indicated in the anecdotes above, Mersin embodies a Cretan community which is demonstrated in the sample of this study. The Cretan population of Mersin should be approached in two categories; the first one comprising of the people who arrived during the reign of II. Abdülhamid in the 1890s and the second one with the people who arrived after the population exchange with Greece in 1923. The Cretan background of the members of the Cretan community constitute a strong influence on how they identify themselves. The life that their families had in Crete has constituted a solid part of their identity to such an extent that some members of the third generation of

those families founded a Mersin Cretan Association to establish a network between the families with Cretan backgrounds. They strive to learn to speak Cretan and Greek and arrange regular trips to Crete to spot and visit the houses that their families used to live in. There used to be a Cretan neighborhood in the city of which the name is changed to İhsaniye today, but it is still widely known in public as 'the Cretan neighborhood.' The residents of the neighborhood, also known as the Cretan village, Melemez, hold annual celebrations on the day of the Cretans' arrival in Mersin[1] and also have been holding festivals and touristic events to attract tourists in the last couple of years.[2]

Three Muslim interviewees have Cretan backgrounds in their families. One interviewee's family moved from Crete to Mersin during the reign of II. Abdülhamid in the 1890s. The family of one Muslim interviewee's husband, who is also from Mersin, consists of Cretan emigrants who came to Mersin in 1923. Two of the Muslim interviewees are sisters and their mother's family arrived in Mersin from Crete after the population exchange agreement with Greece in 1923[3] and their narratives display the non-diminishable bond they had with the Cretan part of their identities. They even visited Crete in order

1 Mehmet Şirin Erbey, "Girit Türkleri Anavatana Gelişlerini Kutluyor," Çukurova Gazetesi, last modified on 01.03.2018. Accessed February 9, 2019. http://www.cukurovagazetesi.com/girit-turkleri-anavatana-gelislerini-kutluyor-47590.html. Adnan Açıkgöz, "Girit Türklerinin Anavatana Gelişinin 96. Yıldönümü," CNN Türk, last modified on 24.02.2019, accessed March 1, 2019. https://www.cnnturk.com/yerel-haberler/mersin/merkez/girit-turklerinin-anavatana-gelisinin-96nci-yildonumu-934279

2 "Akdeniz'de 'Melemez Köyü Giritliler Festivali' Coşkusu", Hürriyet, last modified on 20.04.2015, accessed February 9, 2019. http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/akdeniz-de-melemez-koyu-giritliler-festivali-coskusu-37095527

3 For more on the population exchange between Turkey and Greece, please see Ayhan Aktar, "Nüfusun Homojenleştirilmesi ve Ekonominin Türkleştirilmesi Sürecinde Bir Aşama: Türk-Yunan Nüfus Mübadelesi, 1923-1924, in *Ege'yi Geçerken, 1923 Türk-Yunan Nüfus Mübadelesi*, ed. Hirschon, Renée, çev. Müfide Pekin, and Ertuğ Altınay (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007). Kemal Arı, *Büyük Mübadele: Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç (1923-1925)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995). Hirschon, Renée, ed., *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Herkül Millas, ed., *Küçük Asya Araştırmaları Merkezi – Göç: Rumlar'ın Anadolu'dan Mecburi Ayrılışı (1919-1923)* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001).

to find the house in which their mother lived as a child and met their relatives who still lived there. At the same time, their narratives shed light to the bureaucratic difficulties that the people arriving from Greece had to endure to legally claim the new land and property that the government was supposed to assign to them in exchange for the land and property they had to leave in Crete.[4] In this particular case, the interviewee's family had to wait for more than twenty years to get the documents proving that they were the owners of the new land given to them by the government. By the time they got the documents after 1944, her grandmother and grandfather, the first generation of Cretan emigrants, passed away.

The recurring pattern in the familial backgrounds of the Christian women was that almost all of them are either from Lebanon or Egypt and arrived in Mersin in the 1800s. As it is mentioned in the last chapter, the port-city characteristics of Mersin were consolidated with the Christians and Levantines who settled in the city and mostly dealt with trade and exports which is why the Christian interviewees consider themselves to be among the founding families of Mersin.

"We are the founding family of Mersin. Seven or eight fishermen's families traveled here and there and liked it here. Then they migrated here and founded Mersin. The records of the church verify (their being one of the founding families) as well." (Catholic Christian, 84)

"In the year of 1840, Tripolis, Lebanon. Syria then used to be Lebanon. (as an answer to the question of where her family came from). The founding family here, N…. They came as two brothers. Those two brothers each had five kids, those five kids each had eight or nine kids. … My mother is Italian. My husband's family came from Lebanon as well. Some of them stayed in Tarsus for a while, then moved to Mersin right away and established a marine agency. The Christians here mostly dealt with trade, marine agency and with legumes for exports." (Catholic Christian, 80)

4 Çomu discusses these kinds of bureaucratic problems the Cretan emigrants had experienced in Mersin in detail. For more please see Aslı Emine Çomu, "Mersin Mübadilleri 1923-1960 – Migrants in Mersin 1923-1960," in *Akdeniz Kentleri: Gelecek için Geçmişin Birikimi- 4. Tarih İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu* (Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 73-79.

"We came here from Tripolis, Lebanon, in the 1850s. … My grandmother, my mother's mother, was from Alexandria. My mother's father came from Lebanon. My mother's mother came to *Kız Kalesi* (the Maiden's Castle on the sea) from Alexandria. My mother's father's family came from Lebanon in the 1850s. … A family which has never got out of Mersin and has lived in Mersin from the 1850s to 2017." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"Our ancestors, you already know, had come from Lebanon. My father's side came from Lebanon and my mother's side came from Cairo, Egypt. Egypt, Greece, Egypt and then here. Migration, migration everywhere. Of course everybody received migration." (Catholic Christian, 80)

"… All of them, my mother and my father as well, came from around Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo. They resided in Tarsus, after a while they moved to Mersin." (Orthodox Christian, 72).

Tarsus occupies a considerable place in the family backgrounds of the Christian women. As explained in detail in the last chapter, before Mersin evolved to be a port city, the main port and urban center of the region used to be Tarsus, a fact which is in line with the familial histories of the interviewed Christian women. In a similar vein, the narrative of a Christian interviewee who insinuates that the Christians were the founders of the villages in the Gözne, the *yayla* twenty kilometers away from Mersin, conforms to the historical facts since Cuinet ascertains that the notables of Adana and Mersin, among whom were surely Christians as well, spent their summers in those settlements above the sea-level.[5] Likewise, Davis also talks about the same place, as *Geuzna*, as the chief summer resort in the city and even resides there in the house of Mavromati which again shows that the Christians of the city had houses there.[6]

"Of course in the years of 1850s this place had the composition of a village. Tarsus was so big. Tarsus, of course, had been a port city throughout the history since Cleopatra. Today what hideousness it is, with the bad settlements…" (Christian Catholic, 71)

5 Cuinet, 1892, 61-62. Cited in Toksöz, 2000, p.150.

6 Davis, 1879, p.16-17.

"…When they came to Tarsus, my grandfather worked as a judge in the criminal court. They came to Tarsus. They went to Çamlıyayla, they lived there, they lived in Fındıkpınarı and they lived in Gözne. (the upland plateaus of the region) The villagers in Gözne are in love with the Christians, they still do their work. Go and ask those villagers, the first founders are the Christians. (Orthodox Christian, 72)

§ 4.2 Life Narratives

4.2.1 *Education*

All Muslim interviewees except one are either university graduates or graduates of teacher training schools. They all exceeded the education level of the prior generation of women in their families. Since all the interviewed women belong to the second generation of the Republic, they had more access to education and participation in professional life compared to the women of the previous generation. The constructed identity for women to be 'modern, enlightened and educated' was more consolidated by the time of the childhoods and youths of the interviewees of this study.

Six out of seven Muslim interviewees resumed their education until they got a university degree and a profession. Five of them are university graduates of which four are alumnae of the same university, Ankara University. One of them is a graduate of teacher training school in Adana but she got a university degree later. Of the seven Muslim interviewees, there is only one woman who is a high school graduate and did not get a university education. She has never professionaly worked. Her family had the financial means for her education but because she lost her father at a very early age and was an only child, her mother did not want to send her to another city for university education. The interviewee utters her deep remorse about not studying at university and not working.

Four out of seven Muslim interviewees are teachers and they worked until retirement. One of the non-teacher interviewees worked at a completely different job before she got married but started teaching English as a tutor at a private institution in her late 30s. The other non-teacher interviewee worked

intermittently at different jobs both in Mersin and in Ankara but then quit for good after she moved back to Mersin. Of the seven Muslim interviewees, there is only one woman who has never participated in professional life throughout her entire life and that is the same interviewee who could not go to university.

Only one of the four retired teachers is a graduate of teacher training school; ergo a primary school teacher. However, she worked for twenty years and got her first retirement at 38 years old. After that, due to a new regulation, primary school teachers were granted the right to become university graduates on the condition that they enrolled in a degree program for two years. She attended a program and eventually got her degree and became a social sciences teacher which led her to return to teaching at 47 years old. She worked for a couple more years and got retired for the second time. All in all, she is a university graduate as well.

The other three retired teachers were already university graduates which made them specialized in majors and teach a specific subject at elementary and high schools from the beginning of their teaching careers. One interviewee was a mathematics teacher, the other one was a geography teacher and the last one was a literature teacher. All three worked at public schools for more than twenty years until completing the required years of service for retirement. The retired geography teacher makes an explicit remark that she and her two sisters are all retired teachers; but rather than studying at the teacher training school in Adana which was the general norm for most of the female students in Mersin, all three of them went to high school and then to the university.

"We are three sisters. None of us three went to the teacher training school. They (girls in general) went to the teacher training school in Adana after finishing elementary school at the time. We went to high school." (Muslim, 80)

The girls in general were expected to finish studying as soon as possible and start earning a living as teachers which is why they went to teacher training schools after elementary school and got their diploma to become a teacher. However, this interviewee comes from a notable family in Mersin, an old family of the *eshraf*, the provincial elite, which is an important factor in the unconventional path she and her sisters followed which is entailed in her narrative. Furthermore, Özsan manifests that *eshraf* families place importance on

which schools their members attend and what kind of education they receive because education serves as an instrument of distinction among others and reproduces the social class they belong to.[7] Bearing a symbolic significance, education also functions as a constructive element in their family narratives to demonstrate that theirs was a rooted family with a long history of taste and manners, aside from the financial capital.[8] This analysis clarifies the emphasis that this interviewee made about the university education of her and her sisters which was unconventional for the time.

Despite the majority of the teachers of the time being graduates of teacher training schools, as mentioned above, there is only one teacher training school graduate in the sample of this study. In accordance with the quote above, she was a graduate of the teacher training school in Adana, which was one or two hours away on a train ride from Mersin at the time. Her case bears a resemblance to that of the interviewee who is not a university graduate and has never worked because she was not supported by her mother to resume her education, either. However, the mothers had different reasons as to oppose the education of their daughters. The aforementioned interviewee was an only child and her mother hesitated to send her out of town to the university even though she had the financial means to do. But this interviewee is the only one of her sisters who studied until she got a profession and her mother did not want her to study because she was a girl. The mother of the interviewee, who got married when she was fourteen years old and gave birth to twelve children of which five had died, was not even content with her daughter's going to school, let alone being happy about her being a good student and intention to resume her education. The mother did not how to read or write and never worked outside the house as she had seven children to look after. So, the interviewee was more than glad that she was the only girl in her family to receive an education and in the end, become a primary school teacher. She also reflects that the education of girls used to be approached with doubt and criticism at the time.

7 Gül Özsan, "Eşraf Ailelerinin Statü Kazanma Mücadelesinde Kadınların Rolü," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 117, (2010): 79.

8 Ibid.

"… When I was going to school, my mother used to call behind me and say 'God willing, you will fail.' We had a house at the plateau, at Fındıkpınarı. We had a neighbor there. … She used to say to my mother 'Nazmiye *Hanım*' she said, 'you happen to have such a (good) daughter that I wish our kids were like that (her), too.' But my mother did not want that. My milieu, the people in her milieu (did not want that)." (Muslim, 73)

As this narrative demonstrates, the society was not always ready to adopt the Republican reforms as a whole in regards with providing women public visibility and granting them equal rights with men for education and employment. These women living in a peripheral region of the country legally had the right for education and employment but their seizing these rights was frowned upon in the socio-cultural context. Still, as it is exhibited in the life story of this interviewee, regardless of the lack of support of families and the social milieu, thanks to the rights for education and employment that women legally had, a female student was able to finish her education and become a teacher even in a small city in the periphery.

One of the Muslim interviewees constitutes an exception among the others by being the only one who was sent to a school out of Mersin for elementary and high school education. Her mother, who was the only one among the other interviewees' mothers with high education and work experience, decided to send both of her daughters out of Mersin to İstanbul and Ankara for elementary school after they graduated from primary school. The interviewee mentions how much she missed her home and family as it was her first time getting out of Mersin and staying away from her home and family. The families sending their daughters to other cities for education was so few at the time that it was quite extraordinary for these two sisters to get both their elementary and high school education outside of Mersin. The mother herself was a graduate of the teacher training school in Konya which might have affected her decision to send her daughters away for education at an early age. The mothers of the rest of the Muslim interviewees were either primary school graduates or had not gone to school at all and they condoned their daughters' leaving Mersin only for their university education, if at all.

Arat suggests that parents overall preferred the education of their sons over that of their daughters and inclined to support their daughters' academic

or professional education only if they did not have any sons.[9] The case of this particular interviewee's mother enacts yet another exception because while she sent her two daughters to boarding schools out of Mersin at the age of eleven, she did not do the same for her only son. She enrolled him at a school in Mersin while she sent both of her daughters to İstanbul and Ankara. Therefore, this interviewee's mother' decision regarding her children's education contradicts with Arat's argument and denotes to the presence of families which placed more importance on the education of their daughters in comparison to that of their sons. However, it is noteworthy to state here that the interview's mother did not want to send her son out of Mersin for education because she thought she wouldn't be able to bear being away from him. Nevertheless, it is still noteworthy since the mother didn't seem to have the same concern about not being able to bear her two daughters' absence.

Another Muslim interviewee also brings forth this issue of sending daughters to boarding schools out of Mersin and associates this with the modernity of Mersin and its people. However, she could not attend one because her mother did not let her which depicts that not every family was willing to send their daughters away from Mersin to other cities for education.

"Mersin was so modern that people used to send their daughters to colleges in Ankara and İstanbul then. I wanted to go so much but my mother did not let me and that was because of her conservatism." (Muslim, 74)

Interestingly, the education life of the Christian interviewees of this study were noticeably shorter than that of the Muslim interviewees. The only primary school graduate in the sample for this study is a Christian; yet she attended the Girls' Institute but quit before graduating because she got married at the age of 16. For the middle and upper middle class Christians, leaving Mersin and attending a school in other cities or abroad is much more common in the narratives which is one of the reasons they can speak a couple of languages. The children of the Christian families were more likely to be sent to the schools teaching in languages other than Turkish in İstanbul, Aleppo, Damascus or Beirut. However, it needs to be underlined that the Christian women who could afford to study abroad are primarily the daughters of the

9 Zehra Arat, 1998, p.168.

upper middle and upper class Christians who were able to afford it. For the lower and lower middle class, the education of girls, especially abroad, was not accessible. The daughters of the families with lesser means were not able to go to school at all. For instance, while a Christian interviewee from an upper middle class family tells that she and her mother both went to schools in Beirut because they did not speak Turkish fluently at the time, another Christian interviewee is a primary school graduate and her mother never did not receive any education whatsoever. As most of the Christians in Mersin come from Christian Arab backgrounds, they mostly spoke Arabic at home while growing up. Learning a new language, preferably French, and speaking it fluently is the main reason they were mostly sent to French schools in Lebanon and Syria.[10]

Language training displays quite an influential pattern in the education backgrounds of the Christian interviewees. For instance, one of them is a graduate of Saint Benoit High School in which the main education language is French. Two of the interviewees never studied at a Turkish school; and of those two, one went to an Italian school of the Latin Catholic Church in İskenderun and the other went to a French school in Beirut. Another Christian interviewee went to a high school in Aleppo after graduating from a primary school in Mersin. One Muslim interviewee confirms the non-Muslim students' going abroad for studying after primary school as well. As to the reason of that choice, the Christian interviewee who studied in Beirut elucidates that she did not speak Turkish when she was a child and learned Turkish later in

10 Hourani suggests that the French culture had been influential on the Catholics living in the Eastern Mediterranean; especially on the Lebanese Maronites. The various missionary schools that the French opened in the region had cultivated the French culture to have an impact on the Catholics, which might be why there was a trend among the Christians in general to send their children, daughters as well, to the French schools in Beirut and Aleppo. Albert H. Hourani, "The Political and Social Background in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Economic History of the Middle East 1800-1914,* ed. Charles Issawi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 29.

Yorulmaz also asserts that there is a clear French influence on the Catholic Lebanese which might be interpreted as a specific local characteristic of the Eastern Mediterranean region and as the reason why the Christians of Mersin were different than the ones in İstanbul and İzmir. Yorulmaz, 2002, p.8.

her life only to find employment. So her parents thought she had better gone to a school in Beirut. The other interviewee explains that the school of the Latin Catholic church, teaching in Italian, in İskenderun was still open as opposed to the schools teaching in other languages in Mersin which were all closed down after the Republic. Since they had relatives in İskenderun, she was sent there to study.

Three Christian interviewees learned to speak Turkish not while growing up, but in their youth and adulthood, which is why they still have a slight accent. As their families were worried that they would not have been able to succeed at schools teaching in Turkish, they were sent to Beirut and Aleppo to study at schools teaching in French and Arabic. Plus, most of those schools in Beirut and Aleppo were managed by nuns so that the students could get a proper religious education as well. Since they would not have been able to have a religious education in Turkish schools, this was another factor in the decision of the Christian families of Mersin to send their children to the schools abroad. For instance, one interviewee studied at the school of the Latin Catholic Church in İskenderun. Also, the interviewee who is a graduate of Saint Benoit College in İstanbul explicitly mentions the school was run by nuns at the time.

Among all the Christian interviewees, only one of them went to a high school in Mersin which was a Commercial High School and she notes that she was the only girl in her class. The notion that the interviewees managed to surpass the education level of the women of the prior generation of women in their families holds true in the case of the Christian interviewees as well. Nevertheless, the amount of time spent for education in the lives of the Christia women interviewed for this study is considerably shorter than that of the interviewed Muslim women. None of them are university graduates. Regarding the ones who studied abroad, the fact that they got their high school training at schools abroad might have been considered as a valid reason not to resume their education further at university. Moreover, as it was discussed above, the majority of the Muslim interviewees are retired teachers and they worked at public schools as civil servants throughout their careers. As it is also displayed in the sample of this study, working in public sector and being a civil servant were popular career paths among the first and second generation of women of

the Republic. However, since working as a civil servant was not an option for the Christians due to legal restrictions pertaining to the minorities, it is possible that language training felt more useful for securing a job in private sector in the future. For instance, the Christian interviewee who studied in Beirut had a long career in private sector which made her work in different cities and countries, thanks to the languages she speaks. So, rather than resuming her education in university, as it was already convenient for her to find a job because she could speak a few languages, she decided to start working right away.

The only Christian interviewee who studied at a high school in Mersin did not resume her education further because she got married. Only one Christian interviewee, the one who studied at Saint Benoit, mentions her unrealized wish to have a university education and study law. She couldn't do it because her father passed away after her high school graduation and as an only child, she had to stay in Mersin and work in order to earn a living for her mother.

"They (the non-Muslims) went to school in Beirut and we would envy them. They used to be engaged with trade, their financial strength was better. They would finish primary school here and then leave (to study abroad.) Most of our friends in our class at primary school were non-Muslims." (Muslim, 77)

"My mother had never gone to a school here. Unfortunately, me neither. It was the trend to send (girls) to the French school in Beirut then." (Catholic Christian, 80)

Another detail alluding to a difference of mentality about education between the two communities is that while the Muslim interviewees studied at co-ed schools as it was dictated by law, all of the Christian interviewees except one resumed their education sexually segregated schools after finishing primary school. One interviewee attended the Girls Institute. The schools the rest of the Christian interviewees studied at, especially the ones in Beirut and Aleppo, were mainly schools managed by nuns which only accepted female students.

However, it should be mentioned that the teacher training schools that Muslim families essentially preferred their daughters to go to were segregated into two for boys and girls as well. But since only one Muslim interviewee in this study is a graduate of teacher training school, in the case of the sample of

this study, the difference between the educational backgrounds of the interviewees of two communities illustrates the positive influence that the Republican reforms and the introduction of equality in right of education for women had on the education of the interviewed Muslim interviewees of this study.

4.2.2 *The Work Lives*

The interviewees are members of the professional class with Western aspirations which has been driven by secular motives. Through their own merits, they have become a part of the professional class which has had Western and secular objectives. Therefore, when it comes to the work life, the stories of the Muslim and Christian interviewees follow a similar pattern. Most of the interviewees from both communities had long careers for which they worked until they reached the age of retirement. There is also one interviewee from each community who has never professionally worked. One Muslim interviewee worked intermittently; she worked at a bank in Mersin until marriage and then she worked in Ankara at a government office around the time she had her second child. She had to quit when she and her husband decided to move back to Mersin for good and has not worked ever since. Two Christian interviewees worked until marriage but quit afterwards because they married into financially well-off families and did not need to work. So as much as there are similarities regarding the work lives of the interviewees from both communities, there are also discernable differences. For instance, although there are four retired teachers among the Muslim interviewees, there is none among the Christian ones.

The Muslim interviewee who worked intermittently complains that she had to go to work the day after she gave birth to her second child through a difficult labor. She worked at a government office in Ankara then and her husband was an academic in one of the most prominent universities there. She had one child who was going to the primary school when she had the second one. After she gives details about the long labor, she conveys her astonishment at herself that she got up and went to work the day after. However, rather than blaming her boss or the absence of a maternity leave, she blames herself for her sacrifice and says she wouldn't have gone to work the day after labor if she had known better.

The narratives of the retired teachers converge on the point that they all enjoyed teaching and loved their jobs. In fact; one of them loved the school she was working at so much that she never switched to another one and worked at the same school as a geography teacher until retirement. They all speak affectionately of their memories and express their love for the students they had taught. Another underlined point in their narratives is that teaching is a profession done with the heart rather than the mind. They mention the low amounts of wage they earned throughout their careers and accentuate that they did it not for the money but for the love of teaching. They also compare the manners of the students, the governmental education program, the Ministry of Education and the educational regulations of those times with the current ones and express their appreciation of the past. So, in a sense, nostalgia plays an important role once again in the narratives regarding their teaching experiences. They also allude to the high number of women among teachers and praise them. One interviewee explicitly criticizes her male colleagues who used to complain of the low salary. She speaks of the tenacity with which she did her job and it seems that she was rewarded in that because her former students surprised her with a book they wrote about her a couple of years ago. She happily showed the book to me and insisted on lending it to me so that I could read and learn how good of a teacher she was from first-hand. An interesting part of her narrative was that she didn't use her maternity leaves even though she has had two children since both of the births took place in the summer months. Another interviewee goes into more detail about how the parents were a positive influence on the quality of education in Mersin and she also points out to the fact that she had taught to the children of families from different social classes in a self-praising tone. Since she got retired and then went back to teaching after earning a university degree, she talks of her second experience at teaching in a more criticizing tone compared to her first.

"For instance I started working at this profession 1963 and there were a lot of women at all the school I worked at. Thanks to Atatürk and what he has done for women. Today women do not appreciate enough what he did for us because like a spendthrift, they had freedom, revolution and this comfort pre-

sented to them. … I had been the teacher of the most valuable people of Mersin. I taught the son of the janitor of the school as well as the children of K.[11] So, the janitor's kid was with me (meaning he was a student in her class) as well as the kids of K. … Neither Mersin is the old Mersin nor are the children the old children. The teachers are not the same teachers, either." (Muslim, 73)

"We had done very good teaching because the Ministry (of Education) was good, the regulations were good. The executives were even better. The births of my children coincided with the summer holiday. We have never thought of using our maternity leave. … This profession especially is done with the heart." (Muslim, 77)

The narratives about their teaching experiences do not include narratives about being a woman and rather concentrate on what a holy profession teaching is. This reminds Kandiyoti's delineation that women had to be "as sexual and devoid of their essential femaleness"[12] in order to be accepted into public life in Republican Turkey. Kandiyoti explains that there is a paradoxical relationship between Turkish women's gender roles and their professional roles. Turkish women's sense of gender, even though it is strong, does not tend to infiltrate in their professional lives in the same disseminated way it does the Western women's cross-sex professional interactions. The rigid cultural definitions of femininity facilitate the redefinition of women in positions of power as "nonfemale." Kandiyoti also refers to the cultural structures which are driven to construct some cross-sexual encounters as "neutral" by asserting kinship idiom labels for unrelated women such as sister, aunt or sometimes even mother with explicit emphasis of asexuality.[13] As the female teachers were in positions of power, they were shown respect as teachers and referred to as "lady teacher" (*öğretmen hanım* or *hoca hanım*), which makes them more apt to be considered as nonfemale in cross-sexual interactions with men. Durakbaşa also talks about the new forms of masculinity and femininity which were introduced by the Kemalist Republican ideology that "incorporated in

11 A prominent and wealthy family of Mersin.

12 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Slave Girls, Temptresses and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel," *Feminist Issues*, (Spring 1988): 45.

13 Kandiyoti 1987, p.328-329.

its modernist reforms a project of degendering and regendering."[14] While it was expected of women to be moral and virtuous wives and enlightened mothers in the private space, they were expected to be masculinized or asexualized social actors in the public space. Likewise, Tuncer also discusses that the presence of women in the public space was "as de-gendering subjects, absent of their female sexuality," and goes on further to express that women's undomesticated sexuality was controlled by one of the two alternatives: by either confining women into the familial roles of mother and wife or by "downgrading her femininity and rendering the female body almost asexual."[15] As a result, their narratives about teaching are rendered without any mention of the experience of being a woman.

However, as opposed to the other three retired teachers whose narratives of concentrated on teaching only, there is one interviewee who sets an exception. This particular interviewee's narratives include femininity and sense of fashion which she used to display at work. Another detail worthy of note here is that she was a primary school teacher rather than the other three who were specialized in a subject and worked at elementary and high schools. So, out of four retired female teachers in this sample, only one explicitly talks about her assertion of her femininity in her work place. Since this is a small sample, it is hard to claim whether her case is a mere exception or there are other cases like hers which would contradict with the suggestions in the literature which were given above.

"I was a young girl then like you and they loved my outfits and style. They appreciated (me) a lot and my professional success as well. … As a primary school teacher, because I had half the day off and since I loved dressing up, I would buy my fabrics and sew skirts which were 30 centimeters. Think about it; this is Mersin. My mother would say 'make the hemline in the back a little longer.' I never forget; once when I was working at İleri Primary School, a friend said to me, 'X, I swear I saw your underwear.' I said 'Oh, what color is it Fatma?' I made no concessions. This is how modern it was." (Muslim, 73)

14 Ayşe Durakbaşa, "Kemalism as Identity Politics in Turkey," in *Deconstructing Images of the Turkish Woman*, ed. Zehra Ara (U.S.A: Palgrave, 1998)b, 141.

15 Tuncer, 2014, p.60-61.

One Muslim interviewee, who is one of the two non-teacher Muslim interviewees, has had an unorthodox career. When she was a university student in Ankara, she worked at miscellaneous jobs to earn a living. She worked as a translator, as an English tutor and even worked as a model for the *Olgunlaşma Enstitüsü* (a vocational school for girls) and walked on the runway for a show the Institute organized to demonstrate the dresses that the students made. After graduation, she worked at TRT (State Radio and Television Corporation) in Ankara for four years. She loved her job and talks about that one time she got to interview İsmet İnönü for the fiftieth anniversary of Lausenne Treaty with great honor. Nonetheless, she had to resign from her position after she got married because her husband was assigned to an attaché position abroad. Later in life, they moved back to Mersin and as her son was growing up, she decided that she wanted to resume her career but had to do it in a different path than she did in the past. She got offered a job from the Çukurova branch of TRT. At the same time, a couple of her friends were setting up a private education institution in which they would teach English to students. They offered her a job as well. Even though she wanted to get back to working for TRT, she turned down their offer as it would not be convenient for her role in the household.

"… But the work life at TRT is very intense; you would have to work overtime, you would have to be sent out of town, I mean it's an active job. I have a small kid, my husband is a bit umm… He has principles, he is a tidy person, and he does not like messiness and wants everything to be in order when he gets home. So I accepted the tutoring job and not TRT and worked non-stop for twenty years. I did it very happily." (Muslim, 70)

The part of her narrative where she feels the need to defend her ultimate decision to turn down TRT's offer by referring to her husband's tidiness and his being a man of principle is a depiction of how married women are expected to prioritize their husbands' wishes and preferences even long after they get married. Her husband supported her decision to work but when left between two job offers, she chose the one which would be more convenient for her husband and for her role in the household.

The stories of the professional lives of the Christian interviewees resembles those of the Muslim interviewees in this respect as well. Out of six Christian

interviewees, only one has never professionally worked and it's because of the heavy load of housework and childcare since she has six kids. Among the rest of the five Christian interviewees who had professional lives, two interviewees worked for a short while until they got married and quit afterwards. One of them worked at the Dutch company which was one of the constructing companies of the Mersin port in the 1960s. The other one had a brief work experience at a private firm as well. These two interviewees who did not work after marriage respectively had three and four kids and since both of their husbands were financially stable, they preferred not to work.

The rest three Christian interviewees worked until retirement. One of them had worked both in Mersin and İstanbul in private sector for more than thirty years. Thanks to the four languages she speaks fluently, she also worked at the abovementioned Dutch company which founded an office in Mersin during the construction of the Mersin Port. Due to the dinners and parties the Dutch employees organized at the small village which the company set up for their accommodation, she also had a vibrant social life while she worked with them since she was invited to all of those events. Later on, after the foundation of Ataş Oil Refinery in 1962, she started to work as the assistant of a general manager there. She worked in other companies in İstanbul afterwards.

The other two Christian interviewees always worked in Mersin; in fact, they worked together at the Mersin branch of a public bank and they both speak very highly of their experiences. So, in my sample which consisted of six Christian women in Mersin of the age group of 70 and 84, three of them had careers and worked until their retirement. However, since this is a very small sample, it is not a reflection of the proportion of working women among Christian women of their age group.

"For instance, I worked at Bank X. We were three Christians at Bank X. … There were Jews working at the bank as well. At Ottoman Bank, at Bank X. Mr. H. (a late well-known Christian in Mersin) used to work there as well." (Orthodox Christian, 72).

"She is my friend from the neighborhood and from work at the same time. We worked together at Bank X [talking about the Christian interviewee with the quote above.]" (Catholic Christian, 71)

The interviewee who has six children and who has never worked is a primary school graduate and at the same time a drop-out of the Girls Institute. She started at the Institute after primary school but quit after she got married at 16 years old. Because she was so involved with housework and childcare, the thought of working outside the house never crossed her mind. The same interviewee also tried to convince me to talk to her husband rather than interviewing her, suggesting that since she had been so caught up with housework and childcare, she has not had the chance to go outside the house much and did not know much about Mersin, either. She mentioned that academics from Mersin University came to interview her husband a couple of times about the history of Mersin because they are one of the oldest families of the city and her husband had a shop at the historical market place. However, she herself has never spoken to them or has been asked to speak. She points out that she was fine with it and did not find it odd. Her narrative speaks volumes about how the experiences of women are rendered invisible and not worth talking about. She has internalized this viewpoint to the extent that, just because she was a housewife and has been so involved with housework and childrearing, she believes that she has not had any experiences worth telling. The inclination of this interviewee to dismiss the heavy housework she has had to do all her life as 'not real work' is an epitome of how "dominant ideologies distorted and made invisible women's real activities, to women as well as to men," whereas in fact women "experienced housework as actual labor, as a practical activity that filled their daily existence."[16] Accordingly, this interviewee describes her experience of giving birth to three children by natural labor before the age twenty and then taking care of them as "just giving birth and raising them."

"When you have a profession, when you have a shop at the market place… and we have been in Mersin forever. We are locals of Mersin but since he (her husband) interacted with everyone, he knows Mersin better. He is not like me. I just gave birth to children and raised them. He knows Mersin very well. … We did not work. My mother-in-law did not work, either. My mother did not work, either. Because I have six kids, I was occupied with looking after them, I never worked. … I had three children by the time I was twenty years old so

16 Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner, 1987, p.106.

I didn't bother. I had three kids when I was twenty years old, I raised those three as triplets. We all did, though; my mother-in-law, my mother, my father, all of us." (Catholic Christian, 84).

As Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner concede, the ability of women to value their own experience and perception is impeded by self-doubt and hesitation, especially when their private experience does not conform to the cultural values pertaining to how a woman is supposed to feel and think.[17] As activities which are almost always associated with women and femininity, childcare and housework are not considered as real work and women who have engaged in these activities throughout their whole lives are inclined to feel that way about their own perceptions and opinions. Women have internalized the cultural values imposed on them which do not take the thoughts of women, who have been home-bound and dealt with housework and childcare their whole life, seriously to such an extent that they do not value their own thoughts and experiences, either. This interviewee's insistence that she does not have anything to tell me either on Mersin or on herself verifies this statement. She insisted that she wouldn't have anything to tell me because she has been in the house almost all her life. But afterwards when we got to talking, she told me a lot of things when I asked her direct questions.

Correspondingly, Göğüş Tan et al. infer that in the oral history interviews they conducted with the members of the first generation of the Republic, the women tended to stay silent unless they were asked direct questions because they believed that they did not have anything worth telling. This induces Göğüş Tan et al. to state that for a person, in order to even believe that he/she has a story worth telling about life experience, there needs to be some fortunate circumstances such as having an education, being a man, living in the urban area and so on.[18] Conforming to their observations about the women they interviewed, this particular woman I interviewed was not quiet at all when I asked her direct questions. She was not homebound and isolated as she thought she was because she has had several friends and acquaintances with whom she has kept in touch. But other than that, she was adamant that she

17 Anderson, Armitage, Jack, and Wittner, 1987, p.114.

18 Göğüş Tan, Şahin, Bora and Sever, 2007, p.46.

had no stories to tell as she was home all the time and before I asked her direct questions, she insisted that she did not have anything to tell.

İlyasoğlu mentions the presence of an "epic genre" in the narratives of the prominent and educated women of the Republic who belonged to the elites of the early Republican era. Those women, İlyasoğlu argues, express their belonging to an elite class on the basis of family status, education and profession which leads them to adopt a discourse that goes beyond the norms of a dialogue between the oral historian and themselves. Those women's narratives are prone to be mistaken for a speech given to the public as they talk about their life stories by distancing themselves from them in a narrative structure and adopt a narrative discourse which assembles their experiences with the ideals of the Republic. Conversely, the narratives of the underprivileged women tended to be more direct and constructed in a framework which demonstrated their life struggles and coping mechanisms with the problems they encountered in life.[19] Even though the interviewees for this study were from the second generation of the Republic and they come from middle and upper middle classes, some of them adopted the epic genre in their narratives as well. However, it is hard to make a generalization based on class out of their use of epic genre in their narratives, because it varied from interviewee to interviewee. For instance, one Christian interviewee, a woman coming from an upper middle class family and who had a career in private sector does not adopt this epic genre whereas two Muslim interviewees, one from an *eshraf* family and one from a middle class family and is a retired teacher uses it. One of them talks about her memories about her teaching experience in a praising tone in which she distances herself from the narrative. The other interviewee who is also a retired teacher tends to speak in the same tone and refers to herself in third person from time to time. This kind of narrative goes hand in hand with their own values and attitudes and the Republican claim to raise elite women in professions. These women are proud of the success they had

19 Aynur İlyasoğlu, "Cumhuriyet'le Yaşıt Kadınların Yaşam Tarihi Anlatılarında Kadınlık Durumları, Deneyimler, Öznellik," in*75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, ed. Ayşe Berktat Hacımirzalıoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 193 and Aynur İlyasoğlu, "Kadınların Yaşam Tarihi Anlatılarına Kadın Çalışmaları Alanından Bir Bakış," *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru*, ed. Aynur İlyasoğlu, and Necla Akgökçe (İstanbul: Sel Yayınları 2001), 31.

shown in their professions which was teaching and do not refrain from emphasizing it.

4.2.3 *Marriages*

The studies focusing on the increase in the age of marriage of women in the 1960s-1970s reveal that the increase was related to the improvement in the education levels of women, especially in the case of large urban centers. For instance, according to the findings of the Hacettepe Research in 1973, the average age of marriage in urban areas for women who had secondary or high school education was 26.41 and was assumed to be higher for women who had higher education in university and further.[20] In an empirical research conducted in Ankara in 1965 and 1966, Fox also dissects that 66% of women who were from families with urban backgrounds for one or two generations were likely to get married at the age of 20 or even higher.[21] Similarly, the age of marriage for the Muslim interviewees of this study, who got married in the 1960s, seems to have been postponed at least until the women finished their education and for some of the cases, until they got a job. Compared to their mothers before them, there is a gradual increase in the average age of marriage in the case of the Muslim interviewees in this study.

According to a study conducted in 1968 in the three largest cities of Turkey; İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, one-third of women were introduced to their future spouses by their families and made arranged marriages.[22] The same study also exhibits that the rate of marriages where the spouses met each other at the engagement was 16%.[23] What is more, in another empirical research conducted in 1966 in Ankara, it was found out that 73.2% of marriages were arranged.[24] Equivalently, despite the increase in the average of marriage, the

20 Ferhunde Özbay, "The Impact of Education on Women in Rural and Urban Turkey," in *Women in Turkish Society,* ed. Nermi*n* Abadan Unat (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 174

21 Greer Litton Fox, "Some Determinants of Modernism among Women in Ankara, Turkey," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 35, No.3, (1973): 523.

22 Serim, 1972, p.95-97.

23 Serim, 1972, p.97.

24 Greer Litton Fox, "Love Match and Arranged Marriage in a Modernizing Nation: Mate Selection in Ankara, Turkey," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 37/1, (1975): 186.

marriage patterns of the Muslim interviewees of this study display diversity. While two interviewed women made arranged marriages over the age of 30, the rest five met their spouses independently. One woman met her spouse at university in which they were students in the same major. One of them met her spouse at work. Another one met her future husband in the neighborhood when she was a teenager and the last one met her spouse through her cousins at university who were friends with her future husband from Mersin. The last interviewee met her husband through her friends in Mersin.

Five Muslim interviewees met their spouses independently and got married in their 20s except for the two women who made arranged marriages in their 30s. One of those two Muslim interviewees, who is a retired mathematics teacher, got married at 35, an age which might still be considered as quite old for marriage in Turkey even in the twenty-first century today. The other Muslim interviewee, who is a retired primary school teacher, got married at the age of 33. So, both of these women who got married at older ages made arranged marriages. As much as their ages of marriage were unconventional, their arranged marriages was common even in the large urban centers of Turkey, let alone in a small city in the periphery like Mersin. However, one interviewed woman who met her husband independently, asserts that in Mersin, meeting independently, rather than the arranged marriages, was the norm.

"Mersin was very romantic. Everybody met their spouses independently. Arranged marriages were so few. It was a city like that." (Muslim, 74)

The earliest age of marriage among the Muslim interviewees is 22 whereas it is 16 among the Christian interviewees. One Christian interviewee who worked at a public bank until retirement also got married at 19 years old while the rest three Christian interviewees got married over the age of 20. So, in this aspect, it could be said that the education and employment rights for women which the Republican reforms brought to fore, served to prolong the age of marriage for the Muslim interviewees of this study as the span of education life extended. After the Muslim families started to send their daughters to school as a consequence of the state policy, education and employment rather than marriage had to be prioritized in the lives of the daughters.

For all that, it needs to be highlighted that although the age of marriage was pushed back, all of the Muslim interviewees eventually got married

sooner or later as it was – and still is - presumed as something that has to be done at some point in women's lives. But the only unmarried woman among the interviewees is a Christian. She broke off an engagement for which she was persuaded by her family, though, which manifests that arranged marriages occurred in the Christian community, too. She was 19 years old and accepted it in order to not upset her father but after her father passed away, she broke it off. She never got married which was –and still is - quite an unusual thing for a woman in Mersin at the time. The women who have never got married or had kids were so few that some of the interviewees still remember them by name and the names they enunciate tend to belong to Christian women which demonstrates that most of the women who somehow managed to remain unmarried and not to get married off by their families at the time were Christians.

"… I grew up with such a good joy. 'Oh' I said, 'How nice. I shall never get married, I shall dedicate myself to this Mersin,' I said. When I told my mother 'I won't get married'…Well I didn't tell her anything, I neither told her this stuff nor anything else. 'Never mind,' I said, 'I want to live with you.' Of course there was that as well, I was an only child, how could I do that? I had a life of this kind." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The only divorcee among all the interviewees is a Christian, too. She met her husband at work and he was not from Turkey. She was 25 years old when they got married. Although she mentions him in one of the anecdotes that she relays of the time when she was engaged to him, she has not referred to their divorce. She has one daughter out of that marriage.

The other Christian interviewee who is one of the retirees of a public bank got engaged at 18 years old and got married one year later. Yet, she was already working at the public bank when she got engaged and she never quit. Hers was an arranged marriage like the engagement of the other Christian interviewee described above. Her husband's mother wanted her son to get married with the interviewee. Even though it was arranged by her mother-in-law, the interviewee accentuates that she and her husband are soulmates. The Christian interviewee, whose early marriage was mentioned above, got married at the age of 16 with a legal permit obtained from the court since she was younger than

18, the earliest legal age for marriage. Hers was an arranged marriage which was organized by her mother-in-law as well.

Another Christian interviewee met her husband through a friend who is also among the interviewees for this study. The friend happened to be the niece of the interviewee's future husband and introduced them when they ran into him on an occasion. Compared to the other Christian interviewees, she got married at a later age than them, at the age of 26. Likewise, another of the Christian interviewees met her future husband during her brief work experience as an executive assistant when she was 20 years old. In short, among the six interviewed Christian women, two of them made arranged marriages before the age of 20 whereas the rest three met their spouses independently at work and got married in their twenties and one of them never got married.

Kaplan explicitly delineates that "at the very heart of feminist theory is a challenge to the dichotomous use of terms such as 'public' and 'private, 'personal' and 'political."[25] Likewise, the dichotomy between public and private takes up an undeniable place in the interviewed, if not all, women's lives. The experiences in the private space for the women of Muslim and Christian communities, especially after marriage, is quite complementary with each other. Women from both communities were expected to assume an active role in the household and in childcare in particular. Competence in housework and things related to it such as embroidery and sewing, which were perceived as necessary for women, were supposed to be essential for marriage. The women were supposed to undertake all the things related with housework and childcare in the household.

"In my time, when a girl was asked for marriage, it was told as 'she knows sewing, she knows work [housework], she knows embroidery, and she knows how to cook. It was told so, I heard so when I was a child. I learned (all of those) later on, not during my childhood because I loved reading so much." (Muslim, 74)

As noted above, in parallel with the Muslim community, the Christian women were also expected to assume an active role in the household. Two of

25 Gisela Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 1.

the Christian interviewees in particular, who had more children than the others and did not work, were more engaged with housework and childcare compared to the rest, even though one of them was financially better off than the other. The resemblance between these two women's experiences in the private realm; one who had four children and belonged to the upper middle class as her husband was a ship-owner and his family owned a lot of property in the city, and the other who had six children and belonged to the middle class as her husband was a shop owner and their families were not financially doing well to begin with, portrays that class was not a determinant factor in ascertaining women's private roles in the household. A married woman was expected to be fully engaged in housework and childcare, regardless of the class she belongs to. But between these two Christian women there was an essential difference. The one from the upper middle class could afford to hire a maid to help her with housework and childcare while the other one from the middle class only had her mother and mother-in-law who was living with them for help.

The lack of economic well-being to hire a maid for help attributed a huge difference between these two Christian non-working women's social lives. Despite being a mother of four, the one from the upper middle class could find the time and opportunity to go outside the house whenever she needed to or felt like it whereas the other interviewee, a mother of six, puts her experience in words as "I couldn't get out of the house because then who would have taken care of the kids?" She underlines that she couldn't even get out of the house to accompany her children on their first days of school because her other children needed to be taken care of at home. She defines herself as "An old mother who has six children. All of her children studied at university. Thank God, the grandchildren all studied as well, thank God." She identifies herself only as a mother and has reservations about talking about anything else than her motherhood and housework even when she is asked to.

Her narrative is an indication that the internalization of her lack of participation in the public space led her to dedicate herself to her roles in the private space and because of the heavy responsibilities she had in running the household, she had neither time nor the opportunity to participate the public space much often. Her anecdote below about the difficulties she had to endure with

housework are demonstrations of how the technological changes at the micro-level "subtly altered the infrastructures and perception and over time expanded women's maneuverable space."[26] During the time the Second Wave feminist movement was gaining momentum which brought upon inevitable macro-level changes for women, the most important technological novelty introduced to women's lives was the laundry machine.[27] In a survey conducted in Belgium in 1987, participant women who were asked to name three most important positive changes that took place in women's lives in the last century, picked the invention of the laundry machine as the third most significant change in their lives with 28%.[28] The results of this survey exhibit that the invention of the laundry machine was deemed almost as important as the right to vote for women, which was named the second with 29%, as it somewhat lessened the hard domestic work which was placed upon their shoulders. It served to save much needed time[29], especially for women of big families. Accordingly, the narrative of the Christian interviewee below displays the changes that the laundry machine generated in her life as a mother of six children. As it is brought to the fore by her narrative, even the laundry machine, for which she is quite grateful, did not suffice to rid her from the troubles of domestic labor. Cowan discusses that although women availed of the laundry machine in time saving, that re-gained time was apparently lost again to middle class women because it was spent for the fulfillment of other chores and tasks regarding childrearing and the overall household. Even though the requirements of the domestic role changed thanks to the innovations introduced at the macro-level which rid women of the obligation to wash clothes or dishes manually, the time dedicated to the domestic chores did not change as women had to allocate that extra time to other household chores. Therefore, time

26 Kaplan, 1992, p.13

27 Keşoğlu, Birsen Talay, 2007, p.3.

28 Kaplan, 1992, p.13.

29 Kaplan, 1992, p.40.

spent in household chores has not decreased in general but rather increased.[30] This argument resonates with what the interviewee talks about below.

"I have not worked in the women group of the Church or anything like that because your Uncle X (her husband) did all that ... He used to go to the first day of school when they started primary school, he went to all. I couldn't get out of the house because then who would have taken care of the kids? I mean, at those times, there was no laundry machine. I used to wash the dirty clothes with my bare hands. Everything was done manually. I don't specifically yearn for any kind of machines now, any of them. However; thank God I have everything, but the laundry machine is the best. When the machine finishes the laundry, I say 'God bless you,' my friends laugh at me. But I say 'it's the best one', I mean the rest is dishwashing. You have two cups and you wash them instantly but laundry is not like that. I know what I had suffered, that's why. I had washed clothes day and night with my bare hands for ten years. Today, childcare is very easy. Women complain but what is it compared with the old times? For instance, I raised my kids in swaddles. How many diapers were there every day…" (Catholic Christian, 84)

The other non-working Christian interviewee from the upper middle class had the chance to go to the club of the Chamber of Commerce which is referred as 'the Merchants Club' and play card games there with her friends in spite of having four children very close at age because she had a maid for help. As her husband was a ship-owner and member of one of the most prominent families of the city, it was quite convenient for her to attend the public life in her own terms or with him on his occasions related to work. In fact, the name of her husband's family is mentioned in the books about the history of Mersin among the first group of Christian families to arrive in Mersin and get involved with trade as well as owning huge portions of land. She lived in one of the oldest and most famous mansions of Mersin[31] for 22 years which used to

30 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Industrial Revolution in the Home," in *The Social Shaping of Technology*, (2nd ed.), eds. Donald A. MacKenzie, and Judy Wajcman (Philadelphia: Buckingham, Open University Press, 1999), 290-291.

31 For more on the characteristic Mersin houses please see Filiz enişehirlioğlu, "Mersin Evleri," in *Sırtı Dağ, Yüzü Deniz: Mersin*, ed. Filiz Özdem (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 177-190 and Yenişehirlioğlu and Müderrisoğlu, a.g.e., 1995.

belong to her husband's uncle and is still standing today in one of the old neighborhoods of the town. As a result of her economic well-being, she managed to get out of the house and enjoy herself from time to time. Notwithstanding her marrying into one of the oldest and wealthiest families of the town and being able to afford to hire a maid who helped her in the house, her roles as a mother and a wife required her to assume an active role in the private space and give priority to the upbringing of her children and the problems related with the house, especialy in the winter as heating an old house was difficult. Accordingly, her narrative contains bits from the social life she was fortunate enough to have but at the same time focuses on the difficulties she had with housework and childrearing.

A common feature between the interviewed women of the both communities is that, with the exception of the Christian interviewee who is a mother of six, they all enjoyed an active social life where they could get out of the house and attend several activities. Their narratives converge on the point that they believe Mersin's socio-cultural life used to be much more liberated in the past than it is today. When talking about their childhood, youth and adulthood, they speak very fondly of the Mersin of the past. Albeit when the teenage romances they lived in high school are recounted, there are implications as to how the dates had to be kept secret because of the risk of the parents hearing about it and ending up with a bad reputation.

The narratives of the Muslim women about watching their attitude and behavior in public space in order not to harm their virtue and morality signify the other side of the coin in public life in which they were able to participate after the Republic. As a manifestation of the new democratic nation state, women were encouraged to participate in public life for education and employment; however, when it was a matter of relations with the opposite sex, they were expected to behave as 'moral and virtuous' women and obey the cultural traditions. While they were expected to be modern and westernized, it was also expected of them to "represent the authentic cultural values of the national tradition"[32] as the responsibility to ensure proper social conduct in the social relationships with men was considered to have belonged to women.

32 Tuncer, 2014, p. 57.

The women were to "preserve basic codes of female virtue" and were expected to be "…highly cautious of not being seductive."[33] So, the public acts and behaviors of women were considered as the determinants of their morality and virtue and the narratives of the interviewees substantiate that once again. After more than sixty years later, the interviewee tells her memories of going to the movies with her boyfriend in high school and sitting on his bike behind him as a courageous act and expresses her shock and shame about her own behavior at the time. These narratives of the interviewed women exhibit the dual role that women had to assume in the newly introduced social life. Another conspicuous detail the narratives include is the hint at the suffocating experience that growing up in a small city in the periphery where most of the people knew each other might generate.

"I used to sit on his bike behind him and we went to the movies together. I'm ashamed now. Yes, how brave I was; what a courageous person I was. I mean, not everyone would have been able to do that. 'Let's skip the school today,' I would say (to him.). … We were very scared of getting a bad reputation." (Muslim, 80)

"We were scared to death, we would wander around with our heads down because of the fear of getting our name a bad reputation. During my mother's girlhood, if someone got engaged with someone and then break up, it would taint her name. It would be very difficult for her to remarry. But our time was a little more liberated than theirs. Still we, too, were very scared that our name would be getting a bad reputation." (Muslim, 74)

One Christian interviewee relays an incident she experienced with her fiancée at the time when they were almost going to be taken to custody by soldiers just because they showed the slightest display of affection in public. She managed to avoid it at the last minute thanks to running into an acquaintance who worked at the municipality and told the soldiers that she was one of the most renowned families of Mersin and to let her go. Another Christian interviewee briefly mentions that she had a couple of flirts before she got married but does not want to get into further detail other than indicating that she sometimes told about her flirts to her family and sometimes did not.

33 Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu, 2001, p.200.

Almost all the interviewees still maintain an active social life at the relatively older ages they are now. One Muslim interviewee, whose mother was one of the founders of the Mersin branch of *Yardımsevenler Derneği* (Philanthropists' Association), has taken after her mother in working with civil society organizations. She is still a keen member of the Soroptimist International in Mersin and participates all meetings, gatherings and organizations. Another Muslim interviewee was among the founders of the polyphonic choir of the city and sang as a member of the choir for 19 years. Other three Muslim interviewees regularly attend meetings and gatherings at their friends' houses. They also hold and attend weekly religious gatherings where a group of women gather at one's house to listen to *mevluds* (prayers). Even though the interviewed women attend *mevlud*s for occasions such as the birth of the grandchildren of their acquaintances from time to time, the ones they regularly attend are more different in the sense that they are held for no specific reason and provide opportunity for casual conversation and comments on both religious and daily topics afterwards.[34] One of the Muslim interviewees is also very fond of traveling; her two children live out of Mersin so she often goes to visit them but she goes on vacations just for the sake of traveling to see new places, too.

Two of the Christian interviewees are quite active and influential in the social and cultural life of Mersin as well as being influential members of the organization committees of the churches. They attend almost all organizations and events held in the city. One of them even sings in the choir of the church. Another Christian interviewee is an avid traveler as well; she regularly visits Beirut where her older sister lives. One other Christian interviewee still drives her own car at the age of 80 and goes shopping on her own. Thus, the life stories of these women of Mersin are remarkable in the sense that it unfolds how the Republican reforms have served as a catalyst for encouraging these women to perpetuate their social lives while undertaking the private roles expected from them in the household as well as assuming roles in professional life in the periphery of Turkey since the 1920s.

34 Nancy Tapper, Richard, "The Birth of the Prophet: Ritual and Gender in Turkish Islam," *Man*, (1987), 82.

4.2.4 *Social Life*

In the accounts of the interviewees, there is a dominant narrative of a very active social life in Mersin in their childhoods and youths. They talk about the Mersin and the social life of those times as something which is lost forever. With constant comparisons and contrasts to the current social life and status of Mersin and its residents, they make references to the activities they had done as children and young girls which might be quite hard for the children and young girls to replicate in the current status of Mersin today. They repeatedly refer to the fact that not only they were able to wear shorts, but they could also ride their bikes while they had their shorts on. Another issue subjected to constant comparison is the former planning of the city and the gentrification that the city's most well-known spots have gone through since the 1950s. Even when they are talking about a completely different subject, the interviewees tend to bring up how much the city has changed since their childhood. They regularly drop hints implicating that the city used to be so much different before a large part of the coast was subjected to land reclamation and filled with concrete to build roads.

Another common feature found in their narratives is that they used to be able to go to the beaches in the city on their own and swim with their friends among whom they were able to enjoy the company of males as well. Two of the interviewees, who are sisters with a three year gap, make it clear that their father passed away when they were very young and they had a quite conservative grandfather who served as *kadi* in the late Ottoman era; yet they were still able to wear shorts and make friends with boys without any difficulty. However, they also need to stress that they "never crossed the line" which evokes what is elicited by Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu about women's role in cross-sexual relations where traditional codes of sexual segregation did not apply but "managing new social relationships with men usually necessitated strict sexual repression, and the responsibility of proper social conduct usually fell on young women's shoulders rather than men's."[35] In a similar vein, a Christian interviewee talks about how she was one of the first women to wear a bikini at a beach in the 1950s of Mersin even though it was turned into such a big deal.

35 Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu, 2001, p.200.

Nonetheless, for the interviewees, although Mersin deteriorated in the last couple of decades, it was a city of modern habits and good taste in the past, especially compared to the other cities in the region like Tarsus and Adana. In fact, in one of the anecdotes below, one Muslim interviewee explicitly adverts to the vulgar and macho culture of Adana and accents that Mersin used to be much more modern than Adana. According to their perceptions relayed in the narratives, Mersin was a city in which women were able to wear shorts and miniskirts and not get harassed by either looks or words; it was a city where young girls were able to go on their own to the beach which was right in the middle of the city center and swim with their male and female friends.

"I wouldn't say it was 'the first' bikini ever (in Mersin) because it was like this (showing how it was styled.) I had brought it from Paris. Don't ask how much blame they put on me." (Catholic Christian, 80)

"When I was young, I used to ride my bike with my shorts on. When I was a young girl, we used to go to beach from there and swim in the sea together with boys and girls." (Muslim, 70)

"I was a young girl, I took my bag in my hand and went to the beach to meet my friends there. We used to swim in the sea. The place over the Müftü Bridge today used to be called the Mediterranean Beach." (Muslim, 74)

Another subject they steadily draw attention to is that everyone watched their clothing and what they wore in the old Mersin. A perpetual remark about how women dressed fashionably and frequently made their seamstresses sew new dresses is evident in these narratives. Similar to the implications about wearing shorts, hats and miniskirts are ascribed to the modernity Mersin used to have. The chicness and elegancy of the outfits of the people are considered as signs of how modern Mersin used to be as a city. The fashionable and chic image of not only women, but also that of men, constitute an image which they remember as an important marker of the modernity of the city. This demonstrates how modernization shaped the daily lives of women as well as

manifesting "how they reacted to the reforms and innovations in social life with enthusiasm."[36]

"Mersin has always been open to innovation; it is a sea town after all. People were very open to innovation at those times. In my childhood, everyone was so keen to wear more cleavages. I used to think that headscarf was going to be left in the times of my mother. … My childhood in Mersin was very modern. The old *Mersinlis* were again very modern." (Muslim, 74)

"... You could wear a super mini skirt and the most daring cleavage. Mersin was an extremely modern place where people were extremely respectful and wore hats and gloves and full makeup. … The high society; Adana and Mersin competed with each other. *Adanalı*s followed Mersin ladies with admiration. I know that (Adana) culture. It is more macho, more rowdy; I can't bring myself to say tacky. But Mersin ladies were elegant, gorgeous, knew how to behave and how to speak. They really had manners. … You can't see the elegance, the manners, the modesty of Mersin in Adana. And neither in their women. … I have been in Adana a lot in my girlhood. Mersin is like this." (Muslim, 73)

"The Madams… they were all extremely chic. At 5 p.m. in the evening, with a hat on their heads and a cane in their hands… Not that they needed it (the cane), they just used it as an accessory. Where did they go – to the Merchants Club. They played cooncan there. Co-ed; doesn't matter if they are men or women. Until 8 in the evening. At 8, everybody would leave and go back to their homes. A life like that." (Orthodox Christian, 72).

The interviewees talk a great deal about how going to the movies constituted a remarkable aspect of the social life in Mersin. According to the narratives, going to the movies required wearing the brand new and most fashionable clothes since it was the place to see and be seen. The interviewees also mention getting their hair done for even going to the movies. The *Güneş* (Sun) Cinema, especially generated a considerable part in most of the interviewee's narratives since it aggregated a significant part of the social life of the city. It is

36 Ayşe Durakbaşa, Gül Özsan, and Meltem Karadağ, "Women's Narratives as Sources for the Study of Eshraf Families," in *Women's Memory the Problem of Sources: 20th Anniversary Symposium of the Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation 17-19 April 2009,* eds. Fatma Türe, and Birsen Talay Keşoğlu (İstanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi, 2009), 157.

understood that it also had an open-air theatre during the summer which had a screen visible from the surrounding buildings as well. Even the fact that the cinema had private boxes is still reminisced and told as a great part of the Mersin of those times.

"… We would go to the movies at six in the evening and go back home around eight or eight-thirty on our own and by bursting into laughter. And nobody would turn their heads without as much as a glance. We lived in such an era." (Catholic Christian, 71)

As aforementioned in the quotes by the interviewees, another place which played a significant part in the social life of Mersin was the Merchants Club. It was established in 1927 by the prominent merchants and traders of the city. The original building of the Club used to be a different one than today; yet it was moved in 1945 to another building in the same neighborhood where the building of the Chamber of Commerce still stands today.[37] The Club used to take an important part in the social lives of the families of the merchants of the city. It was a members-only club and the anecdotes of the interviewees assert that it was very exclusive and had a strict membership policy which did not accept every applicant. In fact, a Christian interviewee relays that her husband says that the Merchants Club in Mersin then was the equivalent of the one in İstanbul. The Chamber of Commerce still embodies a club for its members today; but the old building known as the Merchants Club is demolished and the interviewees mention that the old dynamism of the Club has been lost for a long time because they accept every applicant to the Club nowadays.

"The Merchants Club is still going on; but the old vibrancy is not there in today's Club because they started to accept everyone. They used to accept only the best merchants then." (Orthodox Christian, 78).

The Club and the organizations held inside effectuated one of the most influential aspects of the social life and entertainment in Mersin. As much as it was a place for the merchants to have dinner and drinks and socialize, it was also the host of the Republican balls held on the nights of the national holidays. Live music and entertainment were indispensable to the events which

37 Tolga Ünlü, and Tülin Selvi Ünlü, *Gelişen Ticaret, Değişen Kent: Mersin, 1850-1950* (Mersin: Mersin Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Yayınları, 2012), 101.

were organized in the Club. However, it needs to be noted that the Christian interviewees attribute a meaning to the Club as a place for women to play cards which is different than the meaning it has for the Muslim interviewees. The Muslim interviewees refer to the Club as more of a place to have family dinners or to attend the Republican Balls whereas most of the Christian interviewees confer the Club as a daily spot to which the Christian ladies went for their regular outings to get together and play cards. The Club served as a place for the woman to be seen in the public place, both for playing cards and for having dinner and for attending balls from time to time. However, even though the Christian women were prone to frequently go to the Club on their own to play cards with their friends, the Muslim women could only go there as long as they were accompanying their husbands to the Republican balls or they were going to have dinner there as a family. The local historian Develi, who also served as the president of the Club for a while, discloses the custom of the Christian ladies, often referred as 'madams,' to frequent the Club to play card games and mentions them as his 'cooncan friends' who came to Club every afternoon in their best outfits and left in the evening.[38] Therefore, the Merchants Club and its association with the public life of women had different connotations for the women of the two communities which results with the Muslim and Christian women to generate their own distinct social memory about the Club. Still, the place that the Merchants Club takes up in their memories, as well as in their narratives, is so extensive that the Club was a constitutive part of their local identity in Mersin.

"Ladies used to go to the Merchants Club and play card games there. We played bezique, we played cooncan, and we did *rölans* (a term used in the cooncan game.) Men have played bridge since those times." (Orthodox Christian, 78)

"There was a Merchants Club here. They held entertainment events there every week. There was constant music and orchestra. My husband was a member as well, we used to go on the weekends. They held balls there and the people leaving those balls used to walk on this street with their ball gowns; most of them lived around here and they walked home while singing and dancing.

38 Develi, 2007, p.127.

It was a Mersin like that. The life of Mersin was nice, it was very nice." (Muslim, 79)

Mersin is one of the six cities in Turkey which has a local branch of General Directorate of State Opera and Ballet. It was established in 1990[39] and the performances are staged at the Culture Center which used to be the People's House building that is right at the center of the city. However, opera and ballet performances have been held there since the 1940s which is why opera and ballet constitute a considerable part in the narratives of the interviewees. In fact; one of the Muslim interviewees conveys that she and her husband used to go to Ankara and to go to the theatre and opera before the Mersin branch of the State Opera and Ballet was founded in 1990.

"That Culture Center used to be the People's House. They staged Madame Butterfly opera on the revolving stage of the People's House in the 1940s. It had a revolving stage. The acoustic of the opera-ballet house today was magnificent. Can you imagine? In the 1940s they staged Madame Butterfly opera there. It was such a Mersin." (Muslim, 70).

"Mersin had been like Paris from the very beginning. Extremely civilized, extremely contemporary, extremely modern city. … The first revolving stage in Turkey was in Mersin. At the Culture Center today. Think about it, people did theatre and opera on that revolving stage." (Muslim, 73)

Aside from the cinemas, theatre and social clubs; tea gardens and *gazinos* also aggregated a crucial part of the city's public culture. Not exactly like taverns, and different from bars, *gazinos* offered people a place where they could go with their families to have something to eat and drink while enjoying traditional Turkish music live.[40] They used to reserve one day of the week for women exclusively; calling it 'women's matinee', but sometimes served as a nightclub for men as well. The anecdotes of the interviewees talking about the *gazino* in Mersin to which women could go as well, exhibit another aspect of

39 "Tarihçe", Devlet Opera ve Balesi Genel Müdürlüğü, accessed 30 September 2018. https://www.operabale.gov.tr/tr-tr/kurumsal/genel-mudurluk/Sayfalar/Tarihce.aspx

40 Murat Belge, "Türkiye'de Günlük Hayat," in *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi (Vol. 3–4),* eds. Murat Belge, and Bülent Özüakın, Bülent (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1984), 836-876.

public life that women were able to participate. Tea gardens which were sometimes called as 'family gardens' were open-air places where families could again enjoy food and beverages over live music and they were common in most parts of the country.[41]

§ 4.3 Narratives about the Republic and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

The interviewees tend to look at and evaluate the past with the contemporary outlook of the present day. Thus, they speak very highly of the Republic, the transformations that the Republic brought along, and, the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Because the interviewees are not content with the political climate today, they elaborate that the young people take what Atatürk and his revolutions provided to them for granted. They praise the uplifting effect of the Republic on women and exemplify Müfide İlhan[42], the first female provincial mayor of Turkey and the only female mayor of Mersin, as the proof that Mersin and its women were quite progressive in accordance with how the Republican reforms intended them to be. They sound very proud that the first female provincial mayor of Turkey had come out from Mersin and point out to the opportunities that the Republic provided for women as the reason of that. However, it should be noted that they do not abstain from criticizing the events that led to the resignation of Müfide İlhan after only a year in office and blaming the patriarchal mindset of the politicians for driving her away from the municipality.[43] Still, the narratives include some mistaken details regarding the duration of her time in office. A Christian interviewee, who personally knew İlhan, states that she was made to quit in 6 months whereas in fact she was elected in September 1950 and quit in December 1951.[44] She also mentions that the Fevzi Çakmak was Müfide İlhan's uncle[45] and she

41 Tuncer, 2014, p.204.

42 Birgül Bozkurt, and İbrahim Bozkurt, "Türkiye'nin İlk Kadın İl Belediye Başkanı 'Müfide İlhan' ve Mersin'deki Çalışmaları," *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Yıl 10, Sayı 19, (Bahar 2014): 51-75.

43 Bozkurt and Bozkurt, 2014, p.71

44 Bozkurt and Bozkurt, 2014, p.65-72.

45 Bozkurt and Bozkurt, 2014, p.62.

met him once without knowing he was him and she feels bad about not having their photo taken right at that moment.

"Now, at the corner of the street of İçel Art Club today, Müfide İlhan, the first female mayor of Turkey, used to live there. Their home was upstairs and his husband was a doctor and had his office downstairs. Whilst she was a mayor, the stableman would bring her horse at 8 am every morning. Müfide *Hanım* would come downstairs, get on the horse and go from village to village. She would listen to the problems of everyone. In the evening, the stableman would come again, take the horse and go. … Müfide *Hanım* was such a valuable mayor but she was envied so much and they made her quit in six months. She left 87 thousand Turkish Liras in the safe of the municipality. In six months. She used to visit Mersin frequently. The last time she visited, she was 90. She used to send me a word every time she was here. The last time she came, in a meeting, the municipality subject came up. I said to her 'you left 87 thousand Turkish Liras in the municipality.' 'How could you keep that in your mind?' she said. I said 'I do.' She was a very respectable and venerable person." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"... Müfide İlhan, our first female mayor. And the men had irked that dear woman. She was compelled, they had worn her out. She got to work as the mayor for a very short time. And the patriarchal community had worn Müfide İlhan out and she resigned. Her friends said 'as a result of the pressure from above' but who pressured from above? It's the men again. They appointed a man to her position afterwards." (Catholic Christian, 71)

A Muslim interviewee also talks about Atatürk's visits to Mersin and stated that her mother had personally met Atatürk. Furthermore, she told the same story that Uğur Ersoy elaborated in his autobiographical book about Mersin that Atatürk and Latife Hanım were entertained as guests in his father's garden.[46] Another Muslim interviewee relays what her father told her about Atatürk's visit to Mersin which includes a rumor about how Mersin became the main province and Silifke remained as a district. She herself states that she does not know whether it is true or not but as depicted by Tonkin, narratives

46 Uğur Ersoy, *Bir Zamanlar Mersin'de* (İstanbul: Evrim, 1997).

are not testimonies to prove the facts; they are rather social acts about a certain time and place and directed towards a certain audience.[47] The narratives imply what is of importance for the people telling those narratives.[48]

"When Atatürk came to Mersin, Silifke was supposed to be the central province; Mersin was a district. But when Atatürk was running late, the people of Silifke cleared the table. Did you know about that? It was dinner time. They ate their dinner and Atatürk was a bit late when he arrived. And my father took him by car; he used to tell so. 'He sat next to me, my knees were shaking,' he said. After that, they say, he made Silifke a province and Mersin the central province; I don't know if it is true or not. You know he said to *Mersinli*s 'look after your city' right?" (Muslim, 80)

4.3.1 *Narratives of the Christians about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*

The Christian interviewees heavily praise Atatürk, the Republican elite and the Republican renovations which targeted nation building and introducing the Turkish people with modernity. They underscore that they identify themselves as 'Turks' several times in the course of the interview and our conversation. One Christian interviewee mentions that she still keeps the Turkish flag which she raised up to the flagpole in one of the weekly ceremonies at primary school and wishes to be buried with that flag when she passes away. She also tells an anecdote in which a man came up to him in a discussion panel and asked her how she could say that she is a Turk when she is a Christian. This will be elaborated in the next chapter but the interviewee talks about how offended she and other Christians get in the face of statements like this.

One Christian interviewee talks about a rumor about Atatürk, which is also mentioned by the local historian Develi in a different way.[49] The interviewee tells it with a laugh while talking about how lots of Christians used to live in the best houses in the best neighborhoods of Mersin. Nonetheless, she

47 Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 97.

48 David Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Berg, 2001), 135.

49 Develi, 2001, p.47.

refrains from commenting on the rumor and confines herself to only telling it to me without any personal remarks. Neyzi asserts that memory is as much in relation with reminiscing as it is with forgetting and the violence enclosed in silences.[50] She also sets forth that the selectivity in the use of narrative and silences, in other words deciding on which topics to keep silent and which ones to narrate, should be considered as an intentional individual act just like remembering and forgetting is.[51] Therefore, it should be no coincidence that the interviewee prefers not to comment further on this.

"When Atatürk came here in those times; you know that … family's house? He said 'aren't there any Muslims? We ask this, you reply 'this belongs to … (the name of a Christian family)', we ask that, you reply 'that belongs to … (the name of another Christian family)', we ask the one over there, you reply 'it belongs to … (the name of another Christian family)'. The villas, the houses all belonged to the Christians. He said 'isn't there anyone from us who built these?'" (Orthodox Christian, 78)

In the version of the rumor which is relayed by the local historian Develi, this incident takes place on Atatürk's first visit to Mersin in 1923. At first, he is told that the non-Muslims, the children of the Christian Arab minority, also came to greet him, to which he replies that there are no minorities in the Turkish land but citizens. Then, after he asks about the owners of the houses he sees and gets the answer that they belong to the non-Muslims, he asks the crowd '"What have you been doing while they were building these?" to which a villager replies "Pasha, we were doing our military service and keeping guard in the Balkans, Yemen and Zeytin."[52] The Christian interviewee's narrative of the rumor lacks some parts of Develi's version. Yet, they converge on the point that Atatürk asked about whether there was anyone 'from us,' among the Muslims, who owned such houses and buildings.

Another Christian interviewee goes into detail of Atatürk's second visit to Mersin in 1925. She mentions that he was the guest in the house of a Christian

50 Leyla Neyzi, *Ben Kimim?: Türkiye'de Sözlü Tarih, Kimlik ve Öznellik* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 20.

51 Neyzi, 2004, p.51-52.

52 Develi, 2001, p.47.

family during his stay and stresses that his stay there draws attention to his character. While relaying this narrative to me, the interviewee warns me to listen carefully because it would be a significant piece of information for my research as Atatürk was hosted in the house of a Christian family.[53] She also explains an anecdote in which Latife *Hanım* liked the dress that the old lady living in the house was wearing and asked her to arrange her seamstress to make a couple of dresses for herself as well. The seamstress was a Christian and brought her thirteen-fourteen-year-old niece with her as she came to give the finished dresses to Latife *Hanım*. Atatürk took a liking to the girl and on the day that they were going to leave Mersin, as they got on the balcony to greet the crowds waiting for them, they took that little girl out with them and let her stay on the balcony between them.

"… The family wanted to leave the house to them and get out in the evening so that Atatürk and his wife would be more comfortable. 'No,' he said, 'if you leave here, I will get out of that door, too. We will stay here together with you, it would make me happier.' This is Atatürk saying that; think about what kind of a person he was." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The Christian interviewees in general speak very highly of Atatürk. When it comes to women's enfranchisement and the right for equal education granted to women by the Republican reforms, they again do not withhold their appreciation of Atatürk; however, at the same time, they indicate that the

53 In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, this mansion was known as the Christmann Mansion which belonged to Christmann, the son-in-law of Hacı Konstantin Mavromati. Then, it was passed on to a member of the Tahinci family, who was another son-in-law of Mavromati. The mansion stayed under the possession of this family until 1972 which is why it was also known as Tahinciler *Konağı* (Tahincis' Mansion) in public. It was bought by another local of Mersin and was used as a school for four years. It was expropriated in 1980 and the Ministry of Culture got the ownership which turned the house into an Atatürk Museum in 1982. Since 1992, it has been called the Atatürk House. Today, the Mersin branch of the General Directorate of State Opera and Ballet holds classic music concerts in the museum on the first Monday of every month during the season. "Mersin Atatürk Evi – Mersin," Türkiye Kültür Portalı, accessed on January 28, 2019. https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/turkiye/mersin/gezilecekyer/mersin-ataturk-evi

"İçel – Mersin Atatürk Evi Müzesi," T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, accessed on January 28, 2019. http://www.kultur.gov.tr/TR-96369/icel---mersin-ataturk-evi-muzesi.html

Christian community had already been modernized long before and had not experienced any problems with the Muslim community even before the Republic and the time of Atatürk. Even when they were talking about another topic, the styles of the Christian ladies for instance, they bring the subject back to Atatürk and touch upon the respect that the Christians had for him.

The Christian interviewees' praises of Atatürk might be interpreted by their tendency to compare the present political atmosphere with that of the past which leads them to appreciate the past even more. They feel a strong longing for secularism which was heavily advocated by Atatürk himself. Nevertheless, another explanation for their fondness and appreciation of Atatürk and the Republic in general might be engendered through Goffman's argument of performances. He defines 'performance' as "all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers."[54] This definition might be employed to dissect how the Christians, as members of an ethno-religious minority group, feel that they are expected to portray a performance of such affirmative thoughts and opinions regarding the Republic, even if they do not think that way. However, the interviewees would probably get offended with such a suggestion if they know about it because they are decisively sincere and earnest in their praises of the early Republic era and Atatürk. Kaymak interprets this as a conclusion of contemplating the secular groups to have become the new 'cultural minority' in Turkish society, rather than the ethno-religious ones.[55] Despite the differences between the formal and substantive citizenship for ethno-religious minorities in Turkey, the Christian interviewees stress their acceptation and attachment to the Turkish identity at a national level. They identify themselves both as Christian and as Turkish women. Therefore, they embody their Turkish identity through the way they speak and feel about Atatürk and the Republic as well. I will go into more detail in the next chapter while discussing intercommunal relations between the two communities.

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54 Erving Goffman, 1The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," in *Contemporary Sociological Theory,* eds., Craig Calhoun, Joseph Gerteis, James Moody, Steven Pfaff, and Indermohan Virk (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 49.

55 Kaymak, 2017, p.255.

All the interviewees, Christians and Muslims, highlight the difficulties that secular women experience today, adding that it had been much different when they were young. Therefore, deliberating the positioning of secular groups and especially secular women as disadvantaged and underprivileged in the current political climate, the Christian women maintain their praising tone in their narratives about Atatürk. One interviewee explicitly refers to him as 'Ata' which means 'the father.'

"Atatürk had given women such rights and women have availed of those rights in a very good way. He gave respect; he showed respect towards them so that the women would be able to show the same respect to her environment. … We, the Christian community, had already been a modernized community. The neighboring relations were going on with the opposite side in such a high respect. But after the revolutions, they (the Muslims) became more free-minded and enlightened. … I'm talking about the time after Ata, the Mersin that my mother lived in. Mersin had already been a much modernized city with the migration and the people coming from outside. … God willing a second Atatürk won't be needed to take the lead of Turkey but we need an Atatürk now." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"What would we have done if not for Atatürk? I haven't heard any complaints regarding the time before him. Never. … The Christians are very fond of Atatürk, very fond of this homeland. They have enfolded Mersin in their arms. … They (the Christians) would never miss a ball but they would absolutely attend the Republican balls because they always said 'we wouldn't have been here if not for Atatürk,' they would all say the same thing." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"… And after Ata (referring to Atatürk as 'Ata' meaning the 'Father'), they (her mother and others) used to tell how the women took off their hijabs. Of course, we Christians do not have this wearing a hijab thing, so they were talking about their (Muslim) neighbors. They took off those hijabs and threw them out. They just threw them out. I hope it happens once again. God willing a second Atatürk won't be needed to come ahead of Turkey but we need an Atatürk now." (Catholic Christian, 71)

§ 4.4 Narratives of the Muslims about Islam and Religion

All Muslim interviewees touch upon the issue of religion because they have got to be more religious and more involved with religious meetings as they got older by age. As mentioned above, three of the Muslim interviewees regularly see each other at religious meetings where they pray together and it is no coincidence that their mothers were quite religious people as well. Two of the interviewees perform the ritual prayers of Islam and one of them has been to Mecca on a couple of *umre* visits. Nonetheless, when they are talking about these things, they feel the need to emphasize that they are definitely not zealots. Even when they are conveying their mothers' or their own religiousness, they deem it necessary to highlight that they are also modern and followers of Atatürk's principles and opinions. None of them cover their hairs or wear a hijab in their daily life. They only cover their hair during their religious meetings when they read prayers and and feel the need to state that they are not zealots and have nothing to do with the affiliations of radical Islam.

The hijab issue is mentioned by a Muslim interviewee while she is conveying the old modernity of Mersin; "I used to think hijab was going to be left in the time of my mother." She also enunciates that her mother was religious, covered her hair and performed the ritual prayer of Islam five times a day; but then tells an anecdote about her mother in which she threw off her veil when her uncle forced her to wear it in her childhood which must have corresponded to the 1930s.

"I'm fond of hadjis and hodjas in a modern way. I myself want to be a pilgrim but you won't be able to see me as a covered up pilgrim (meaning wearing a hijab.) … My mother has a wedding photo with my father in which she has a hijab on. Even though it is after the Republic. Yes, it should be after the Republic because you know the Hat Revolution did not happen that quickly. … But by the time she died; she had worn coats for years. She was modern. She had never been a radical. Mersin has never been radical. Even though it receives migration, there is a civilized fraction that is rooted. … I have two different Quran groups; we meet and read Yasin (a prayer.) 'Open Quran and read, my friends,' I said, 'there is neither a cult nor a sect; they are

all made up by the hadjis and hodjas. Leave them to take young girls into their harems.'" (Muslim, 73)

"When my father was alive, my mother wore hats; she was a woman with a modern style. After my father died, she covered her hair and after a while, she entered a religious cult and she had become the mother of the cult. There were people gathering around her, she was 'Hadji mom.' They called her 'Hadji mom' in Mersin. But she was very *Atatürkçü*. She would object to those who would come with long coats touching the ground, saying 'shorten these; you are sweeping the floor,' and she knew about all my friendships (meaning flirts.) However, the people in the cult did not listen to her. They were not supposed to show their shoes. What is it that you have with the shoes?! My mother had never been like the ones wearing hijab today. She always covered her hair with a veil in a triangular style. She wore a topcoat but it was under her knees, not reaching the floor. The ones wearing topcoats today are sweeping the floors." (Muslim, 80)

The last anecdote is noteworthy on the ground that the interviewee's mother whose modern and Westernized fashion sense in the past is emphasized by her wearing hats, had become a 'mother' of a religious cult in her later life. Still, the interviewee feels the need to underline her mother's devotion to Atatürk to portray her distinction compared to the other members of that religious cult. In her narrative, the sense of fashion and clothing is once again employed as an instrument to project modernity and distinction in comparison to the other female member of the religious cult.

"… I'm not religionist at all but when it comes to performing my religious duties, I think like this; if religion comes from the inside, it erupts like a fountainhead. It won't allow you to sleep during the call to prayer (*ezan*), it won't allow you to sleep here and there. But if it is injected from the outside, it numbs you like morphine." (Muslim, 73)

This interviewee visits Rumi's tomb in Konya every year because she feels that the visit makes her a more tolerant and a renewed person. The same interviewee also mentions a homework his son was assigned by his religion teacher in high school. The homework assignment asked the students to compare the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Prophet Mohammed's

Farewell Sermon. Intrigued by the subject, she herself looked it up in encyclopedias and found out that the first articles were the same. She was very moved about this discovery and believes it to be the manifestation of the progressiveness of Islam as the first article of the UDHR had been the first article of the Farewell Sermon for more than a thousand years. She also states that it demonstrates how enlightened the teachers of Mersin were at the time.

§ 4.5 Narratives about the French occupation and the Independence War

In Mersin and in Çukurova region in general, the times of the French occupation during the Independence War[56] is still conspicuous in the narratives of the elderly people who had heard about those times from their families. The topic of the deportation of the Armenians come up, too, when they are conveying the memories of the times of the French occupation they heard from their mothers and grandmothers. As the narratives relayed about this issue are heard from their mothers and grandmothers, it evokes Hirsch's definition of post memory as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right."[57]

Drawing upon what has been transmitted between generations, it might be said that the narratives regarding this issue initiate with an account of how the Armenians cooperated with the French occupation forces. The collaboration between the Armenians and the French are substantially articulated in the narratives. However, one Christian interviewee implicitly makes a remark about the appropriation of the property which belonged to the Armenians in Tarsus before they left.[58] She does not elaborate much on the subject which is

56 Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 149.

57 Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Post Memory," *Poetics Today*, 9/1, (2008): 103.

58 For more on the law of *emval-ı metruke* (abondoned properties) which legalized the appropriation of the property of the Armenians who left and did not return after a certain period of time, please see: Soner Çağaptay, "Kim Türk, Kim Vatandaş? Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi

in line with the general attitude the Christian interviewees adopt mentioning these issues but implies that the wealthy people of Tarsus are the ones who expropriated the property of the Christians, including the property of the Armenians. Another Christian interviewee explicates that there were many Armenians not in Mersin, but in Tarsus when she was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, and then makes an interesting remark about her own heritage. All the same, the narratives about the Independence War and the times of the French occupation are enlightening in regards of illustrating the mentality of the society in those times. For instance, one Muslim interviewee relays that when the French occupation had started, the first thing his grandfather thought of was the virtue of their daughters: "My grandfather and the others said 'oh no, hide the girls, protect the girls. We do not care about the gold and money but protect the girls,' they said." (Muslim, 73)

In her study about the remembering of the locals of a Black Sea town, Tirebolu, through material culture, Öztürkmen describes that most of the narratives about the alleged cooperation of the non-Muslim communities of Tirebolu with the Russian occupation forces are framed as stories and experiences of "a remote past, spoken from a certain distance, and easier to tell" as second-hand narratives. They are also retrospectively reconstructed stories which are "told within a nationalist framework, following eight decades of separate existence in nation states."[59] The narratives of the interviewees of this study about the Armenians' alleged cooperation with the French occupation forces follow the same pattern in the sense that they are told from a certain distance. Furthermore, as none of the interviewees have Armenian lineage and the Christian interviewees refrain from elaborating on the subject other than a few sentences, these narratives demonstrate the experiences of the Muslim-

Vatandaşlık Rejimi Üzerine Bir Çalışma," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 98, (2003). Kerem Öktem, "Incorporating the Time and Space of the Ethnic 'Other': Nationalism and Space in Southeast Turkey in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," *Nations and Nationalism*, 10, no. 4, (2004): 559-578. Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Recalling the Appalling: Mass Violence in Turkey in the Twentieth Century," in *Memories of Mass Repression: Narrating Life Stories in the Aftermath of Atrocity*, eds. Adler, Nancy, Selma Leydesdorff, Mary Chamberlain, and Leyla Neyzi (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2009), 175-198.

59 Arzu Öztürkmen, "Remembering Conflicts in a Black Sea Town: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Memory", *Middle Eastern Studies,* Vol. 39, No.2, (April 2003): 191.

Turkish side only and is inevitably told within a nationalist framework after more than a century since the deportation.

"Armenians cooperated with the French right away. My grandmother used to tell; the French would come at midnight and collect men from their houses and kill them. And a French soldier even entered their garden and asked for a kiss from my grandmother. She was a young girl who was around 15-16 years old then. There are a lot of life experiences. Turks had not been that merciless; the Armenians had. But what is happening? They advertise more; because they speak more, we are deemed guilty in the world." (Muslim, 74).

"There weren't many Armenians in Mersin. We used to go to Beirut for vacation in summers to visit the relatives. There were many Armenian families in the neighborhood they lived who moved from Adana to Beirut during the Independence War. From Kayseri, Adana, Mersin… We don't have any Armenian heritage, thank God… (laughing)." (Catholic Christian, 84)

What the interviewee meant with her last sentence given in the last quote above is unclear as she didn't go into further detail. Considering the context in which she was talking about, her laughing might indicate that she is thankful that they didn't have to move from Mersin to Beirut like the Armenians. Her reaction also evokes Passerini's statement that during oral history interviews, when interviewees do not want to answer certain questions and the question is re-directed to them after some re-organization, they might still keep silent or give an unrelated answer in the form of a joke. Since this Christian interviewee clearly does not incline to get into much detail about this topic, she makes a joke.[60]

One of the Christian interviewees of this study tells an anecdote which once again indicates to the presence of the Armenians in Mersin. A couple of years ago, two Armenian sisters and the daughter of one of them came to Mersin to find the house in which they were born before their family left Mersin for good in 1921. The daughter was now a film maker and wanted to film the process of the search for the house and the Turkish journalist from a national newspaper was accompanying them to report it later. Through an acquaintance, they asked for the interviewee's help to locate the house since she knows

60 Passerini, 1998, p.58.

Mersin very well. The two sisters told the interviewee that their maternal grandfather moved to Mersin from Cappadocia in the late 1800s and as he expanded his business, he built a two-floored house right across the *Ulu Camii* (mosque) on the coast. After a long search they found out that the old house, located on one of the back streets around the mosque which is used as *İçel Sanat Kulübü* (İçel Art Club)[61] today, is the two sisters' old family house. It was turned into a military building in the 1930s but has been rented to the Art Club since 1989. The interviewee explains that the Armenian ladies were in shock when they saw the house and started crying. The journalist wrote a piece on her newspaper about the whole ordeal.[62] However, the interviewee speaks about a detail which is not included in the piece of the newspaper. When the Armenian ladies told that they used to be the owners of the building, the officers at the Art Club got a bit worried as to what would happen if the sisters would legally ask to have the house back or ask for compensation. The interviewee had to assure them that it was not what the sisters were after and that they simply wanted to cherish the memory of their family. The film maker daughter of one of the Armenian women shot all this into a film and uploaded a short version on YouTube afterwards.[63]

Another Christian interviewee talks about the Independence War as a historical event which paved the way for the foundation of the national identity. In her perception, the fact that the Christians and Muslims fought together at the Independence War indicates that there was no differentiation between the people of the two communities and religion was not the decisive factor in in identifying 'the Turk,' it was rather pushed to the background as a less important facet of identity.

"My grandfather and uncle had done a very long military service in that military service era; they used to tell. You would dig up a hole and stay there

61 "İçel Sanat Kulübü," İçel Sanat Kulubü, accessed on January 29, 2019. https://www.icelsanatkulubu.com/

62 Armutçu, Emel, "Sirarpi Manukyan Mersin'de Doğdu O Evi Tam 87 Yıl Sonra Buldu," Hürriyet, last modified on 03.02.2008, accessed 12 November 2018. http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/sirarpi-manukyan-mersin-de-dogdu-0-evi-tam-87-yil-sonra-buldu-8155997

63 Since the interviewee of this study is clearly seen and her name is mentioned in the video, I have to refrain from giving the link to the YouTube video in order to protect her privacy.

from morning till evening; being very hungry. We all had gone into the Independence War. No difference between the Christians and Muslims. A people who had grown up on this soil and eaten bread off of it. Now, that is the Turkish community. That is the Turk. No religion or anything. The religion is not even on the fifth place or the tenth place." (Catholic Christian, 71)

§ 4.6 Chapter Conclusion

Drawing upon the anecdotes of the interviewed women, it should be emphasized that the modernity in Mersin has two sources one of which is its port-city characteristics and the other is the Republican reforms. These two sources tend to overlap at some points and diverge from each other at some others. So, it turns out that the socio-cultural history of Mersin has a double structure. First of all, it has the intrinsic characteristics of the cosmopolitan port city background which was what introduced civilization and modernization to the city in the first place. On the other hand, there is the civilization and modernization that was brought along with the Republican reforms. So, Mersin has a dual structure of a socio-cultural history which sometimes overlap and sometimes separate in the narratives of the interviewees. The narratives of all interviewees converge on the point that Mersin has a characteristic modernity which renders it a distinction from the other cities in the Çukurova region, as well as in Turkey.

In the narratives of the Christian interviewees, what comes to the fore is the port city characteristics of the city. The modernity of Mersin which they all underline is ascribed to the port city characteristics and is perceived as the continuity of the modernity that was established in the city in that period. The strong emphasis that even before the Republic, they were already modern and civilized to begin with, emerges from affiliating the peculiar characteristics of the city with its port city background. Since their families arrived in Mersin in the mid-nineteenth century as it was turning into a major player as an Eastern Mediterranean port city, they define themselves as a part of that period. However, they do not underestimate the Republican reforms, either, and feel strongly about accentuating their appreciation of them. It is just that the explanation based on the port-city background of the city is more important to

them as they believe that it is where their roots lay. Their narratives illustrate the perpetuation of the identification with the port-city background; one that is not established by but reinforced with the Republican reforms. The modernity that was brought along by the Republican reforms is perceived by them as to maintain Mersin's port city characteristics.

Conversely, the Muslim interviewees stress the modernity and civilization of the city which they believe to have been instigated with the Republican reforms. They accent the internalization of modernity with examples from the daily life and cultural life of the city. When they speak about the pre-Republic era, they mostly refer to the times of the French occupation instead of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when Mersin thrived as a prominent port city in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their narratives do not allude to any claim of having been modernized even before the Republic. On the contrary, the prioritization of the Republican modernity and the progressive reforms it introduced for women is at the forefront in their narratives. The essential part of their memories of Mersin are associated with the modernity which surfaced after the Republic.

Despite the tension between the port-city modernism and Republican modernism in the narratives, this dual structure in the socio-cultural historical context do not seem to conflict with each other. After the foundation of the Republic, most of the non-Muslim population which was one of the indicators of the cosmopolitanism of Mersin, left the city and tmartinhe population of non-Muslim communities demonstrated a serious decline. Notwithstanding, the Christian interviewees do not advert to any kind of narrative which implies that the Republican reforms might have played a role in hindering the port-city characteristics and modernity of Mersin. I believe that the contemporary context through which they perceive the past is more influential here. As they are not content with the current political conjuncture and the current state of Mersin whatsoever, the Mersin in the early Republican era, especially in comparison to its current state, seems as agreeable as possible to them. In the case of the Muslim interviewees, the city they call as 'the old Mersin' is the Mersin in the early Republican era. Nonetheless, they believe that the source of modernity in Mersin depends on the presence of the Christian community.

Since the interviewed women come from traditional urban secular middle and upper middle class families, they have had the opportunity to participate in public life activities as much as they could. The public spaces they participated in their childhood were not sexually segregated. However, as they grew older, four of the Christian interviewees were sent to sexually segregated elementary and high schools some of which were run by nuns. The Muslim interviewees all studied at co-educational schools until they graduated from high school and university. The graduate of Adana Teacher Training School is the only one who studied at a segregated school for a while.

The predominance of teachers even in such a small sample indicates the significance teaching has held as a profession in the Republican modernity. Since it was considered as an acceptable profession for women not only in Turkey but in other countries as well, several young women chose teaching as a career. Even the morally conservative families were opened up to the idea of their daughters to become teachers. However, the narratives about their teaching experiences are not strongly entangled with the experience of being a woman, although they contain a few implications for sure.

Aside from one Christian interviewee who has never got married, all the other interviewees have children which indicates their heavy workload in private space as well. As expected, motherhood has taken up an important portion of their lives. The interviewees who are retired teachers are particularly assertive about "the idealized image of the Turkish women remained that of an enlightened wife, mother"[64] as they manifest the vital role mothers play in the education of children.

The public spaces that these women participated were plenty; the casinos, family gardens, movies, beaches and Merchants Club. Among these public spaces, the beaches are particularly extraordinary. The narratives about going to the beach on their own and meeting their friends there portray a specific characteristic of Mersin. Still, the narrative of the Christian interviewee who told that she got a lot of reaction when she wore a bikini she got from Paris at

64 Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 212.

a beach in Mersin demonstrates that there were still some limitations in regards to women's outings at the beach. The likes of Merchants Club were found in almost every city in Turkey back then, so it is hard to say that it was a peculiarity of Mersin. However, the fact that women, too, were frequenters of the Club exhibits another specific characteristic of Mersin. While the Christian women regularly visited the Club almost every day to play cards with each other and with the men at the Club, the Muslim women were more likely to go the Club on occasions such as family dinners or Republican Balls as the companions of their husbands and fathers who were members of the Club themselves. Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu discuss that these kinds of "rituals of the Republican period, such as Republican Balls, tea parties and fashion shows at schools, social activities at people's houses, recreational activities, including card playing and other saloon games, at clubs attached to the military or at other high society clubs" were effective in dispersing the ideas and practices of social mixing between the two sexes.[65] The interviewees also stress the significance of fashion sense and women's ultimate attention on their appearances, asserting that everyone paid attention to what others were wearing. They also dwell upon how common it was to wear miniskirts, shorts and blouses with cleavages and insist that these were the indicators of how modern they as women and Mersin as a city used to be. This is again parallel to what Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu underscore when they argue that women "imitated each other through costume, make-up, hair-style and they competed in applying the latest fashion in dress as well as home decoration, furniture, party organization, etc."[66] So, the inference that women played pivotal roles as agents of modernization and the advent of their constitution of role models to other women in public life as well as in socialization and family life is valid in the case of the interviewed women for this study as well.

The first part of this chapter based on the oral accounts and narratives of thirteen women of Mersin, of which six are Christians and seven are Muslims, focuses on their perceptions of their education, marriage and family and social lives and social lives. Through their narratives, I intended to examine their

65 Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu, 2001, p.199.

66 Durakbaşa and İlyasoğlu, 2001, p.200.

perceptions of modernization and the Republic. While the narratives of the Muslim and Christian interviewees were alike in regard to their recognition and commendation for the Republic, they were quite divergent on the grounds of the source of the modernity in Mersin. While the Christian interviewees divulge their families' and Mersin's historically modern background to ascribe the modernity of the city to its characteristics as an Eastern Mediterranean port city, the Muslim interviewees emphasize the Republican modernity. Then, I aspired to explore the narratives about their perceptions regarding the social life of Mersin during their childhood and youth. All the interviewees described a very vibrant social life in the past. Their current social life is not as vibrant as before, partly due to their old age, but they are still socially active. Afterwards, I analyzed the perceptions of the interviewees about the Republic and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Then, I discussed the narratives of the Christian interviewees regarding Atatürk in particular. After that, I investigated the narratives of the Muslim interviewees on religion and Islam. Finally, I scrutinized the interviewees' narratives about the times of the French occupation in the early 1920s and the Independence War.

5

Intercommunal Relations in a Changing Cosmopolitan City

As one of the very few Turkish cities which has managed to harbor a multi-religious and cosmopolitan population even after the Republic, Mersin has distinctive and peculiar characteristics in comparison to the other cities of Turkey. Be that as it may, in spite of the limited cosmopolitanism which has been maintained, the numbers of the Christians has been in a swift decline. Meanwhile, due to the newly received rural migration and immigration waves, the demographics of the city has been gradually changing for the last couple of decades. The one common theme in all narratives is the high level of unhappiness with the current situation of Mersin. Since they could not come to terms with the flux of mostly Kurdish migrants since the early 1990s, all interviewees heavily complain about the increasing number of Syrian immigrants who have been arriving to the city since 2011.

In the wake of the arriving newcomers, the impact of this demographic change on the intercommunal relations between the old *Mersinli*s, the Muslim and Christian communities, is intriguing as to whether it has resulted with stretching the existent boundaries or not. The interviewees are all persistent that Mersin has always had a plural life culture which enabled the different ethno-religious communities co-exist in peace. Moreover, when it comes to intercommunal marriages, the Christian interviewees, as members of a dimin-

ishing ethno-religious minority, do not refrain from stating that their preference would be for everyone to marry from within their own religion but accept that these marriages are more common today. They all have family members who are married to Muslims and make it clear that they do not have any problems with them. While the Muslim interviewees are more vocal about how they do not have any issues with intercommunal marriages, it is interesting that they do not have any family members who are married to Christians.

In this chapter, I am going to delve into the narratives of the interviewees about the social and demographic change Mersin has been going through. By focusing on their perceptions about the newcomers of the city, I am going to probe into their perceptions about rural migration and immigration which is going to cover their nostalgic perceptions about the past of Mersin as well. By virtue of concentrating on their narratives in regard to the cosmopolitan structure of Mersin, I will discuss how they have perceived the groups of people who left Mersin and the ones who arrived instead. Through these narratives, I am going to discuss their perceptions about modernity and the ways they perceive themselves to be modern. Then, I am going to focus on their perceptions and opinions pertaining to intercommunal marriages in Mersin. At first, I will talk about the perceptions of the Christians regarding divorce and inter-denominational marriages. After discussing the perceptions of the Muslim and Christian interviewees about exogamic marriages separately, I am going to dissect their narratives about the intercommunal relations between the Muslim and Christian communities in Mersin. Lastly, I am going to analyze the narratives of the Christian interviewees in order to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding being a female member of an ethnoreligious minority group in Mersin and in Turkey.

§ 5.1 Being *Mersinli* (Mersinian)

The sense of local identity as *Mersinlis* (Mersinian; the ones from Mersin) is a very powerful theme in the narratives of all interviewees. Even though they concur on the point that Mersin has decayed and deteriorated to a great extent in the recent decades, they still feel themselves to have belonged to Mersin.

Their local identity as *Mersinli*s supersedes any disparity pertaining to differentiations in religion and ethnicity at certain points in their narratives. Their strong bond with Mersin which is the most common characteristic among all the interviewees assign them unique identities as *Mersinli*s.[1] The strength of the local identity in regards with the city in which they were born and raised, evokes "overlapping senses of identity"[2] which insinuates the imbrication of local identity with others such as, in the case of the interviewees of this study, the gender identity, the ethno-religious identity, the class identity or the national identity which are either expressed or disguised depending on the context of their narrative. As deduced by Mills, "local place relationships thus created a sphere of belonging beyond nationalist categories,"[3] and in this case, created a sphere of belonging as *Mersinli*.

In the world of the twenty-first century, migration is a challenge that every country and especially Mediterranean cities with a waterline border must face. Therefore, as an Eastern Mediterranean city in the south of Turkey, Mersin is not unfamiliar with migration, either. It has always been an urban center which attracts an intense load of not only migrants but immigrants as well. In fact, as it was elaborated in the second chapter, the city itself was founded by the immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is no surprise that the city still draws vast migration today, especially since the early 1990s when a considerable number of Kurds had fled to the city to escape from the turmoil going on in the southeast region of Turkey. In the time span of the four previous censuses before 2007, Mersin had received 412,000 migrants while the population of the city center was 825,000, according to which a migration flow of people corresponding to the half of the population had settled

1 For instance, Mills mentions a similar type of bonding with a place in the case of Kuzguncuk, a cosmopolitan neighborhood in İstanbul, and its residents who are members of minorities. For more, please see Mills, 2008, p.383.

2 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 19. Cited in Mills, 2008, p.384.

3 Mills, 2008, p.391.

in the city.[4] 83% of the immigrants the city received were Kurds.[5] Mersin's population has been increasing since then; but with the immense flow of refugees escaping from the Syrian Civil War to Turkey after 2011, it has reached a peak.

In line with the demographic statistics, migration has been a recurring theme in the narratives of the women of Mersin who were interviewed for this study. Their dissatisfaction with the migration that the city has received began in the 1990s with the first flow of migrants arriving in the city. The interviewees' narratives converge on the allegation that the first signs of the deterioration in the city's unique socio-cultural characteristics had begun in the 1990s with these newcomers. They interpret the current situation to be much worse because of the Syrian refugees who have been arriving in the city since 2011.

All the women interviewed for this thesis have made their love and affection for how Mersin used to be explicitly clear. Even though they certainly neither like nor approve the way the city has progressed especially in the last couple of decades, they are still very fond of the effect the city has had on their lives. The aforementioned nostalgia factor in their narratives also seems to have influenced their opinions about the current situation of the city. They focus on the feeling of the loss of the 'old Mersin' of their childhood, youth and young adulthood so much that they prefer not to dwell upon on any of the possible good outcomes that the city's development might have brought along. Mersin itself has been founded by immigrants arriving from all different places in the nineteenth century; yet, the immigrants arriving to the city today are not welcomed at all and considered as the main reason of the decay and deterioration the city is going through.

The population of Mersin has displayed an ever-increasing growth since the early Republican era. As aforementioned, the population of Mersin between 1935 and 2000 period exhibited a growth of 20 times.[6] The denizens of

4 Kadri Gürsel, "Mersin'deki Kürt Sorunu,' Milliyet, last modified on 15 May 2010, accessed on 26.09.2018. http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/kadri-gursel/mersin-deki--kurt-sorunu--1238555/

5 Yaşar Erjem, *Mersin'de Göç, Yerleşme ve Sosyal Problemler* (Mersin: Mersin Valiliği Yayınları, 2009).

6 Ünlü, 2007, p.434.

the city have not been able to come to terms with the rural migration of mostly the Kurdish citizens moving to the city since the 1990s; so the immense flow of the Syrian immigrants since 2011 is regarded as "adding salt to the wound," by one of the Muslim interviewees who especially states her dislike for the current Mersin but says that she keeps living there imperatively since she is old.[7] Another interviewee who complains of not running into an acquaintance on the street like she used to, details her dissatisfaction of the current Mersin with the words "There are no more *Mersinli.*" However, the narratives also point out to the fact that the population of the city has skyrocketed so being able to see familiar faces on the street in such a big city would be much harder today than it was in the past.

"When I was young girl in Mersin, there were thirty-thousand people (in the city). Everybody knew each other and approached each other in a respectful manner. Now when I pass from those places (where she had to greet a lot of people on her way to work) there is not one person to say hi to specifically. That is Mersin – from thirty thousand to one million (in population), what do you expect?" (Catholic Christian, 80)

"But when we get together as the old ladies of Mersin we always talk and say that 'we walk kilometers and do not see one person from Mersin.' And when we do, we hug each other like we do our mothers and fathers. There are no more people from Mersin." (Muslim, 73).

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7 According to the latest official statistics announced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2019, the number of registered Syrian immigrants under temporary protection in Mersin is 206,146 which makes Mersin the sixth city in Turkey with the highest number of Syrian immigrants. The Syrians comprise the %11.36 of the city's current population of 1.814,468 people. "Geçici Koruma," T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, accessed February 5, 2019. http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik3/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713

However, this number seems to contradict with the unofficial number of 320,000 the mayor Burhanettin Kocamaz gave to the local press in 2015. He said that while the official number was 132,462 at the time, the unofficial number was presumed to have surpassed 320,000. Considering he gave this account in 2015, the real number of the Syrian immigrants in Mersin might be much higher than the number stated in the official statistics in 2018. "Başkan Kocamaz: Gayri resmi Suriyeli Mülteci Sayısı Kentimizde 320 Bini Geçti," Milliyet.com.tr, last modified onSeptember 10 2015, accessed February 5, 2019. http://www.milliyet.com.tr/baskan-kocamaz-gayri-resmi-suriyeli-mersin-yerelhaber-966018/

"Mersin used to be a small city in our childhood but it was a nice city. It was very modern, almost everyone knew each other. Love and respect. We grew up in that kind of an environment. Our schools were like that, our teachers were like that. Then, because of migration, Mersin changed a lot." (Muslim, 79)

These kind of statements point out to the fact that the main reason these women miss 'the old Mersin' is the nostalgic sentiments instigated and triggered by rural migration and immigration. As they were raised in a local space where everybody knew everyone else and people had specific neighboring practices, the fact that they do not personally know anyone they see on the street today leads them to accuse the newcomers of Mersin for the loss of intimacy among the residents of the city. Özyürek notes that "if the turn of the twentieth century is marked as an age of forgetting for Turkish citizens, the turn of the twenty first century is one of nostalgia for people in Turkey and elsewhere."[8] The nostalgia that the interviewed women exhibit in their narratives and the accusatory tone they apply when they talk about the newcomers who have begun to settle in Mersin since the 1990s, portray that nostalgia might be more than just a feeling or the remembrance of the past. As Rofel argues, rather than just being a sentiment or moment of recollection, nostalgia is also a "strategy of representation" which is employed by individuals to construct legitimacy or a political space for themselves.[9] The expression of nostalgia for the early years of the Republic and also for Mersin during those years, has the potential to be a depiction of the past which also harbors a political motivation to benefit the present. The nostalgia these women feel for those times is more than just a personal sentiment. Mills discusses that social relations and actions that make a certain space a place, also inscribe a person's identity as bound in that particular place and makes it as one of the collectivity.[10] In that sense, the social relations among these interviewees and *Mersinli*s in general, which make Mersin a local place for them, also create a facet in their identities which is bound in Mersin. However, the interviewees believe

8 Özyürek, 2007, p.6.

9 Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism* (University of California Press, 1999.), 135.

10 Mills, 2007, p.348.

that mass migration and rapid urbanization has deteriorated the close-knit social relations of the past which makes them feel threatened. The intimacy of and belonging with the old Mersin life have turned into a subject of nostalgia.

"If you say heaven, that's what Mersin was like. In my mother's childhood, they did not lock the doors when they went out somewhere and in my childhood nobody used to lock their doors in the *yayla*. We would close the garden door of my grandmother only at night so that we would sleep. The thieves would come and collect the laundry; they would steal the laundry. The *yayla* of my childhood was so great. Nobody used to go to the sea or anything. There weren't any sea houses or anything like that." (Muslim, 74)

The Mersin of the interviewees' childhoods seems like a fascinating place where everyone was kind to each other. This is closely related with the fact that they are in a later period of their lives when the memories of childhood seem to make more sense than the memories of their adult lives. Cresswell argues that meanings attributed to a place can be very personal and linked to individuals and their personal biographies; such as the places where people went to school, fell in love or where loved ones are buried[11] which aptly sums up the meanings the interviewees attribute to the Mersin of their childhoods.

§ 5.2 The Cosmopolitan Structure of Mersin

As it has been explicated in the second chapter, Mersin has had a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural cosmopolitan population since its foundation in the second half of the nineteenth century. As expected, the narratives of the interviewees, especially those of the Christians, include frequent references to that peculiar characteristic of the city. They have a strong affirmative outlook in regards with the cosmopolitan structure of Mersin. The fact that they consider it necessary to highlight the alleged difference of Mersin's modernity in comparison to the other cities of Turkey, especially the ones in the Çukurova region, illustrates their strong identification of the

11 Tim Creswell, "Place," in *The International Encylopedia of Human Geography*, eds. Rob Kitchin, and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier Ltd, 2009), 169.

'old Mersin' with modernity. Some narratives of the Muslim interviewees explicitly associate modernity with the presence of the Christian population in the city and make the assertion that the reason as to why Mersin was a much more progressive city than the others in the region, was the modernity the non-Muslim communities introduced to the city. The anecdotes of the Muslim interviewees clearly indicate that they were able to grow up in a modern and civilized environment, thanks to the Christian community and the cosmopolitan characteristic of the city. In a similar vein, the Christian interviewees strongly stress the cosmopolitan urbanism in the city and speak very fondly of their childhood and youth. The interviewees embrace a "cultural sense of 'belonging' based on a cosmopolitan notion beyond the nation."[12] In general, all interviewees have nostalgic memories of the cosmopolitan culture of Mersin and their narratives serve to illustrate Mersin as a space to which they developed "belongings and fondness for a cosmopolitan past."[13]

The tendency of the interviewees to render Mersin a distinct place than the other cities in the region, and in Turkey in general, evokes what Geertz adverts to as 'local knowledge' in which he refers to the term 'local' not as "… a place, time, class and a variety of issues, but as to accent – vernacular characterizations of what happens connected to vernacular imaginings of what can."[14] According to the narratives of the Muslim interviewees, the local knowledge of Mersin which assigns to it a different and distinctive characteristic than other cities, was intrinsically and inextricably related to the presence of the non-Muslim communities. What has made and still makes Mersin different than the other cities of Turkey in their eyes, is the modernity which they attribute to the former non-Muslim communities and the current Christian population in the city. The narratives of the interviewees about Mersin and its cosmopolitan structure illustrate the city as a place torn between its cosmopolitan past and the nationalist present which includes a biased attitude against the immigrants and newcomers of the city. Their memories unveil a

12 Örs, 2016, p.81.

13 Mills, 2008, p.391.

14 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 215. Cited in Öztürkmen, 2006, p.182.

nostalgia for the cosmopolitan urbanism of Mersin in which they shared vibrant social relationships with one another. The narratives illustrate a local place in which a common identity was shared by all *Mersinli*s as neighbors and where they experienced no problems. So, it might be said that the shared identity of *Mersinli* and their bond with Mersin had the capacity to transcend and distinguish itself from the other identity categories such as nationalist, ethnic or religious. As Mills notes, "the role of place sometimes supersedes the role of state in processes of national (and minority) identity formation."[15]

"There were non-Muslims here, there is still a non-Muslim population but they are a minority now. Jews, Christians, Arabs; they were all mingled with each other without marginalizing anybody. … Frankly, it was a civilization they brought along. They made great contributions to Mersin. For instance, the Church and the Atatürk statue and the Culture Center are together. People who come to Mersin from outside say 'what a beautiful city' when they see that spot. The Orthodox Church, the statue of Atatürk and the Culture Center behind them." (Muslim, 70)

"The Christians have a different kind of etiquette, they have a thing. Even though they lived here, their manners… they are different. They are polite." (Muslim, 74)

"The non-Muslims had dealt with exports and transport. Because this is a sea town, this is a sea city which is why it was civilized. This is why it has been different than Adana and Tarsus; and the other (reason) is the non-Muslims. There have been people coming from Lattakia, from Rhodes, from Crete…" (Muslim, 70)

According to one Christian interviewee, the French influence in Mersin used to be more apparent than it was in Adana and this difference attested to the modernity of Mersin in comparison to Adana. In fact, the constant comparison of Mersin to Adana and Tarsus, and, the comparison among the women of the three cities, was salient in the narrative of one Muslim interviewee who claims that the women of Mersin were more elegant and had manners whereas the women of Adana were not like that at all. But the most apparent comparison of Mersin to the other two cities in the Çukurova region is

15 Mills, 2008, p.385.

on the ground that Mersin is different and much more modern than the other two. For the reason of that, the interviewees have stressed the presence of the non-Muslim community and the fact that Mersin was a sea town which made it open to progress and renovation. The cosmopolitan structure of the population in Mersin in general is assumed to have been the reason of difference of Mersin than Adana and Tarsus both by the Muslim and Christian interviewees. The interviewees use the word *kozmopolit* as a concept to describe the "nostalgic memory of better times in the past" and to indicate "a seamless, idealized past of tolerant multiculturalism, unburdened with negative connotations."[16] Furthermore, the cosmopolitanism they relay in their anecdotes and memories refers to a sense of multicultural coexistence among ethnically and religiously diverse groups which belonged to middle class and had a lifestyle which was defined by Western and modern aspirations in the common public space.[17] So, in a sense, the lifestyles of the interviewees were embodied both by the concept of cosmopolitanism and modernity, Westernization and secularism.

In a similar vein, the Christian interviewees feature that compared and contrasted to other Turkish cities, Mersin was unique in the sense that, for better or worse, the locals have provided a much tolerant and secure social environment for them. For the most part of the interviews, they speak very highly of the multi-religious and multicultural composition of the city's population and profess that they had not experienced any kind of discrimination against their community or whatsoever up to that point. However, as the interviews proceeded further, they get a little bit more outspoken and mention the discriminative behaviors and attitudes their families had experienced but never without adding warily that "these are all in the past." When explaining

16 Amy Mills, "Cosmopolitanism as Situated Knowledge: Reading İstanbul with David Harvey," in *İstanbul: Living with Difference in a Global City*, eds. Nora Fisher-Onar, Susan C. Pearce, and Fuat E. Keyman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 100.

17 İlay Romain Örs, "Cosmopolitanist Nostalgia: Geographies, Histories, and Memories of the Rum Polites," in *İstanbul: Living with Difference in a Global City*, eds. Nora Fisher-Onar, Susan C. Pearce, and Fuat E. Keyman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 92.

the times they themselves were faced with the same kind of attitude, they explicitly affirm that the incident either took place in another city in Turkey or it was an exception and not the norm, even if it happened in Mersin.

"The people of Mersin were very nice, excellent people. It was like the junior Paris. Nobody cared about anyone's religion or stuff. Tarsus is not like that. Go to the other direction and it is not like that, either. Only Mersin is like this. Why? Because Mersin is cosmopolitan [has a cosmopolitan population.] Fifty-two nations. There were plenty of Jews, plenty of Armenians, many Greeks and Christian Arabs..." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"Mersin has always been very different. When we went to other places in Turkey, it felt quite weird. It felt weird; with the looks and so on… We don't have it here (in Mersin). … Our people; believe that, there was no backwardness or anything. Why? Because most of them come from the outside; you know that, I told you, most of them were immigrants. They lived more freely, they had grown up more freely." (Catholic Christian, 80)

"… I haven't experienced such a thing as 'non-Muslim' in Mersin. There is no such thing. There has never been and there cannot be. With its Muslim, Christian, Arab, Jew, Armenian, Cretan, they all have lived next to each other, arm in arm, lived in attached houses and shared the streets. They have lived together." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"The Muslim-Christian relations in Mersin is at an unbelievable level. A coalescence going hand in hand with love and friendship. It still is so today. … At the Associations Office at the police station… My name is ... (a non-Turkish name and surname which implies she is not a Muslim); a name which indicates that I'm a Christian in the first place. But it has never come in my way. We have not experienced this in Mersin. We don't." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"… Mersin has always lived in unity, in peace and in fraternity. For instance, when a Christian needs something from the municipality… Right away, right away, no problem. Is it either a piece of land or something else; no problem. It is done in that instant. No matter which municipality (meaning whichever political party is in the office at the municipality) they do it. This does not happen everywhere. … When you go to a public office you do not experience any difficulty. Never. They (the civil servants) always approach

them (the Christians) with love and respect. Look, even now when the circumstances have changed (in the political sense.) Never." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

It needs to be accentuated here that the two Christian interviewees who give the last two quotes above are prominent figures of the civil society and non-governmental organizations in the city. Additionally, they are very active in the bureaucratic and organizational affairs of both of the Churches; therefore they need to get in contact with the protocol of the city very often as the official consent of the Governor's Office is a must for organizing ceremonies and events at the churches. For instance, one of those interviewees talks about participating the visits that the committee of the Church regularly pays to the newly appointed bureaucrats of the city. She plays a dynamic role on behalf of the Catholic Church in the social life of the city. The other interviewee also has close relations with the bureaucrats in the city as she takes part in most of the events of civil society associations and non-governmental organizations. She is a well-known figure in the social life of the city and has a vast network of friends and acquaintances. Therefore, it should be said that the narratives of these two Christian interviewees about not experiencing bureaucratic problems while running errands might not reflect the experience of the whole community. What's more, being formal citizens of the Turkish Republic requires the Christians and other non-Muslim citizens to receive the same and unbiased attitude that the Muslim citizens receive in bureaucratic affairs. However, since they know that it is not the case for the non-Muslim citizens throughout Turkey, they perceive the respect and nondiscrimination they experience in Mersin as a specialty which is unique to their hometown even though it is what needs to happen in all cities.

"There was absolutely no thought of discrimination between the Muslims and the Christians. And according to me, the most important merit of Mersin is the cemetery. The Christians and the Muslims lie next to each other [in tombs.] This is only in Mersin. I told that to the Governor, I said 'you wouldn't be able to see it anywhere else in Turkey.' There was certainly no differentiation between the Christians and the Muslims." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"On Christmases and Easters, the governor and the mayor certainly send flowers to the church to celebrate … On Christmas Eve, the mayors come (to

the Church) and bring their wives along. The deputy governors come and celebrate Christmas together. This is not found anywhere else and this is the difference of Mersin. They come and stay until the very end. When people stand up, they stand up; when people sit down, they sit down. I mean there is no 'I'm not a Christian, why would it concern me?' He does what everyone else does. You can't see that in İstanbul or İzmir, you can't find this there." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The narrative about the prominent bureaucrats and politicians attending the religious ceremonies on the religiously festive days seems to be a commonality between the ethno-religious minorities living in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In an interview, the president of the Hatay Jewish Foundation also highlights that on Passover, the mayor and other prominent bureaucratic figures of the city visit the synagogue to celebrate the Jewish minority's Passover.[18] Considering that celebrating the religiously festive days of non-Muslim communities is not that common in the rest of Turkey, the emphasis on this is not unorthodox.

The Christian interviewee, who is an eminent figure in the social and cultural life of the city, mentions how most members of the Christian community get in touch with her to ask for help in their affairs with the municipality or the police station. In fact, during our interview, a friend called her to ask where they should go to file an objection for an unfair traffic penalty they recently received. Giving an account of the time she arranged the burial of a Christian friend on a national holiday, the interviewee relays that the officers at the cemetery made an exception because they personally knew her, in spite of the regulations for the funeral having to be held and the burial having to take place the following day as it was a national holiday that day. Through that anecdote, the interviewee elucidates how she takes care of the bureaucratic arrangements of most of the members of the Christian community. Through her con-

18 Henri Çiprut, "Hatay Musevi Cemaati Vakfı Başkanı Şaul Cenudioğlu: "Filistin'den geldik, 23 Asırdır Buradayız,"" Avlaremoz, last modified on June 26, 2016, accessed September 30, 2018. http://www.avlaremoz.com/2016/06/26/hatay-musevi-cemaati-vakfi-baskani-saul-cenudioglu-filistinden-geldik-23-asirdir-buradayiz/

nections, she has effortlessly evolved to be a renowned yet unofficial representative of the Christian community in Mersin. She was even officially invited by the German Embassy in Turkey as a special guest to attend the visit of the former German president to the Saint Paul's Church in Tarsus.[19] She was the only guest from Mersin. After that, she was invited by the Turkish ambassador of Germany to represent Turkey at a multireligious event held in Berlin to which she attended with an official from the church in Mersin. She also hosted the embassy employees and German television programmers when they visited the city to shoot a documentary on Tarsus and Mersin.

Both these two Christian interviewees specifically decipher the peculiarity of the city cemetery of Mersin as being one of the very few cemeteries not only in Turkey, but in the whole world in which people from the three monotheistic religions are buried in a common place. The only other cemetery in Turkey of three monotheistic religions is in Hatay which demographically resembles Mersin with its multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. The interviewed women believe that this specific cemetery alone suffices to manifest the uniqueness of Mersin in terms of the relations between its diverse multi-religious and multi-ethnic communities. One of the Christian interviewees mention the passing away of a priest of the Catholic Church in Mersin who had lived in the city for more than 30 years and the lengths that the bureaucrats in Mersin had gone to in order to convince his family to bury him in the multi-religious cemetery of the city. She connotes the 'Fraternity of Religions' ceremony that is held every year in the city cemetery on the first day of the Feast of Sacrifice for which the priests of the Orthodox and Catholic Church and an official imam of the city get together and pray. The ceremony has been held annually since 1999 and is covered in the local and national press every year

19 "Wulff urges Turkey to respect Christians," The Local De, last modified on 19 October 2010, accessed September 30, 2018.https://www.thelocal.de/20101019/30609. "Alman Cumhurbaşkanı Tarsus'ta hacı oldu," CNN TÜRK, last modified on 21 October 2010, accessed September 30, 2018. https://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/10/21/alman.cumhurbaskani.tarsusta.haci.oldu/593795.0/index.html

with headlines praising the tolerant, multi-ethnic and multi-religious characteristics of Mersin and the city cemetery.[20]

"For instance we have a cemetery which is unique in the world. It's a cemetery of every religion. There is always a ceremony on the first day of the Feast of Sacrifice every year. We will do the nineteenth one this year (in 2017.) You will see it if you go on Google and write 'the city cemetery Mersin.' There are prayers for the dead there. The imam, the priests, the choir members of the Church who happen to be here at that time come and sing hymns. They sing Yunus Emre. It is a mix. The side of the Christians is on the left when you enter. But now that side is also mixed, we bury Muslim friends there, too. Everyone goes there. There is no religion there, there is only the body of a person; that is all." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

After describing the city cemetery and how it holds an exception in comparison to the other cities in Turkey, she utters her appreciation for the cleanliness of the side of the cemetery belonging to the Christians and how it is no different in terms of hygiene and tidiness than the side of the Muslims. As cemeteries are places associated with the past, the people in the past and the emotions regarding the past, they might serve as a 'site of memory'[21] in Pierre Nora's words. They contain cultural symbols and meanings and in the case of Mersin cemetery, these symbols and meanings are reinforced even more since it is a common cemetery for people of the three religions. Aside from reminding people of their interactions with their families and other people and making them question the meaning of life, they are places designated with dynamism and transcendence.[22] So, the ceremony held at the Mersin cemetery on the first day of the Feast of Sacrifice every year by the imams and priests exemplify the new symbols and meanings attributed to the cemetery as a site of memory. In the case of the Christian interviewee, the cleaning of the tombs on the Christian side of the cemetery is symbolized as a reason to embrace the

20 For the national news covering the latest ceremony in 2018 please see: Mustafa Ercan, "Mersin'de Din Adamları Hoşgörü Mezarlığı'nda Buluştu," Hürriyet, last modified on 21 August 2018, accessed on 30 September 2018. http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/mersinde-din-adamlari-hosgoru-mezarliginda-b-40934571

21 Nora, 1989, p.8.

22 Türker, 2015, p.243.

homeland even more although it should be the basic duty of the cemetery office to keep all the tombs clean, regardless of the religion to which people in the tombs belonged in their lifetimes. It seems that the common assumption that an acceptable citizen's having to be Muslim and Turkish does not end after people go inside the tombs, either.

"The cleaning of the Christian tombs… It empowers you as well as giving you the strength to embrace the homeland more." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

As mentioned above, both of these two Christian women serve as key contacts for the rest of the members of their community in their bureaucratic affairs since they personally know most of the local government employees in the office. Aside from these two interviewees, there is also another Christian woman from the next generation who works at the municipal committees regarding the current problems of the city. Thus, their positions in the social and bureaucratic circles of the city might signify their assertions about not experiencing any difficulty or discriminatory behavior while conducting their affairs at the public offices. The interviewees themselves are aware that their experiences by no means represent those of the other members of ethno-religious minorities in Turkey. What's more, they express that their experiences in Mersin do not set an example to what they have experienced outside of Mersin from time to time. For instance, one of these two interviewees particularly discloses an experience she had while she was lying at the hospital for an operation in Ankara on which I will elaborate later on.

§ 5.3 Not Knowing One Another's Ethno-Religious Background in a Cosmopolitan City

One of the most repeated narratives about the childhoods of the interviewees is that while growing up, they allegedly did not know who was Christian and who was Alawite or who was Kurdish and who was Turkish. This line of thought is mentioned more frequently by the Muslim interviewees but the Christian interviewees refer to it as well. This kind of narrative is adopted to exhibit the theme of tolerance and cultural and religious plurality in Mersin during their childhood and youth.

"When I was going to school, we were going as a mixed bunch in the mornings. I wouldn't even realize whether the one standing next to me was a Muslim or a Christian. That is how the nice tolerance we grew up with was like. This is Mersin." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"… Then the Arabs, too, came here but we are all as one. No discrimination or anything. I had never known such a thing. I had not known whether there are Alawites or Kurds or Turks… We are all as one. It is still like this; yet in the past we hadn't known it (the ethno-religious backgrounds of people) at all" (Muslim, 70)

As it is explicitly stressed in the anecdotes, there is a dominant intimation of not having known anything about people's ethno-religious identities in the past. However, despite these anecdotes, the other narratives about the non-Muslim population of Mersin in the past and present appears to be in conflict with the allegations about 'not knowing whether anyone was Turkish or Kurdish or Christian.' Everybody knew about who belonged to which community. This will be elaborated in the upcoming sections about the intercommunal marriages and relations. However, this discourse is adopted while talking about ethnic minorities as well. During the interview with one Muslim interviewee, she was thinking aloud about what more she could remember to tell me and suggested the name of a renowned sportsmen of Mersin like she was talking to herself. But a second later, she changed her mind saying "He was Arab." These narratives brings forth the result that the allegation that people were not aware of each other's ethnic or ethno-religious identities does not exactly hold true.

All the same, it is noteworthy here that knowing and not knowing or being aware and being unaware of ethnic backgrounds is in close relation with the ethnic and class position in the power hierarchy.[23] People belonging to an ethno-religious community which comprises the majority in a society, have the privilege of not needing to know about the others who belong to the groups or communities which are down under the ethno-religious hierarchy. Whereas the minority groups need to know about the presence and the sensitivities of the majority group as a must for survival, the majority group does

23 Barış Ünlü, *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi* (Dipnot Yayınları, 2018), 17.

not need to know anything about the minority groups because the members can afford not knowing. Likewise, it is only the members of ethno-religious community or the race in majority who can afford to allege that there is not an ethno-religious or racial problem in a society. Analyzing the issue from a perspective borrowed from whiteness studies, which focuses on the privileged and underprivileged groups in society from the positions of the black and white people, and feminist studies, which address the privileged position of men and underprivileged position of women in society; Ünlü asserts that the privileges derived from belonging to the majority group are present in the first place because of the lack of privileges in the case of the minority group. He employs this framework to develop an analysis of Muslims and non-Muslims in Turkey.[24] Plus, in an ethnically and culturally diverse city as Mersin, the plurality of cultural features such as the accents, names and clothing, entailed who was who and who was from which ethno-religious group. All in all, the ethno-religious identities of the non-Muslim communities have always been known as the members were labelled as '*gayrimüslim*' and the fact that they hold a peculiar position and stand out as different in a heavily Muslim society has always been imposed on them. Since they are not Muslim but members of ethno-religious minorities who have not had to leave Turkey and been able to stay, they are more prone to be considered as '*gavur*s' (infidels) who were allowed to stay. Their assigned roles require them to be more diligent citizens but be invisible and reticent when it comes to demanding their rights.[25]

The acknowledgment of privilege is a much complex process than the acknowledgment of the opposite because the comfort that privilege provides does not incite people to question how they acquired that privilege in the first place. In other words, it is much more convenient for the people of the majority group to claim there is no discrimination against a minority group in a society which might be the case for the Muslim women interviewed for this study. In Kimmel and Ferber's words, "privilege is far less visible to us than its absence; when we are discriminated against, it is much more painfully obvious than when we belong to the groups that benefit from that discrimination."

24 Ünlü, 2018, p.31.

25 Türker, 2015, p.166.

They argue that being subjected to discrimination is experienced more explicitly than the experience of being the one who practices the discrimination.[26] Therefore, the quotes of the Muslim interviewees about not being aware of the ethno-religious backgrounds of their non-Muslim friends and neighbors in the past is not that much surprising considering they did not need to know about the backgrounds of ethno-religious minorities since they were members of the majority group of Muslims in the city and in the country.

However, these explanations do not indicate that the interviewees are not straightforward by any means when they mention that they used to not know about people's ethnic backgrounds in the past. On the contrary, their narratives are portrayals of the fact that identifications at local level go beyond the ethnic community borders.[27] Aside from ethnic and religious ones, political, cultural and especially local identities are also essential in terms of determining communities. In a similar vein, Eriksen deciphers that cultural boundaries "do not necessarily correspond with ethnic boundaries" and "are not clear-cut."[28] During the childhoods and youths of the interviewees of this study, what was significant to them was not people's ethnicity or religion but their locality as being from Mersin which they all shared in common. Rather than defining the denizens with their ethno-religious identities, they chose to define them with the common identity they shared; which was being locals of Mersin. Through Eriksen's interpretation that the importance of ethnicity varies in accordance to social situations and it is the agents themselves who decide on its level of importance[29], it might be asserted that the interviewees of this study did not place much significance on the ethnicity and religion of the people they interacted with in Mersin during their childhoods, youths and early adulthoods.

26 Michael S. Kimmel, and Abby L. Ferber, "Preface," in *Privilege: A Reader*, eds. Michael S. Kimmel, and Abby L. Ferber (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.

27 Doğruel, 2009, p.81.

28 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 35.

29 Eriksen, 1993, p.32.

§ 5.4 Modernity and Immigration

One Muslim interviewee heavily complains about the decadence in the city and not recognizing anyone familiar on the street. At the same time, she states that she is able to comprehend whether a person is truly from Mersin at a quick glance at their attitude and behavior. The interviewee articulates that she does not evaluate or judge people on their religion or nationality. Moreover, her anecdotes and narratives draw out quite a tolerant and understanding point of view; however, she is clearly not happy about the migrants and immigrants who have settled in the city and does not consider them as true *Mersinli* at all; either with their appearance or their mindset. She does not feel content with the Syrian immigrants who have been settling in Mersin since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. Yet, when she is talking about the Cretan community who had arrived in Mersin a century ago as the result of the population exchange agreement with Greece, she portrays the difference in her perception of the Cretan and Syrian communities of the city. While she acknowledges that the problems arising from the immigrants and their rehabilitation in Turkey are the results of inefficient governance, she relays conflicting narratives.

"… We grew up like this, there was no discrimination based on race, religion, language in our community. This is first. Secondly, I do not argue with people who discriminate based on race, language and religion anymore. I raise my hand like this (a hand sign indicating 'stop') and say 'Are you still there?' … Everyone has a Kurdish daughter-in-law, everyone has a Kurdish son-in-law. The one you call 'Kurdish' has come from Adam and Eve; you might also call it Darwin's theory if you like. Both are welcome but in the end, who has created them both: God."

"… (after saying Mersin used to be very modern and like Paris) Now it is very mixed up. I cannot find a person to say hi to but it is the state policy. … But would it have been better if the old Mersin remained as it was? It would have been very good. Atatürk was a foresighted man. He visited Mersin on 17 March 1922, right? What did he say? 'Mersinlis, look after Mersin.' He must have seen everything from then. And now there is an amazingly reproductive Syrian population. When I see a *Mersinli* in Mersin, I know that he/she is *Mersinli* straight away; from the way he/she speaks, from the way he/she is

dressed, his/her elegance, his/her politeness. ... There is no discrimination based on tradition, race, language, religion. People are coalesced with each other in Mersin. … Mersin has Cretans as well. … These Cretans are polite and beautiful in a different way. We have coalesced with them in a different way. They came as a result of the population exchange." (Muslim, 73)

Kadıoğlu refers to the definition of Turkish citizen as having religious, linguistic and cultural dimensions which only fit people from the Sunni sect of Islam who speak Turkish and have Turkish cultural characteristics.[30] The interviewee's quote about coalescing with the Cretans in a different way adverts her acknowledgement of the Cretans as *Mersinli* whereas she feels differently about the newcomers of the city and this difference in her perception evokes Kadıoğlu's definition. Likewise, Örs also mentions that "…the ideal of achieving the religious, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity of the nation" was performed "in the most dramatic way by Greece and Turkey in the forced exchange of populations in 1924,"[31] which alludes to the interviewee's feeling of having bonded and being more intimate with the Cretan community as they share the same religious, ethnic and linguistic characteristics, unlike the other communities in the city.

Despite the interviewee's perceptions, when the Cretans first arrived at Mersin, they were not instantly accepted by the local residents, either. According to the oral history interviews Emigil conducted with the first generation of Cretans in Mersin, the local residents were opposed to the distribution of the properties of the Greeks who left Mersin to the Cretans who arrived because they wanted the said properties to themselves. According to a local joke often told in Mersin, the local residents made fun of the Cretans because they often cooked and ate vegetables and complained that since the Cretans consumed all the herbs and greenery, they could not find anything to feed their animals. Therefore they left a donkey in front of the district governor building which had a sign on its neck saying 'The Cretans came and I'm left hungry.'[32] It is alleged by the Cretans that this biased viewpoint is why the cuisine of

30 Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "Denationalization of Citizenship? The Turkish Experience," *Citizenship Studies*, 11:3, (2007): 285.

31 Örs, 2006, p.82

32 This joke was also told to me by the third generation member of a Cretan family in Mersin.

Mersin has not adopted the Cretan recipes. The Cretans were either called as '*gavur*' or emigrants (*muhacir*) and the locals did not want to marry their daughters off to them. Marriages often took place within their own community. As time passed, exogamic marriages started to take place between the Cretans and the locals.[33] In fact, even though they have been living in Mersin for more than a century, in a local news piece from 2005, the residents of the neighborhood complain that they are still referred to as *gâvur*s.[34] All in all, in spite of the interviewee's allegations, the coalescence of the locals of Mersin with the Cretans had not been a smooth and swift process, either.

Likewise, a Christian interviewee, who expresses her disappointment and distress over the the deterioration of Mersin multiple times throughout our interview, mentions the Syrian immigrants who have settled in Turkey and enunciates the need for the young Turkish people to stay and fight for their futures rather than leaving and moving to another country.

"Let God send us to eternity on this land but it is not possible to live anywhere else. But you (meaning the youth); you, too, please do not leave, protect your country. We would be no different than the Syrians; I mean to this country… Then, we would be like the young people who left Syria and came here. We should stay here and fight for our country. I feel very upset." (Catholic Christian, 71)

Another Christian interviewee who is very determined on her narrative that the Christian community had been modernized way before the Republic and speaks highly of their social life in Mersin in the past, makes a remark about the current social life going backwards rather than forward. She underlines that thanks to their connections abroad, the non-Muslims modernized Mersin. The emphasis in the the Christian community's earlier modernization before the Republic is noteworthy because it attests to how they have perceived

33 Emigil, 2005, 136-138.

34 "Giritliler "gâvur" diye anılmak istemiyor," Mynet, last modified on 11.07.2005, accessed on February 9, 2018. https://www.mynet.com/giritliler-gavur-diye-anilmak-istemiyor-110100160485

themselves different than the Muslims in the past. It also serves as a demonstration of their perception of being urbanized and Westernized long before the Muslim community in Mersin.[35]

Likewise, one Christian interviewee conveys her memory of a night out in Paris in 1959 when she was mistaken by a guy for being Jewish. She laughs a lot while unfolding how the guy did not believe that she was Turkish her because he thought she looked so different than a Turk. She tells this story to illustrate how she and the other women of Mersin were different than the regular Turkish woman type. Accentuating that she was dressed in a cleavage and she was dancing at a club in Paris, her narrative exhibits that such an appearance of a Turkish woman was hard to acquiesce by foreigners because of the image of Turkey as an underdeveloped country. She also emphasizes that her appearance and modernity, which she believes was not common for a Turkish woman, was a specialty of Mersin.

One commonality among all the narratives is that they believe it is quite important that their families had gone through the modernization process quite a long time ago. The Christian interviewees all mention that they had already been modern long before the Republic whereas the Muslim interviewees underline that they have been more modern than the majority of the Turkish people. The women from both communities use 'modernity' as a tool to emphasize their difference, and sometimes superiority, from the masses. The manifestation of modernity is perceived as the indicator of upward mobility in the narratives of these women; the more modern a family is, the more cultured and accomplished they are. For instance, one Muslim interviewee talks about how her mother took her and her two sisters on separate vacations on a cruise ship even before the Mersin Port had been built. After conceding that those vacations were unprecedented even in their family, which was one of the

35 Similarly, Leyla Neyzi mentions in an interview that the Jewish women living in Teşvikiye, İstanbul, also use the same kind of narrative as to explain that their women were already modernized by the end of the nineteenth century and they received education, spoke French and participated the public space. Hence, these Jewish women in the Teşvikiye neighborhood of İstanbul consider themselves to have pioneered modernization. Duygu Gül, and Zeynep Kutluata, "Türkiye'de Yahudilik ve Sabetaycılık: Leyla Neyzi ile Söyleşi," *Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar*, 7, (Mart 2009): 58.

eshraf families, an intimation in which they are among the people to have experienced such things even then follows. She also talks about how there were no fridges in the houses back then but they had one in which the neighbors sometimes asked to put their butter and jam. She concludes her narrative saying that "These are not the kinds of things to say but I'm telling them to reflect the life of that era in general."

Another Muslim interviewee reflects how she and her husband wished that their son would take a British girl as a wife. She relays that they had not found it strange that their son was staying in the same house with a Turkish girl when he was a student in the UK although it was not common then. Albeit at first she speaks of her initial reaction as being "oh no," she then quickly corrects herself and says that she was happy for her son. She defines her husband's encouragement of her son to flirt with the girl as a demonstration of their being modern *Mersinli*s. "My husband grabbed the phone and said 'Son, steal her heart, steal her heart.' That's the kind of *Mersinli* we are."

In their study about the *eshraf* families in a couple of cities, Durakbaşa, Özsan and Karadağ mention that the narratives of the women from those families include hints "in relation to the various forms in which modernization in Turkey has been lived and fabricated in their experiences."[36] Their findings once again resonate with the narratives of the interviewed women of this study, even though majority of them are not from *eshraf* families. Yet, the women interviewed for this study also accentuate their view of their family histories in order to demonstrate their attachment to modernity. This is evident in their narratives regarding the Republican balls and dances at the Merchants Club as well. During those years, the cultural events in rural cities such as concerts, balls and receptions were considered to have an impact in achieving a social status.[37] The struggle in the cultural space was determined by who had more urban and modernized tastes and consumption patterns which reflected the Western life style.[38] Although the characteristics of being a port city

36 Durakbaşa, Özsan and Karadağ, 2009, p.155.

37 Meltem Karadağ, "Taşra Kentlerinde Yaşam Tarzları Alanı: Kültür ve Ayrım," *Toplum Bilim*, 118, (2010): 49.

38 Karadağ, 2010, p.40.

rendered Mersin a different position than the other rural cities, the determining impact of Western and modern life styles and cultural practices was a commonality it shared with other cities. This is once again apparent in the narratives above which focus on the interviewees' emphasis on their modern and Westernized life styles as well as their perceptions of modernity in general.

§ 5.5 Those Who Left and Those Who Stayed

The interviewees point out to the interval between the late 1970s and early 1990s as the time when the migration to Mersin was initiated. After the mass killings in Kahramanmaraş in 1978[39], which targeted left-wing Sunnis, Kurds and especially Alawites and resulted with the killings of 111 people, many people fled Kahramanmaraş and moved to Mersin, constituting one of the migration waves to the city. The late 1980s and early 1990s correspond to the time when the turmoil in the southeastern Turkey have started to accelerate. The Kurdish people who had to desert their homes searched for shelter in the regions geographically closer to the southeast region. As a result, Mersin was one the cities which has begun to receive extensive amount of migrants around that time and the numbers have exponentially increased. It was only expected, since migrants tend to look for a place to migrate where they have friends and family members who would provide resources facilitating their rehabilitation in that place.[40]

A Muslim interviewee gives the exact name of the mayor who was in the office when the arrival of the Kurdish migrants to Mersin started and accuses him of allowing the migrants into the city for political motivations. The survey Erjem conducted with 1022 households of 5918 migrants in 2009[41] seems to validate her argument as to the time frame the migrants began to arrive. The results depict that 77% of the interviewed migrants migrated to Mersin after 1980 and the highest percentage of people, 25.7%, migrated between the years

39 Zürcher, 2004, p.263.

40 John Field, *Social Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003), 158.

41 Erjem, 2009.

1986-1990, whereas the second highest percentage of migration, 17.6%, occurred between the years 1991-1995[42] which overlaps with the interval the mentioned mayor was in office. According to the results of the survey, 83% of the interviewed migrants in Mersin were originally from eastern and southeastern Turkey.[43] Furthermore, between the years 1985-1990, Mersin had a migration rate of 68% which was ranked the fourth highest one in Turkey.[44] Another significant note is that among the causes of migration to Mersin, employment opportunities came at top with %55.4.

"… Then, because of migration, Mersin changed a lot. The first migration wave started in the time of Kaya Mutlu[45]. He brought a lot of people from the southeast because of votes. Afterwards the Syrians added salt to the wound. It's a very different Mersin now. I don't like it at all but we live here imperatively. You used to greet and say hi to quite a number of people when you went out to street but now you don't know anyone. It would be something if it was a good crowd but…" (Muslim, 79)

As newcomers have kept arriving to the city, the former denizens, mostly the non-Muslims, who are referred to as 'modern' in the narratives of the interviewees, have left and migrated elsewhere. Some of them, the Jews and Christians in particular, are said to have gone abroad. Today, there are approximately 2,000 Christians in Mersin whereas there is only one Jewish family left.[46] In the anecdotes of the interviewed women, the deterioration of Mersin

42 Nail Güreli, "İç Göç ve Mersin," Milliyet, last modified on 17.03.2010, accessed October 10, 2018. http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nail-gureli/ic-goc-ve-mersin-1212397/

43 Gürsel, a.g.e, 2010.

44 Eylem Özdemir, "The Transformation of Cultural Diversity into Divided Urban Communities in the Case of Mersin, Turkey," in *Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity Critical Cases*, eds. Scott Boyd and Mary Ann Walter (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 121.

45 The mayor of Mersin in office in 1974-1980 and again in 1989-1994. "Eski Başkanlar," Mersin Büyükşehir Belediyesi, accessed January 29, 2019. https://www.mersin.bel.tr/eski-baskanlar

46 It should be noted that the total number of Jewish community in Hatay, the other multicultural city in the Eastern Mediterranean Turkey, has been in decline, too. According to a quote given by the president of Hatay Jewish Foundation in 2016, there are 17 Jews remaining in total in Hatay whereas there are 270 Jews in İstanbul who were born in Hatay but migrated afterwards. Çiprut, a.g.e, 2016.

is associated with their departures. As opposed to their complaints and criticism about the newcomers of the city, they nostalgically mention their Christian and Jewish neighbors and acquaintances who have left Mersin and moved to other cities in Turkey or abroad. However, they do not indicate the reasons as to why their non-Muslim friends and neighbors decided to leave. It is almost like there is a tacit and abstract agreement for not dwelling into the reasons of their departure. Only one Christian interviewee mentions that her Jewish friend's move to İzmir derived from the fact that she thought there was nobody to whom she could marry her child off.[47] One Muslim interviewee makes a remark that the families which improved their financial status went abroad but does not state the reason why they did. So, in general, the narratives pertaining to the departure of the non-Muslims of which the reason is not articulated and the arrival of the rural migrants instead are exhibited as the main factors in the decline of the cosmopolitan culture of the city.

Cosmopolitanism "…begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association."[48] Örs suggests that the kind of cosmopolitanism, on which the *Rum* Polites who had to move from İstanbul to Athens established their identity, has its urban character as one of its most significant dimensions.[49] She suggests that the most evident element of "the expressions of Rum İstanbulite cosmopolitanism is their strong sense of locality."[50] The same predicament might be made for the cosmopolitanism of the *Mersinli* interviewees of this study. Their local identity as *Mersinli* cuts across their associations with their religious and ethnic identites. The idiosyncratic urban culture of Mersin serves to demarcate the interviewees and other locals from the rural migrants and the immigrants who arrived

47 Likewise, Leyla Neyzi predicates that one of the major concerns of the Jewish diaspora is the fear that they are not going to be able to find anyone to marry their children off in the future which substantiates the interviewee's Jewish friend's decision to move from Mersin in that sense. Gül and Kutluata, 2005, p.55.

48 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), xix.

49 Örs, 2006, p.88.

50 Örs, 2018, p.92.

in the city recently. While they appreciate the ethno-religious diversity of the original residents of Mersin, they do not feel the same way towards the presence of the newcomers. So, it might be said that the discourse in the narratives regarding the cosmopolitan characteristic of Mersin is grounded upon "the diminishing population of non-Muslims and an ambiguous time frame"[51] as the interviewees refrain from indicating a certain time as to when the non-Muslims began to leave. The same discourse highlights 'what is no more' and 'who is there no more' but at the same time, does not refer to the reason of the departure of those former residents of Mersin which entailed the city to be partially deprived of its cosmopolitan characteristic. In the words of Örs, there is little endeavor made to contemplate "the subjectivities involved" in the loss of cosmopolitanism and pluralism.[52] Moreover, the discourse involves a high level of "cosmopolitanist nostalgia," [53] which relies on the local identity and consciousness established upon the opinion that the old and cosmopolitan Mersin used to be a much modern and civilized place. This opinion seems to have been consolidated against the transformation of the socio-economic and political landscape as the massive Kurdish migration and the Syrian immigration altered the urban scene in the city. Furthermore, as the decline of cosmopolitan cities entailed the rise of nationalism and the rejection of social pluralism, the nostalgia for a long gone cosmopolitan city is "as much about yearning for plurality as it is a critique of the way the social fabric of the city was reimagined through modern nationalism."[54] Although the city has lost a great deal of its cosmopolitanism as a considerable part of its non-Muslim population left, thanks to the ongoing presence of the Christian community, it is still considered as to have a plural, multicultural and multireligious harmony which, along with the memory of the cosmopolitan Mersin, "provides

51 İlay Romain Örs, "İstanbullu Rumlar, Eski İstanbullular," in *Eski İstanbullular, Yeni İstanbullular*, ed. Ali Çarkoğlu, (İstanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2009), 122.

52 Örs, 2018, p.83

53 Ibid.

54 Feyzi Baban, "The Past Is a Different City: İstanbul, Memoirs and Multiculturalism," in *İstanbul: Living with Difference in a Global City*, eds. Nora Fisher-Onar, Nora, Susan C. Pearce, and Fuat E. Keyman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 61-62.

a corrective to the preoccupation with homogeneity in most national narratives."[55]

"… (Mersin) has turned into this ridiculousness afterwards. It has received heavy migration and the modern families went to İstanbul, Ankara or abroad. The Christians went abroad." (Muslim, 74)

"There were so many Christians. There were Armenians, there were Jews and there were many Christian Arabs. They are all gone. None remained." (Muslim, 80)

"A Jewish friend of mine said, 'X (her name,) there is no family to whom I could marry off my child here' and moved to İzmir. … Now there is only one Jewish family in Mersin." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"Right now there is only one or two people from Jewish families. There are not any left; they all went to İstanbul or İzmir." (Muslim, 80)

"For instance, there was a synagogue here; it was then demolished because there are no Jews here anymore. There is only one family." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The departure of the middle and upper middle class non-Muslim families and the arrival of lower and lower middle class rural Muslim families have drawn Mersin away from its characteristics as an Eastern Mediterranean port city which accommodated non-Muslim communities and made it evolve into more of a regular Anatolian town with mostly Muslim residents. The emergence of new identities identities of culture, politics and class which was incited by the migration led to the reconstruction of a new urban space. The interviewees often criticize the current socio-cultural structure of the population in the city in their narratives. One Muslim interviewee tells an anecdote where she chatted with another woman on the bus and how both of them instantly understood that the other one is *Mersinli* even though they have never met before. She claims to have understood her being *Mersinli* from her manner of speaking, courtesy and attitude, stating that she could tell that. Accordingly, the interviewed women tend to associate themselves with other locals who are the true *Mersinli*s, with similar consumption patterns and life styles and have the same socio-cultural status. These women consider themselves

55 Baban, 2018, p.63.

and other locals to have been the representatives of modernity, which they believe to be an essential element of the local identity of Mersin, with their hair styles, fashion sense, etiquette, education and life style. Correspondingly, their narratives construct the story of modernization.[56] Yet, they adopt an exclusionary attitude against the newcomers of the city whom they do not consider to have adopted the same life style or values.[57] Identifying a true *Mersinli* with modernity, civilization and Westernization, as opposed to identifying the newcomers with being unmodern and with the deterioration of the city, is crucial at this point for it reproduces exclusionary attitudes by the locals of the city towards the newcomers who are not considered worthy of inclusion.[58]

The people who have moved from Mersin to other cities or countries probably would not have been able to recognize the urban spaces where they had spent their years. However, the fear of change is constant in the case of those who remained, too. The swift loss of what used to belong to them creates anxiety. They have strong attachments to the places in which they had spent their childhood or a significant part of their adult life, for instance the childhoods of their children. As the urban space with which they attached a strong bond goes through a transformation, it gets harder to preserve that attachment with it. The two clashes between the urban and rural and between the lower and upper classes generate anxiety in the old residents of the city which is why they tend to idealize the times and places in their narratives about the past.[59] There

56 Durakbaşa, Özsan and Karadağ, 2009, p.155.

57 This kind of attitude towards the newcomers of a city is not specific to the interviewed women in this study or a majority group in a city. For instance, Kaymak states that the same kind of attitude is adopted by the Armenian minority in İstanbul who used to live in the Armenian neighborhoods of Samatya and Yedikule but believe them to have turned into conservative Muslim neighborhoods with the arrival of the rural Muslim migrants. They felt the need to move to new neighborhoods such as Yeşilköy where they regarded the modern, secular and urban Muslim population living there was 'like themselves' rather than the conservative Muslims who migrated from the rural towns. Kaymak, 2018, p.138.

58 İpek Demir, "Humbling Turkishness: Undoing the Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion of Turkish Modernity," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 27, no.3, (September 2014): 382.

59 Türker, 2015, p.254.

is a constant comparison between the city's present and its past which they all remember very fondly.

"The Mersin life was very beautiful. I mean, we had lived very nice things until the recent migration. Not the recent; I should say, the first migration." (Muslim, 79)

Although the Christian women interviewed for this study are from Mersin and their families have been in Mersin since the 1800s; due to having more opportunities for employment, the city has also received Christian immigrants from Hatay. While I was doing my fieldwork, I happened to meet a priest of the Orthodox Church in Antakya, Hatay, at the launch of a book based on a research about the Arab Orthodox people living in Antakya[60] and had a brief talk with him about whether a similar research might be conducted for the Arab Orthodox people living in Mersin. He replied that most of the local Arab Orthodoxies of Mersin left and the ones remaining are already from Hatay who had to move to Mersin for various reasons. In fact, the priest of the Orthodox Church in Mersin is from Hatay as well. According to him, roughly 90% of the Orthodox community in Mersin are from Hatay. Out of approximately 350 Orthodox families in Mersin, 320 of them are originally from Hatay and only 20-30 families are from Mersin.[61] Likewise, the Christian interviewees draw attention to the Christians who moved to Mersin from Hatay. However, they do not make any comments other than stating that they do not personally know the Christians who came from Hatay.

"The local Christians left in Mersin are so few." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"There are not any local Christian *Mersinl*is left now. Most of them came to Mersin from Samandağ.[62] All… I mean when we go to the church… Two or three people (from Mersin). You can't see *Mersinli*. They are all foreigners. They sometimes ask me about a family. I don't know them. I don't know them if they are not locals of Mersin." (Catholic Christian, 84)

60 Arslan and Oflazoğlu, a.g.e., 2017.

61 Personal Interview

62 A province of Hatay with a Christian population of its own.

§ 5.6 Exogamic Marriages

5.6.1 *Narratives of the Christians about Divorce and Inter-denominational Marriages*

One of the Christian interviewees whose quote about the few local Christians in Mersin is given above, was a born-Orthodox but switched to Catholicism after she got married to a Catholic at the age of 16. At the same time, she indicates that she attends the services of both the Orthodox and the Catholic church and it does not make a huge difference since what matters is the Bible. Her six children are Catholics because their father is one. The fact that they got married at the Catholic Church is another determinant on which church the kids born out of that marriage belong to.

"Your Uncle X (her husband) is Catholic and because of that, all our kids go there (to the Catholic Church.) I was an Orthodox, my mother and father are so as well but I became a Catholic when I got married. It doesn't matter, though; whether it is this or that, but we go there (to the Catholic Church) the most with your Uncle X. Because I can't leave him alone on his own now (because he is quite old.) On the religiously festive days, I both go there (to the Orthodox Church) and here (the Catholic Church). I go to both. Because my mother and father were Orthodoxies. What is important is the Bible so it does not matter." (Catholic Christian, 84)

Conversely, another interviewee who was a born-Catholic married an Orthodox at the Orthodox Church and switched to Orthodoxy, and as a result, her children are all born-Orthodox. Since her husband passed away, she prefers to attend the services of the Catholic Church more; but just like the interviewee above, she intermittently attends the services of the Orthodox Church as well. Her born-Orthodox daughter got married to a Catholic at the Catholic Church and had to switch to Catholicism, so her children (the interviewee's grandchildren) are born-Catholics now. These cases exhibit the patrilineal descent system acting as the conclusive determinant in these matters.

Similarly, in a study conducted about the role of the women in Slavo-Macedonian minority communities in Greece, Karakasidou states that the children borne out of intermarriages between Slavo-Macedonian women and Greek men, are considered to be fully Greek while the women are forbidden

by their husbands to speak their mother tongue at home and do not have a say in the enculturation process of their children.[63] So, in this vein, women are believed to be the agents of cultural transmission; in fact, nationalism appraises women as the bearer of tradition and accommodates the responsibility of conservation of the heritage on women.[64]

The nationalist ideology ascribes the role of transmitting the culture in between generations to the women as mothers.[65] Since women are perceived as the transmitters of the collective identity, this perception leads to the consideration of women as the agents of nationalism and modernization projects. But at the same time, this perception might lead to the consolidation of conservative discourses regarding restricting women from any kind of change.[66] The nationalist ideology which assigns women the role of bearer of tradition and grants them the power of transmission of culture, endeavors to control this power through cultural strategies.[67] The ritual of a woman having to change her denomination in Christianity in case of marriage with a man from another denomination and then raising the children in accordance with the principles of the man's denomination might be interpreted in this light. The woman has to belong to the same denomination with her husband because their future children are going to be 'owned' by him whereas it is her who is going to be in charge of their upbringing. The mother has to raise the children complying with the principles of their father's denomination. As opposed to what is expected from the woman in case of such marriages, it is out of question for the man to change his denomination and switch to that of his future wife. Kandiyoti stresses that marital relationships in the households in Turkey

63 Anastasia Karakasidou, "Women of the Family, Women of the Nation: National Enculturation among Slavic Speakers in Northwestern Greece," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19:1/2, (1996): 104-105.

64 Ayşe Aybil Göker, "Being 'Cypriot' in North London: Strategies, Expereinces and Contestations" (PhD Thesis, University College of London, 2007), 181.

65 Nükhet Sirman, "Kadınların Milliyeti," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınevi, 2002), 242-243. Simten Coşar, "Women in Turkish Political Thought: between Tradition and Modernity," *Feminist Review*, Vol. 86, (2001): 127-128.

66 Elif Ekin Akşit, "Anadilde Eğitim ve Kadınlar," *Fe Dergi*, 1/1, (2009): 35.

67 Göker, 2007, p.181.

are executed by "in-marrying women to the male-headed household."[68] When a woman marries a man, she 'enters' and marries into that family,[69] whereas the man is not considered to 'enter' or marry into the family of the woman. Thus, the interviewed Christian women who switched to their husbands' denomination for marriage exemplifies that patriarchal mechanisms in Turkey perform regardless of religion. Nonetheless, there are also other cases which do not adhere to this pattern. For instance, one Catholic interviewee is married to an Orthodox but her children are born-Catholics and she herself is still an active member of the Catholic Church; therefore, the patriarchal and patrilineal reasoning did not manage to influence her to decide to change her denomination and raise her children in her husband's denomination.

The Christian interviewees insinuate that interdenominational marriages among Christians used to cause a lot of problems in the past but marriages between the believers of two denominations of Christianity is not uncommon in the current climate. Since the Christian community in Mersin, and in fact in whole Turkey, is continuously declining, they do not consider the difference between the two denominations of Christianity to be much of an issue today. As a matter of fact, they suggest that exogamy of this kind between the two denominations would not be much convenient in Islam as it is in Christianity today.

"Marriage between the Orthodoxies and the Catholics was not that common. It would be a huge problem when an Orthodox and a Catholic would marry each other." (Catholic Christian, 80)

"(one) Alawite and (one) Sunni might not be that peaceful if they get married. Look, I am a Catholic and my husband is an Orthodox. We are from different denominations." (Catholic Christian, 71)

The Catholic Christian interviewees address the increasing frequency of divorces in a criticizing manner and note that divorce is not allowed in Catholicism. Their viewpoints about how the woman as a wife should manage her husband and know when to speak and when to be quiet are enlightening

68 Kandiyoti, 1987, p.331.

69 Göker, 2007, p.177-179.

in regards of clarifying the restrictive mentality stipulated for women even after marriage. The double standard implemented on women comes to the fore at this point; the religious divorce is only possible if the woman acts in an 'immoral' way whereas the interviewees do not mention what would happen in case of exhibition of immorality by the man.

"… The church ceremony is obligatory for us. And you know, there is no divorce for us. If the woman is not bad, the priest would never divorce them. The woman should be bad; I mean, if she is immoral or anything like that, then they can get divorced. (When asked if divorce is possible only if the 'woman' is immoral) Yes, of course. Now how many people get married and then divorce…" (Catholic Christian, 84)

"The first thing of our religion, after love, is turning the other cheek. Some people consider it as dishonor or servility. This is not servility. Turning the other cheek means making the opposite side stop and question him/herself, meaning 'I hit him/her but he/she turned the other cheek; am I guilty?' This incident has influenced us women as well. We women, when we hear a bad word, when the man has a moment of anger, having to be quiet and go on with life but making the man recover himself with your silence. … There was no such thing as separation. You are going to resume your life with that man with his sins and good deeds. Because you have babies; it is a shame for the babies." (Catholic Christian, 71)

The arguments expressed by the two Catholic Christian interviewees illustrate their internalization of the gender roles. They have the expectation of women to undertake the traditional role of mother and wife in the private space. These also manifest that the opinions of Christian women of Mersin might be socio-culturally in parallel with those of the the traditional Muslim women regarding the social responsibilities and values of women. So, regardless of the ethno-religious identities, the gender roles are inclined to be defined and shaped in accordance with the patriarchal cultural codes of the geographical region.[70] The perception about gender roles, even in Christian women, are generated by relying on the patriarchal mindset which is consistent with the dominant patriarchal culture in the majority group of Muslims. All the same,

70 Kaymak, 2017, p.316.

the transformation of gender roles in both public and private have granted women with more freedom which is the reason behind the narratives of the Catholic Christian interviewees about the increase in the number of divorces.

5.6.2 *Intercommunal Marriages*

Marriage is a multi-functional institution to which several meanings are ascribed. While it is a social status which brings along certain privileges as well as difficulties, it is the socially approved way for two people to start a family;[71] in other words, "a socially recognized contract to form a family."[72] It also provides for the conservation and perpetuation of traditional norms and values which is why selection of marriage partners is mostly decided upon social factors such as race, education, religion and socio-economic backgrounds. Hart surmises marriage to be "at the intersection of intimacy, economic and kin ties, evolving gender roles, and transforming cultural practices on local, national and global levels."[73] In short, it is a versatile institution which serves to undertake several roles for the two individuals involved. Therefore, intermarriages between the members of different groups in a society serve as "an important indicator of the strength of social boundaries" between these groups.[74] Studies on intermarriages have been efficient for reaching an understanding into the framework of ethnic, religious and racial relationships and into the social structure of societies. The versatile social functions of marriage render the analysis of intermarriages crucial for comprehending the level of relationships among people from diverse ethnic, racial, religious and immigrant groups. The presence of marital ties between the groups point out to social contacts between the members. The prevalence of intermarriages also imply

71 Doğruel, 2005, p.91.

72 Ayşe Gündüz-Hoşgör, and Jeroen Smits, "Intermarriage between Turks and Kurds in Contemporary Turkey: Inter-ethnic Relations in an Urbanizing Environment," *European Sociological Review* 18, no. 4, (2002): 419.

73 Kimberly Hart, "Love by Arrangement: The Ambiguity of "spousal choice" in a Turkish Village," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13, no. 2, (2007): 346.

74 Gündüz-Hoşgör, and Smits, 2002, 417-432, p.417.

that the members of different groups consider each other as social equals.[75] They also serve to display whether the intercommunal relations between the groups have the potential to influence marital relations as well as demonstrating if ethno-religious groups are supportive of exogamic marriages.[76] Therefore, the presence of intermarriages or their lack thereof between the Christians and Muslims in Mersin are strong indicators to exhibit the rigidness or flexibility of the boundaries between the communities.

Out of six Christian interviewees, five are either married, divorced or widowed after the passing of their husbands. As indicated in the last chapter, only one Christian woman has never got married. One interviewee is a divorcee and two interviewees lost their husbands several years ago. What is worthy of note here is that they all married Christians. All Muslim interviewees are either married or widowed, too. Among seven Muslim interviewees, five of them lost their husbands. Two Muslim interviewees are still married. Despite the presence of the Christian community in the city, the interviewed Muslim women all married Muslim men as well. When they are asked about whether it was common for a Muslim and a Christian to get married, their answer is clear; it was not. Yet, they also underline that the reaction was not exclusive to Christians and that marriages between an Alawite and a Sunni was not approached lightly. What's more, one Muslim interviewee enunciates a disparaging word to allude to the Fellahin and Arab Alawites in order to explain that marriages were not common between the Sunnis and Alawites, let alone marriages between the Muslims and Christians. Even flirting between a Christian and a Muslim seems to have been frowned upon in the past.

"The *Arap uşaklar* (meaning Arab servants; a derogatory phrase used to imply the Fellahin and Arab Alawites) and Sunnis would never think of marriage. The Christians and the Muslims would never think of it, either. … Our time (as young girls) was considerably more liberal (compared to her mother's time as a young girl) but we still would not look at an Alawite or at a Christian and they would not look at us, either. It was a taboo. The Alawites were even

75 Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002, p.419

76 Doğruel, 2005, p. 91-92.

stricter than us, they never marry (meaning exogamic marriages with Sunnis.)" (Muslim, 74)

"There was no marriage with the Christians. It happened afterwards." (Muslim, 77)

"Marriages with the Christians happened but it used to be such an undesirable thing in the past. I don't remember it but a couple of people got married in those times as well. Things like 'oh the one who married a Christian' were said about them but there were also people who approached it reasonably. For instance, in the apartment next to us here, a Muslim family, a lady whose husband was a Christian, used to live. They both died afterwards and then they moved." (Muslim, 79)

"Muslims and Christians did not flirt that much. In general, it was Christian with Christian and Muslim with Muslim." (Catholic Christian, 80)

A Christian interviewee tells the story of her aunt who dared to marry a Muslim that was a soldier in the service of Atatürk by then. According to what she told, the soldier arrived at Mersin on Atatürk's last visit to the city in 1938 and that was how they met. There were a lot of protest in the interviewee's aunt's family; her father (the interviewee's grandfather) was completely against it. In the end, they secretly got married and ran away from Mersin to Ankara. The interviewee accentuates that it was the first marriage between a Muslim and a Christian in Mersin. In Ankara, the soldier was asked to give up his military career and he acquiesced. Later on, her aunt was given the duty to provide espionage from the French forces in Hatay and Aleppo[77] to the Turkish government since she could speak French and knew stenography. As her efforts turned out to be fruitful in the process of Hatay's annexation to Turkey, her husband was appointed back to his position. The most crucial part of the story is that upon her death, her aunt told the interviewee that she switched to Islam fourteen years ago.

77 Seda Altuğ, "Between Colonial and National Dominations: Antioch under French Mandate (1920-1939)" (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2002).

The last visit of Atatürk to Mersin was indeed in May 1938[78] and Hatay's annexation to Turkey was a year after that, in 1939[79]. So the narrative of the interviewee holds true in historical context. She makes it explicitly clear that her grandfather was so vehemently against the prospect of his daughter's marrying a Muslim soldier that a fight broke out and the soldier ended up beating him. The Muslim soldier even had to give up his career because of his wish to marry a Christian woman. Marriages between a Christian and a Muslim was so rare in the 1930s that the marriage of the interviewee's aunt generated a lot of problems in the family and the couple had no choice but to elope. The relations between the interviewee's aunt and her family were ruptured after the marriage; however, they eventually reconciled as time passed.

As it is evident in the narrative above, the exceptional marriages between a Christian and a Muslim which took place in the past are still remembered, exemplifying how uncommon religious exogamy was in public sphere. When asked about those particular marriages, the interviewees more or less give the same names since intermarriages were so rare and everybody knew each other on a name basis, in accordance with their narratives about "everyone knowing everyone in Mersin." For instance, the marriage which took place in the 1960s between the son of the mayor and the daughter of a prominent Christian family is still remembered clearly and mentioned by almost all the interviewees. Moreover, the three brothers of that Christian woman are told to have married Muslim women. So, the four children of that Christian family are told to have made inter-religious marriages with Muslims in those years which demonstrates that even though religious exogamy was rare, it was not out of question. Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits manifest that in many societies, the question of 'who is going to marry whom' is "a rationally and carefully guided transaction in which important economic and social considerations play a role and many more persons than the partners and their close relatives may be involved."[80] So, the marriage between the Muslim son of the mayor of the city at the time and the Christian daughter of a prominent family of the city discloses that in

78 Develi, 2007, p.34.

79 Serhan Ada, *Türk-Fransız İlişkilerinde Hatay Sorunu (1918-1939)* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005).

80 Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002, p.419.

that particular case, the bride and groom's belonging to the same social class and having similar socio-economic backgrounds played a more significant role than their religions.

"The son of an old mayor of Mersin, X (she gives the name of the mayor), got married to … who was the daughter of the … (gives the name of the family), a Christian family of Mersin. Her three brothers got married to Muslim girls as well. So, the four children of … family, including their three sons, married Muslim Turks. These happened in the 1960s, there had been no marriages until then." (Muslim, 80)

"The …s (name of the Christian family) are my friends. All children of that family, one daughter and three sons, they are all married to Muslims now. … For instance, they got married and they have been quite happy. So have the brides (the Muslim women who married the three sons of that Christian family) Now there are no more 'Christian-Muslim' (difference)." (Muslim, 79)

Interestingly, the same marriage between the son of the mayor and the daughter of a prominent Christian family is told a bit differently by a Christian interviewee.

"… (the name of the Christian woman) got married to the son of the mayor X. There weren't any Christian-Muslim marriages then. All hell broke loose in Mersin. But they still got married. In the 1960s." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

One Muslim interviewee talks about another marriage which happened much more recently, a couple of years ago in fact. The Muslim bride was a daughter of a famous businessman in the city and a distant relative of the interviewee, whereas the Christian groom was again the son of a renowned family of the city, resembling the abovementioned marriage between the son of the mayor and the daughter of a Christian family. As the interviewee relaying this account is a retired teacher, she also mentions that she knows of one of her students' marriage to a Christian man. The interviewee alleges that Mersin used to be such a tolerant city that religious and sectarian exogamy was not frowned upon. Her account is conflicting with the narratives of the other interviewees, especially with those of the Christians which I am going to discuss in detail below. Another point where her narrative differs with the other interviewees' is her claim that religious and sectarian exogamy was more common in the past than it is in the present. She claims that people were more respectful

towards each other and did not place much importance on their identities back then whereas they are misled by the states and governments and tend to be more sensitive about these issues today. However, in spite of her claim that people care more about their identities today, she also maintains that there is an increasing frequency of intermarriages in the present day. She mentions the recent marriage between the son of a Christian family and her distant Muslim relative. She maintains that the marriage took place in spite of the groom's being Catholic and being bound by the strict rules of Catholicism. Furthermore, she tells that the sister of the said Christian groom also married a Muslim man who is a local of Mersin. While giving these details, she contradicts with her former narrative in which she alleges people to be less focused on their identities in the past and more sensitive about them today. Be that as it may, she later on acquiesces that there were strict rules regarding intermarriages in the past.

The interviewee intends to portray an old Mersin where people from different religions and sects could freely marry each other without any problems at all. She denotes to the ethno-religious identity problems of the present times as the result of politics and once again employs the practices of the past in an idealized form where nothing discriminatory would take place in regards with identity politics. However, as a result of the tension between what she wants to display about Mersin's past and the intrinsic knowledge she has had about exogamy in Mersin in the past, she acquiesces to the presence of strict rules people had in the case of intermarriages and religious and sectarian exogamy in the past.

The opinions of the Christian interviewees diverge with those of the Muslim ones on the point of mixed marriages and religious exogamy. Albeit they delineate that they are not firmly opposed to marriages between the Christians and Muslims, it should be noted that the children of all Christian interviewees are married to Christians. While expressing their acknowledgement that opposition against religious exogamy is a thing of the past and it is definitely more common today than it used to be, they do not abstain from making it clear that the dominant inclination for them is still religious endogamy. As much as admitting that the young people do not place much significance on this issue when they want to get married to someone today and there is more

flexibility towards religious exogamy, the interviewees do not deny that their personal preference would be for everyone to marry from within their own religion. Although they do not explicitly assert that they are in favor of religious endogamy in the Christian community, they claim that it is for the best for a person to marry someone from within the same religion and that the Muslim parents would not wish their children to marry a Christian, either. This kind of approach is not unexpected because as Tillion enunciates, mixed marriages are for the benefit of the majority group and the small minority groups try to avoid them as much as possible.[81]

The Christian interviewees nevertheless draw attention to the fact that the times have changed and that the young people might not tend to think like they do on this issue. Also, there are people married to Muslims in their close and distant families and they refer to those marriages in an effort to demonstrate that it is not a taboo in their families and that they have accepted the marriages of those family members with Muslims. For instance, one interviewee tells that her two sisters are married to Muslims and her husband's sister is married to a Muslim as well. Moreover, the interviewees insinuate that young people are more willing to stretch the boundaries in this issue in comparison to the past. The couples act independently and make their own decisions rather than acting in accordance with how their families would intend them to. Addressing the financial problems coming into prominence, the interviewees concede the need of the young people to ascertain other kinds of issues upon marriage.

This point is also argued by Kaymak who confers that religious endogamy is not the first requirement for marriage in the minority communities in İstanbul anymore. Instead, belonging to the same social class is a priority. She explains that the cultural capital, as a factor, cross-cuts the factors of religion and ethnicity.[82] Likewise, Doğruel invokes that high cultural capital, which derives from a high level of education, and high material capital are strong de-

81 Germaine Tillion, *Harem ve Kuzenler*, çev. Şirin Tekeli, and Nükhet Sirman (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2006), 137.

82 Kaymak, 2017, p.323.

terminants for couples in order to avoid problems in inter-ethnic and/or interreligious marriages in Antakya.[83] These conclusions are similar to the narratives of the Christian interviewees of this study who mention that young couples today have more prioritized problems such as financial and economic issues to think about upon marriage. However, Ekmekçioğlu draws attention to the still common practice of religious endogamy in the Armenian community in İstanbul.[84] Yumul also states that in order to ensure endogamy, arranged marriages are the main preference in the Armenian community.[85] Likewise, Özdoğan et. al stress that the concerns for the perpetuation of the community is so strong that even the intellectual members of the Armenian community, who express their self-awareness that they are being conservative in regards with this issue, are in favor of endogamic marriages.[86] In a similar vein, Brink-Danan also stresses that she has observed the social pressure to marry endogamously within the Jewish community in İstanbul and what is more, she discusses that the Jewish women experience this pressure more than their male counterparts.[87]

The Christian interviewees of this study clearly state that their main preference would be for everyone to marry within their own religion so that they would be able to preserve their religion and cultural traditions. Their accounts on this particular subject serve to exhibit the experience of feeling trapped as the members of a religious minority of which the number is in a constant decline. Preserving and internalizing their culture and ensuring the perpetuation

83 Fulya Doğruel, and Johan Leman, "'Conduct' and 'Counter-conduct' on the Southern Border of Turkey: Multicultural Antakya," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4, (2009): 598.

84 Ekmekçioğlu asserts that endogamy is still quite common as a norm in the Armenian community in İstanbul because of the patrilineal rules that have been strictly implemented. However, exogamy and mixed marriages have been gaining more frequency for the last fifteen years. Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia, The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 9.

85 Arusyak Yumul, "Religion, Community and Culture: The Turkish Armenians" (PhD Dissertation, Oxford University, 1992), 147-151.

86 Özdoğan, Üstel, Karakaşlı, Kentel, 2009, p.359.

87 Marcy Brink-Danan, "Love, Luck and Long Distances. Choice and Chance in Turkish Women's Emigration Stories," *Ethnologie française*, T. 43, No. 4, Des mondes juifs contemporains, (Octobre-Décembre 2013): 617.

of their religion and lineage are important to them. In an effort to make me, the interviewer, empathize and agree with them, they re-direct the question to me and ask whether my own family would allow me to marry a Christian, presuming that they probably would not.

"It was not looked upon with favor (the marriages between the Christians and the Muslims.) 'No way, this and that.' Look, let everyone marry from within their own religion. Your mother probably would not want you to marry a Christian now. Maybe she would, maybe she is a modern person. But it does not work; something comes up at one point; faux pas, whatever you call it. Well, the youth today is more modern, they do not mind." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

As aforementioned, the oral historian's own cultural background is one of the factors influencing the oral testimony he/she collects because the oral history interview's evolution into a historical document relies on the agency of both the interviewer and the interviewer.[88] Therefore, when I asked the Christian interviewees about the intermarriages between the Muslims and the Christians in Mersin, my cultural background as a Muslim must have led them to feel the need for me to confirm that my family would not approve an inter-religious marriage between me and a Christian, either. When I remain silent, the interviewee goes on saying that even if my family were 'modern' enough to desire such a marriage, it will not have worked in the end.

"It was not taken kindly much earlier. Everyone retreated to their own shell. Because of the conditions of that era and the fanaticism. No matter what; as much as we say 'we grew up together, we live together,' there is a subconscious marginalization in the society we live in. The Christians are always among themselves and every family wants their child to… I don't think your parents would marry you off to a Jewish man or a Christian man. 'No, my child shall marry a Muslim, those who are with his/her own religion lives with faith' and all that. This kind of a mindset. This mindset was present in the past as well but now the circle has tightened so much that there aren't any Christians left. The children who leave for education stay there and do not come back to Mersin. And what happens when they stay? (implying that they meet

88 Chamberlain and Thompson, 1998, p.15.

and marry someone from other religions) For instance, the wife of my cousin's son is a Muslim. My son's wife was a Muslim, too, but way back when they were friends, she said 'I want to be a Christian.' Please do not misunderstand and think of something else. I told that to my daughter-in-law, 'do not give up your religion.' The spouses of my two siblings are Muslims and we have never said anything like 'you are a Muslim and this and that.' I celebrate their Feast of Sacrifice, their Holy Night at first. They come to the church, too, so that we get together but they have their own religion. It used to be more of a zealot environment earlier; now everything is free. Everyone can get married. And let me tell you the interesting part; now… I mean, during the times of my mother, it was frowned upon, they said 'oh he married a Muslim' or 'oh a Muslim got a Christian girl. How can that happen? It is only love after all; it shall pass sooner later.' But they eventually got married and lived happily ever after. Because there were no divorces. Because (when) you have babies; what a pity on the babies. My niece is married to a Muslim as well. Today, there is no time to think of religion. Religion is not thought of. It turned into a life struggle. The economy is more important now, 'I'm going to raise my kids' is more important now. They are in a serious effort." (Catholic Christian, 71)

As she conveys in her anecdote above, this interviewee's daughter-in-law switched from Islam to Christianity before marriage. The interviewee relays this detail a bit hesitantly in a seemingly anxious attempt to prevent me from assuming that it was her and her family who asked the daughter-in-law to do this. Again, my cultural background as the interviewer and as a Muslim impacted the narrative of the interviewee at this point and led her to feel anxious about what I would make out of that information.

In order to illustrate her point about the young people not prioritizing religious differences in marriages today, the interviewee exemplifies about how the couples tolerate each other's wishes related to religiosity even if they are not from within the same religion. In fact, the example she gives below about a Christian woman who recently married a Muslim man, was also mentioned as a recent intermarriage by one of the Muslim interviewees who knows that couple. As aforementioned, since Mersin is a relatively small city, mixed marriages are commonly known about in society, which is why both the Muslim and Christian interviewees give the same examples of such marriages. The

Christian interviewee talks about the Christian bride as a religious person who regularly visits the church even though she married a Muslim man and symbolizes the Muslim groom's acceptance of her wish about getting out of the church as a bride on their wedding day as an act of courtesy to please his future wife: "The boy did it to please her; these are nice things. He didn't completely neglect it (her Christianity.)"

"When a Christian girl marries a Muslim boy, she might say 'I want to get out of the church as a bride' and it happens a lot. Because I'm in the committee of the church, I have witnessed it a lot of times. … We are now very intertwined with each other. We do not ask 'is your husband Muslim' or anything like that. No, we have passed these." (Catholic Christian, 71)

§ 5.7 Intercommunal Relations

The Christian interviewees as well as the Muslim ones all speak very highly of the good state of relations between the two religious communities of Mersin. Notwithstanding the apparent implications that the relations used to be much better in the old times when most of the people in the city knew each other personally, they do not fail to indicate that the relations are still on a good basis today. In fact, it should be underlined that the differentiation between the Muslims and the Christians in the narratives of the Christian interviewees only come up when asked, which is why such questions understandably upset them as members of an ethno-religious minority. They do not tend to start talking about the intercommunal relations between the Muslims and the Christians, especially in the whole country, on their own. Conversely, the Muslim interviewees bring up the presence of the Christian community in the city by themselves because they regard them as the source of the distinction of Mersin.

As it has also been asserted in the last chapter, the Muslim interviewees relate the modernity of Mersin to the Christian community living in the city and mention the reverence they feel towards the Christians for that as well as appreciating their manners, etiquette and good taste. They also hold the fashion sense of the Christian women in high esteem and talk about how they tried to emulate their style back then.

The social relations between the people of the two religious communities were spoken of fondly by the interviewees. Because they lived in a close-knit society in which the neighborhood and the neighbors played a huge part in daily life, they established close relations with their neighbors whether they were from another religion or not. Even though the Christians are told to have lived in the posh neighbors of the city which manifests that both class identity and religious identity were factors to determine their choice of residence, all Muslim interviewees in general speak of tight relations with their neighbors of which a considerable amount were non-Muslims.

The narratives depict a local space in which everyone approached the neighbors with love and respect and differentiations on ethnicity and religion had no impact in the course of daily life and interactions. The interactions between neighbors which enabled the people with different identities to bond with each other is another thing the interviewees miss about the old Mersin. Their narratives comprise of specific acts of inter-religious neighboring in which generosity and sharing was at the forefront. What is more, looking at the past from the contemporary perspective they have today, the interviewees feel themselves closer to their former neighbors who were locals of Mersin like themselves, who were from the same socio-economic class with them and had a similar cultural capital to theirs. Conversely, the neighbors they have today are people who have migrated to Mersin from somewhere else and what is more important is that they feel those new neighbors do not share the same cultural norms and values with them which incites them to keep their distance.[89] The interviewees of this study speak highly of their former neighbors because they belonged to the socio-cultural context and the elite social milieu of Mersin with similar backgrounds and life styles to theirs.

"Our neighbors across were all Christians. My mother covered her hair (wearing a head scarf), she used to perform the ritual prayer five times a day but they (the Christians) were her best companions. They (the Christians)

89 Likewise, Türker mentions that the İstanbul *Rum*s who have had to migrate to Athens adopt a similar approach when talking about their former neighbors in İstanbul for whom they still have a strong fondness. They indicate that their neighbors were not among the rural migrants who had come to İstanbul afterwards and had a more elite social environment which shaped them in the socio-cultural context of İstanbul and not Anatolia. Türker, 2015, p.211.

used to visit on the religiously festive days and we used to celebrate theirs. … The neighborhood was very good." (Muslim, 74)

"… We had an Armenian neighbor with whom we were very good friends. We were neighbors with the non-Muslims at the *yayla* (the plateau), we did *tabaklaşma* (exchanging dishes, meaning that they used to take some of the cooked food in the house to their neighbors and in return, the neighbors would bring their food to them.) The thing we called *tabaklaşma*. They (the non-Muslims) were predominantly experts at commerce, they did custom transactions. They did maritime commerce. And we, the local people, worked with the land which is the most precious thing here." (Muslim, 80)

The last anecdote above illustrates the perception of the Muslim community about the Christians whom they do not consider as 'locals' of Mersin. Even though the Christians of the city have long been in Mersin since the 1800s, the point of view of the Muslim community inclines to regard them as having come to and settled in Mersin after the Muslims. While I was doing the fieldwork for this study and trying to contact people who might introduce me to older Christian *Mersinli* women who would be willing to do an interview, one Muslim male acquaintance asked me why I was so keen to talk to the Christians rather than studying the *Mersinli* Independence War heroes who are the true *Mersinlis* and milestones of 'our' history. These anecdotes exhibit Barth's argument that 'ascription by others' is a pivotal determinant inasmuch as self-ascription is in constructing ethnic groups and identities.[90] Even though the interviewee and her family have enjoyed a close relationship with their non-Muslim neighbors in which they even exchanged the food they cooked in their homes, they still were not considered to be 'the locals' of Mersin. However, it should be noted that although ascription by others in Mersin used to be done on a religious basis for the most part in the past, it is done on an ethnical basis today. The newcomers of the city, such as the Kurds and Syrians, are ascribed on the basis of their ethnicities rather than their religions or their denomination in Islam, if they are Muslims.

90 Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 14.

Furthermore, the interviewed Muslim woman who gave the last quote above is the daughter of a mother who had to migrate to Mersin from Crete as a result of the population exchange agreement with Greece in 1923. Her father's family moved to Mersin during the French occupation in the early 1920s which makes her being *Mersinli* more recent than the Christians whom she does not consider as 'locals.' Her comprehension of the non-Muslim community as not being the locals of Mersin attests to Aydın's argument that different components of Turkish society have come together under the one common characteristic they shared which was Islam and they either find it more convenient or feel themselves obliged to integrate with the majority group rather than highlighting and embracing their differences from them.[91] Whereas the Muslims are considered to be the true locals of Mersin regardless of their backgrounds and origins, the non-Muslim communities who have been on the same land for the same amount of time or even longer are not considered to be locals. Also, Örs predicates that "national identities are thought of as being mutually exclusive, separated by a dichotomy between ourselves and Others."[92] In a similar vein, the interviewee's anecdote also suggests a perception of a dichotomy but even though it involves the national identity, it mainly focuses on the local and ethno-religious identity which incites the interviewee not to consider the Christians of Mersin as locals.

In spite of their not being regarded as 'locals', Mersin as a city was founded mostly by Christians, as one Christian interviewee also elucidates below; yet, their population had started to decrease as the city developed and Muslims began settling in the city.

"When they came here around 1850s, this place was a swamp, very small. What they found was the Fellahin from Egypt. Our ancestors who came here were fishermen. What were they going to live on? The Fellahin got on working the land. And they (her ancestors) did fishery. The villagers here do not know about fishery that much." (Catholic Christian, 71)

91 Suavi Aydın, *"Amacımız Devletin Bekası": Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Devlet ve Yurttaşlar* (İstanbul: TESEV Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009), 38.

92 Örs, 2006, p.81.

"At the beginning; nobody says this, but when it (Mersin) was founded, the Christian population was above 50%. Then, once they saw that the Christian population was increasing, they started to send Muslims here from Tarsus and so on. But since it was mostly the Christians in general, the Muslims began to attune to them because the culture is common." (Catholic Christian, 80)

The inclination not to consider the Christians as locals of Mersin is apparent even in the defining phrase 'non-Muslim' which is *gayrimüslim* in Turkish. Rather than referring to them as 'Christians' or with whatever religion they belong to, the Muslim community tends to place all citizens who are not Muslims in the same category and refer to them as 'non-Muslims' in general. This, however, is an attitude displayed by all Muslims everywhere in Turkey and not specific to Mersin. One of the Christian interviewees voices her uneasiness about being referred as a 'non-Muslim' but she does it in a wary manner and tends not to use an accusatory tone.

"I do not like the word 'non-Muslim.' We are not people who are excluded from Muslims because we are born as Muslims as well (referring to the etymologic meaning of the word which is 'the one who does not leave the path of what is right.') Muslim means the person whom God created. He/she is born, then everyone chooses a religion but we have Muslimhood in our root as well. We are all God's subjects. I am a Muslim, too, because 'Muslim' means what God created. Everyone chooses a religion afterwards." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

After this quote, the interviewee relays an anecdote in which one of the priests in Mersin, drawing upon the etymological meaning of the word 'Muslim,' once told a journalist that he is a Muslim, too. When the journalist did not believe him, he asked him to check and see whether it is written 'Islam' or 'Muslim' on his national identity card. To his surprise, the journalist checked and saw it is written 'Islam.' The priest explained that it is written 'Islam' and not 'Muslim' because Christians are Muslims, too; meaning that they, too, are people who do not leave the path of what is right. As it is also exhibited by these anecdotes, the narratives of the Christian interviewees emphasize their distress about lack of objective and unbiased information about Christianity and their community. As much as they feel that prejudices and misinformation about their religion are a disservice to them, they do their best not to

feel disheartened. For instance, one of the Christian interviewees, who is a member of the committee in her church and a prominent figure in the cultural network of the city, talks about a welcome visit the church committee had once paid to a civil servant appointed to the city. She relays an exchange they had which made her question how ignorant about Christianity a civil servant, who happened to be a graduate of religious studies, could be.

"… You should have heard him. We went to stay there for fifteen or twenty minutes but ended up staying for one hour and twenty minutes. The man does not get enough; religious problems and etc.… He is a graduate of religious studies and asked 'what is this and what is that…' He said 'there are four Bibles.' At first, I decided not to chime in. Finally I couldn't resist. I said 'My apologies, sir; let's please leave this four Bibles incident aside. There are four authors of the Bible. The narratives of these four people are put together in one book. They explain the life of Jesus Christ. It's the narratives of the four apostles.' He asked me 'is it in Turkish or Latin?' Only the hymns sung on religious festivities are in Latin; one or two hymns should definitely be in Turkish but the prayers are all in Turkish. You read it in Turkish when you take it into your hand (the prayer leaflets.)" (Catholic Christian, 71)

Despite complaining about such incidents, all the interviewees, both the Christians and Muslims, are true believers in Mersin's multiethnic and multireligious socio-cultural structure. Mersin has constituted an idiosyncratic place among the increasingly homogenized cities of the country. Through a mutual comprehension of the commitment to coexist, the two communities with different religious, ethnic, language and cultural backgrounds have been able to perpetuate their existence in the plural society of the city. Living side by side has elicited a local culture which resulted from the coexistence of the communities and the multicultural experience they have shared and the subidentities were protected both in public and private space.

When I first called one of the Christian interviewees to introduce myself and ask for an interview after I got her number from a common acquaitance, she snapped at me by saying "There is no such thing as 'Christian and Muslim' in Mersin." Since I could not express myself and the reason why I wanted to interview her clearly, she felt perturbed. Her reaction might also advert to the

ethno-religious minorities' feeling obliged to comply with the acceptable citizen definition of the state and demonstrate this compliance as much as possible. This feeling of obligation strips them off of their agency and impels them to keep their ethno-religious identity under cover as much as they can.[93] Afterwards when I convinced her to sit down for an interview, she talked about to a great length about the good relations between the Christians and Muslims, especially in her childhood. Nonetheless, as the interview went on and we met for a second time, she opened up about the times she experienced discrimination against herself but always underlined that such behavior was very exceptional in Mersin and essentially talked about the good state of the relations. She also invokes the presence of the Christian community as the reason of tolerance and harmony in Mersin. The narratives she conveys about the celebrations of religiously festive days of both communities is evident in the anecdotes of the Muslim interviewees as well. They especially draw attention to commonly celebrated religiously festive days. The Muslim and Christian interviewees tell various stories about showing respect to one another's religiously festive days, sending food to each other on such days and even visiting one another's religious buildings.

Örs accentuates the same kind of narrative is conveyed to her by the Istanbul *Rum* interviewees living in Greece, who talked about their neighbors in İstanbul, and states that "knowledge about special days of other religions is considered to be another sign of cosmopolitanism" by them.[94] Similarly, in her study about the Jewish life in twenty-first century Turkey, Brink-Danan mentions the necessity that the Jewish Turks feel to balance the mainstream Turkish culture with their different experiences of the Jewish one and asserts that the "balancing of various codes breeds a sense of cosmopolitan knowledge in which experience is mediated through a lens of general and Jewish knowledge that may be variously public, private, or something in between."[95] Mills applies the same theme in her study about Kuzguncuk neighborhood and its residents of minority communities and describes that narratives of *Kuzguncuklu*s about

93 Türker, 2015, p.114.

94 Örs, 2006, p.89

95 Brink-Danan, 2012, p.151-152.

the good neighboring relations demonstrates that the neighborhood "… was truly cosmopolitan in the sense of that it was a mixed culture, where people spoke a variety of languages and celebrated together a diversity of religious holidays."[96]

In a similar vein, the interviewees of this study denote their knowledge about and the common celebrations of religiously festive days as a sign of the cosmopolitanism and plurality in Mersin. Today, this tradition of common celebration is still going on in Mersin. Even though there are much fewer Christians in the city, their Muslim friends celebrate their Christmases and Easters. In return, their Christian friends sometimes invite them to the ceremonies at the churches. Similarly, the Christians celebrate their Muslim friends' holy nights (*kandil*), Ramadan and Feast of Sacrifice. One Christian interviewee explains that she calls each and every Muslim friend of hers on *kandil*s. Correspondingly, she tells that she is invited to the houses of her Muslim friends to have *kavurma* on Feast of Sacrifice and that they do not eat any of it until she arrives. These kinds of discourses highlight the distinctiveness of Mersin in comparison to other Anatolian cities as it is not common knowledge to know about Christmas or Easter, let alone witnessing and sometimes attending their celebration.

"During the Ramadan, I would wake up at *sahur* (the prayer time in the morning before the fasting begins and people eat). … Everyone would get up at *sahur*; the Christians, too. It wasn't a must to fast; they got together with them (the Muslims.) … There was no belittling or anything like that; never. Now, on the Feast of Sacrifice, the Muslim friends would sacrifice their animals and send meat to the Christians so that they could cook *kavurma*. Nobody can forget the deliciousness of that sacrifice meat. I have eaten *kavurma* in the houses of my Muslim friends, learned it there and believe me, they sacrifice their animals but they do not touch their forks to the meat until I get there. When it was Easter, they (the Christians) would send eggs and Easter buns. It does not matter if they are Muslims. It was the Easter of the Christians but they would send it to anyone living on that street. When the Easter time came, the Muslim ladies used to come to the church to be together with those

96 Mills, 2008, p.391.

Madams. They celebrated the festival together. When they get out of the church, if there was anyone who was fasting … (explains the fasting of forty-nine days) For instance, they broke the fast with the madams. And my mother and father did the same with our Muslim friends. If I have a hundred Christian friends, I have a thousand Muslim ones; that is how close I am with them." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"Those *bayram simit*s; if it was the Easter, an egg would be placed among them. They would be put on trays and distributed to all neighbors; that's why they were placed in big trays. On the Feast of Sacrifice, my mother would take out huge washbowls and the meat would be put in them. Now, they (the Muslims) won't give it to even charity foundations, let alone giving it to Christians." (Catholic Christian, 71)

"This neighborhood (Çamlıbel) was the Christian neighborhood. The apartment next to ours belonged to a Christian family. The one behind belonged to another Christian family. … The friendship was great; how should I put it… Aside from visiting each other's houses as guests and intimate dinners and going back and forth, there would be celebrations on their religious festive days and they would celebrate ours. There was no discrimination, no difference." (Muslim, 79)

"We still have Christian friends. For instance, my son is friends with the … family. They are renowned people in Mersin. The child of … was classmates with my son. On their certain festive days, like the Easter and stuff, we used to go to the church altogether and then have something to eat." (Muslim, 73)

Despite prioritizing the peculiarity of Mersin's unique socio-cultural structure which safeguards the multiethnic and multi-religious characteristics of the Christian community in the city, as the interviews went on, the Christian interviewees also gave insights to the discriminative attitudes and behaviors they have experienced as members of an ethno-religious minority. The common point in their conveyance of these kinds of experiences is that they chose to talk about them only after the interview had been going on for quite some time and they thought that they might trust me, the interviewer, enough to mention them. Their main concern at the beginnings of the interviews were underlining the fact that they had not experienced any kind of discrimination against their religious identity in Mersin which is why they chose to resort to

narratives highlighting the tolerant and peaceful social environment of the city. They all talked about the 'old Mersin' in a quite nostalgic way and emphasized that there has never been and there is no differentiation between the Muslims and the Christians in the city.

While talking about how the Christians had not experienced any unrest or problems with the Muslim community even before the Republic, one interviewee uses the phrase that the Christians knew the step they took and that they were not tactless people. What she tries to convey is that the Christians were extra careful in their attitude and behavior so that they wouldn't find themselves in the midst of a problem with the Muslim community. Her anecdote makes one wonder what would have happened if the Christians 'did not know the steps they took.' As Gülalp suggests, a nation state places an ethnic or religious identity at the center of its definition of citizenship, sometimes implicitly and sometimes in explicit.[97] In parallel with this suggestion, national identity in Turkey was constructed as to overlap with the identity of the individuals with Sunni origins and speaking Turkish which led to the assimilation of individuals who had different ethno-religious and linguistic backgrounds in public space.[98] The anecdote of the interviewee saying that the non-Muslims did not experience any problems because they were aware of the steps they had taken serves to corroborate these assertions. As the interviews continued, the Christian interviewees started opening up about some of the discriminatory behavior they had experienced even from their close friends.

"There had not been any unrest. Because I used to ask '(what about) before Atatürk?' But they used to live here before, too, until the foundation of the Republic. They had not experienced any problems because they knew the steps they took, understand? I mean, they were not tactless people." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

"You know, in Turkey, in the case of Christianity and Islam, some groups, some groups that consider themselves religious, I will call them 'religionist',

97 Haldun Gülalp, "Giriş: Milliyete Karşı Vatandaşlık", in *Vatandaşlık ve Etnik Çatışma, Ulus-Devletin Sorgulanması*, ed. Haldun Gülalp, çev. Ebru Kılıç (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005), 12.

98 Neyzi, 2004, p.117.

the Christians are *tü kaka* (meaning they are considered bad and guilty of everything) in their eyes. A very close friend of mine said to me 'X (her name), you are very kind and very nice, if only you were Muslim, too.' I don't say anything. Another friend of mine; we sat down and were talking. She kept speaking ill of the *gâvur*s (the infidels) 'oh these *gâvurs; gâvurs* are like this and that' and then said to me 'X, no offence.' I am automatically in the *gâvur* category and she says 'no offence' to me. Look at the culture level; look what kind of things we live with. But I never get offended or anything. That's how she was raised. Her mother and her father told her 'don't behave like a *gâvur* (infidel)' in the house, '*gâvur*-face, don't look like a *gâvur*, look what that *gâvur* did.' That's how she grew up. What can I say to her? She needs to read and raise (educate) herself." (Catholic Christian, 71)

The tendency of the interviewee to forgive her friends and not dwell upon what they tell her evokes that in order to keep the friendship going, objectification and neutralization of the past is necessary.[99] Kaymak also underscores that the interviewees of her study about the minorities in İstanbul adopted a similar narrative in which they stated that since the majority of the Turkish society is conservative and religious, they have got used to being discriminated against, excluded and marginalized since their childhoods. Through both the promptings of their families and the experiences they have had on their own, they have developed a defensive reflex against such kind of behavior and accepted this as the 'reality of Turkey' and done their best to protect themselves and not get hurt.[100] So, the decision of the abovementioned interviewee to try to get past the hurtful comments her friends make from time to time is a common strategy used by the other non-Muslims living in Turkey who feel themselves obliged to get used to these kinds of comments and move on.

However, the implications of the Christian interviewee's friends attest to the common perception in society that a citizen who is not a Sunni Muslim is not considered to be a 'normal' citizen and considered as a foreigner. Since the religious conservative groups in society position Islam at the top of the social hierarchy and identify the national identity with religion, being a believer of

99 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7. Cited in Türker, 2015, p.222.

100 Kaymak, 2017, p.209.

another religion is envisaged to be down the social hierarchy and ascribed to being a non-believer which is consolidated in the use of the word *gâvur*, literally meaning 'infidel.' On top of the marginalization of the non-Muslims and their presentation as 'the enemy within' in public memory, in national discourse and in educational materials, all the negative connotations regarding the non-Muslims are consolidated in the word *gâvur* which harbors an intrinsic hierarchy within itself.[101] Moreover, as the interviewee herself indicates in her narrative, the vernacular idioms produced upon the word *gâvur* all have negative implications as well, which once again delineates the place of non-Muslims in the social hierarchy in the consciousness of people. Being a member of another religion than Sunni sect of Islam, upon which the common national identity was constructed, is perceived as being left out of the notion of acceptable citizen. The common perception in society which identifies them as *gâvur* is a source of indignation for the Christian interviewees as it implies that they do not have a religion and are non-believers. Another common perception by which they are offended is that they are thought as 'foreigners' just because they are Christians. Such questions inquiring where they are originally from or where they have come from or how come they can say that they are Turkish and Turkish citizens, are offensive and distressing for them.

"… A person came up to me there and said 'You say I'm a Christian, then how come are you Turkish?' I told him 'did you memorize your citizenship identification number?' He said 'no.' I told him mine right away. 'It means that I have an ID bearing the name of the Turkish Republic which is how I am able to tell it to you.' I said 'why do you consider the Christians as 'the other"? We, all the Christians here, are Turkish citizens. We are not anything else. We were born here, we grew up here, we have lived here, and we are eating the bread of here. If they say to me 'Come, we will give you a castle in Switzerland,' I would not take a step inside. This is my homeland here. I was born here and I will die here." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

These kinds of attitudes evoke Bourdieu's suggestion that "the whole social structure is present in each interaction."[102] Marking the Christians as non-

101 Kaymak, 2017, p. 208.

102 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University. 1982), 67.

Turkish and questioning their Turkishness at every opportunity and calling them *gâvur* behind their backs and sometimes even to their faces, demonstrate that "expressions of difference are not always celebratory ethical choices made by individuals faced with multiple ways of being." On the contrary, this questioning about being foreigners and non-Turkishness might impel the Christians to feel obliged to erase their differences in public space which "reveals that cosmopolitan affects are often censored when and where difference is imagined to invite danger."[103] Brink-Danan asserts that in spite of an increasingly popular discourse on tolerance and multiculturalism, Turkish Jews find themselves "performing an everyday anti-cosmopolitan show that insists on their patriotism."[104] Equivalently, the Christian interviewee, who gave the last anecdote above, repeats her Turkish citizenship identification number to the man who questions how she could call herself Turkish, to prove him that she has a Turkish ID and is a citizen of Turkish Republic.

When it comes to what the Christians have experienced in the past, the interviewees are considerably tight-lipped and very cautious to watch what they say. Even when they relay some anecdotes, they make implicit remarks rather than explicit and clear ones.

"No malevolence would come from the Christians; they are afraid of their own shadows. The Christians, too, endured lots of things. Lots." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

This interviewee then tells an anecdote about her grandfather who was a criminal court judge in Tarsus. She did not want to give an exact date date or much detail as to when and how the incident had taken place. She briefly talked about that one day the Christian community in Tarsus heard the news that an armed guerilla and his men were approaching Tarsus to kill all the Christians living there. They all went to St. Paul Church to hide inside and locked the doors. When the man and his gang arrived at the church by playing the *Mehter* band music, the interviewee's grandfather opened the door to see who was so adamant on killing them and he did, only to see a former convict

103 Brink-Danan, 2012, p.83.

104 Marcy Brink-Danan, "Dangerous Cosmopolitanism: Erasing Difference in Istanbul," *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 2, (2011): 449.

whose death penalty he once had overruled. The former convict, who recognized him, called him 'father' and asked him what he was doing there. The interviewee's grandfather replied that they sought shelter in the church since he was going to kill all the Christians. The former convict told him that he was going to save their lives, just like he saved his at court, and asked him to stay there and wait for a while. However, he was shot in the heart by an Armenian girl living in the house behind the church, which is said by the interviewee to be still standing today. Since the former convict told his men not to harm the Christians, they did not do anything even after their leader died and the Christians all got out of the church safely. In her narrative, the interviewee enunciates the sentence, "Can I talk about this?" (*Ben bunu anlatabilir miyim?*), implying that this is a touchy subject about which she cannot speak if she does not trust the person listening to her. Her intimation evokes what De Certau argues about how secrecy designates a play between the actors, asserting that "it circumscribes the terrain of strategic relations between the one who is supposed to know and the one who is supposed not to know it."[105] Similarly, the interviewee mostly tends to keep this story to herself and not tell it to everyone because not everyone is supposed to know about it.

"When I got to know myself (grew up), my father said 'Come here, I told you about this; let me show you that house, it is still standing today.' You turn from the corner and there it is behind the St. Paul, an old house with oriels. Can I talk about this? What if I do and what if I don't? (meaning it would not matter if she did) Now they talk this and that but it was mutual; 'if you shoot me, I will shoot you, too.' Isn't it a pity, did you create him (the one you shoot)? What a pity." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The Christian interviewee who studied at Saint Benoit High School in İstanbul is the only one among the interviewees to have witnessed the pogrom of September 6-7, 1955. She speaks of her horror of seeing the violence and hatred towards the non-Muslims in explicit words. Another interviewee relays an incident which her mother experienced in the early years of the Republic.

105 Michel De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Cent*uries (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97.

"My mother has a story. Now, when my mother was a young girl, when she was about seventeen, everybody spoke another language in Turkey, you know. It was even worse in Mersin. They said that 'it is a must to speak Turkish.' One day, my mother was in front of … Apartment (the apartment has the name of a Christian family). She had to speak Turkish. And she had a big dog, she was playing with it. … There was a tennis court; she was playing with her dog in front of the house. She was speaking French because she was used to that; she studied in Beirut at a French school. That generation did not even learn Turkish properly. Afterwards, we (the next generation) all learned it. I learned it even though I didn't go to school here because I needed it when I was working. My mother was speaking French with the dog. A man was passing by and he was an angry person. 'Lady, lady,' he said, 'do not speak French' or umm no, 'speak Turkish.' My mother turned; she was a young girl, she did not think anything like that, her mind did not work for anything malevolent. She turned to the dog and said, 'See, I will speak to you in Turkish from now on.' 'Wow, you said that the dog understands Turkish, you said 'dogs' to Turks, wow' and he went right away and umm, reported her. A relative of my mother was the American vice-consul then but even he could not save my mother and she stayed in custody for a week. A week. What is it; she spoke Turkish to the dog and etcetera… Yes, yes, that relative could not save her but she did not go to jail (implying she stayed in custody) She spent a week there, in the room. She must have been around sixteen years old." (Catholic Christian, 80).

When asked about the approximate time this incident must have taken place, the interviewee feels a bit uncomfortable and says that it must have happened before the Republic. However, the '*Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş*' (Citizen, Speak Turkish) campaign which targeted the minorities who spoke in languages other than Turkish was initiated in the 1930s[106] so it must have definitely taken place after the Republic. The interviewee gets more perturbed

106 For more on the campaign please see Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Türkleştirme' Politikaları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010). Ahmet Yıldız, *"Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene, Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919-1938)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010). Rıfat Bali, *Bir*

when she is reminded about that and suggests that the Republic should not have been well-adjusted back then. She assumes that it might have been around 1928, mistaking the foundation year of the Republic and presuming that it was founded after that year. In fact, she was right, the campaign was first initiated in 1928[107] but she was not aware of it; she enunciated the year 1928 because she misremembered the foundation year of the Republic. Afterwards, she points out that it might also have been around the time when the novel which was also adapted into a movie, *Salkım Hanım'ın Taneleri*[108], had taken place. Although Aktar remarks that the campaign for speaking Turkish was initiated during the single party regime and had been repeated on several occasions until the mid-1960s[109], the said novel and its adapted movie that the interviewee mentions were centered on the early 1940s when the Wealth Tax against the non-Muslims was implemented.[110] In other words, the interviewee still does not feel at ease about relaying an old incident which must have taken place more than ninety years ago because she says that "it is not a decent memory after all." She says that she told this anecdote to me "just to demonstrate that they have had experienced a lot of things." The 'indecency' of the memory renders it not worthwhile to talk about since it might bring along certain risks and danger. Her hesitancy is not surprising and seems to be common in the Christian community, for when I asked her about other Christian women to whom she might introduce to me, she offered a couple of names but then changed her mind and said, "And they are fainthearted, they wouldn't talk."

Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923-1945) (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005). Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları ve Stratejileri Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 114.

107 Işıl Demirel, "Çanakkale Yahudi Cemaati ile Gayrimüslim Politikaların İzinde" (MA Thesis, Yeditepe University, 2010), 57.

108 Yılmaz Karakoyunlu, S*alkım Hanım'ın Taneleri* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 2004).

109 Ayhan Aktar, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Uygulanan 'Türkleştirme' Politikaları," *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Türkleştirme Politikaları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), 130.

110 Rıfat Bali, 'Toplumsal Bellek ve Varlık Vergisi,' in *Hatırladıklarıyla ve Unuttuklarıyla Türkiye'nin Toplumsal Hafızası*, ed. Esra Özyürek (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 87-126.

This particular anecdote about the interviewee's mother remaining in custody for a week because she spoke with her dog in Turkish when she was impelled by a passerby to speak Turkish, illustrates what Demirel employs with a Foucauldian perspective to analyze the effects of the 'Citizen, Speak Turkish' campaign on the Jewish minority and their mother tongue Ladino.[111] As a result of problematizing not speaking Turkish and affiliating the non-Muslim groups with this guilt, the non-Muslims who did not speak Turkish were legitimately represented as guilty whereas the ones who spoke Turkish were turned into 'the good kid.'[112] Furthermore, the punishment process for the guilty served as a warning for the potential 'guilty-to-be's who had not been charged with a punishment yet. In the case of the Christian interviewee's mother, her punishment of remaining in custody for a week and not being able to clear the charges in spite of being a close relative of the American vice-consul at the time, must have set an example and warning for the other Christians in the city who would have dared to speak French or Arabic on the street rather than Turkish. After witnessing her punishment for this incident, the thought of speaking another language than Turkish must not have crossed the minds of the other Christians.

The campaign for speaking Turkish was one of the most vital steps in the nation building process. The declaration of a language as the only legitimate one among the others and ascribing worth and value to it have engendered one of the most important foundations of the Turkish nation building project.[113] The imperative to speak Turkish in public places have led the non-Muslims to speak in their mother tongue mostly in private space among themselves which paved the way for the non-Muslim minorities to undertake binary roles and lives; one in public and the other one in private. Türker emphasizes that the individuals from the minorities have felt that their loyalty was constantly being subjected to a test which made them feel the need to be

111 Demirel, 2010, p.59.

112 Michel Foucault, *Büyük Kapatılma*, çev. Işıl Ergüden, and Ferda Keskin, Ferda (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2005), 45. Cited in Demirel, 2010, p.59.

113 Yeşim Bayar, "The Trajectory of Nation-Building through Language Policies: The Case of Turkey during the Early Republic," *Nations and Nationalism*, 17, no.1, (2011): 116-118.

wary and cautious in public space. As they could not speak their mother tongue in public space, they were prevented from sharing the public space experience.[114] Ünlü claims that the non-Muslim communities in Turkey practice their religious rituals and speak their mother tongue only in private space but accepts that it is not the case in Hatay.[115] This is also depicted by the interviews conducted by Doğruel in her study about the multiculturalism in Hatay. One of Doğruel's Christian interviewees mentions that the Christians would be able to go out wearing a cross necklace to express their religious identity in Hatay. Yet, he also notes that they would not be able to wear it in certain neighborhood of Hatay, either. However, he explains that he experienced its peculiarity and comprehended what an uncommon practice it is when he went to Ankara and saw the lengths the Christians went to in order to hide their identities there.[116] In spite of the interviewee's mother's experience relayed above, the Christian interviewees and the Christians in Mersin in general, also speak in Arabic and French among themselves from time to time when Muslims are present and do not refrain from it. However, it should be noted that they pay attention to when and where they do it. Just like the interviewee from Doğruel's study notes that a Christian would not be able to wear a cross necklace in certain neighborhood of Hatay, the Christians of Mersin would not speak in Arabic or French in a crowd with which they are not familiar, either. What's more, they might not feel comfortable with speaking in Arabic of French in other Turkish cities at all.

Ünlü further alleges that the free expression of religious identities by Christians in Hatay, unlike in other Turkish cities, is generated from the presence of the Alawite community in Hatay.[117] But it should be highlighted at this point that Ünlü's assumption does not suffice to explain the case of Mersin in that sense. The Christians have the ability to act in a more liberal and nonrestrictive environment not only in Hatay, but in Mersin as well. In contrast with what is presumed for the Turkish cities other than Hatay, the Christians in Mersin do not refrain from expressing their ethno-religious identity in public

114 Türker, 2015, p.190-191.

115 Ünlü, 2018, p.245-246.

116 Doğruel, 2005, p.249.

117 Ünlü, 2018, p.246.

space, either. In fact, as it has been mentioned above, two Christian interviewees very often assert their religious identity as Christians in public space as they are active figures of the socio-cultural life in Mersin. Moreover, they are not the only ones since several Christians, whose belonging to a religion other than Islam is apparent from their names, are active figures in the social and business life of the city.

In her book which consists of interviews with members of the non-Muslim communities in Turkey who have non-Turkish names and tell their experiences pertaining to having those 'different' names in the public and private space, Ender underlines that names are what makes a person an individual and links that person to a community; making one either belong or become a stranger to someone. A name carries an identity, an inheritance and a future within itself.[118] In the interview Ender conducted with her, Yumul also designates that a name is a symbolic contract between the person and the community he/she belongs to; thus, when the difference a name encapsulates is employed as a reason for marginalization, that name becomes a problem.[119]

The Christians in Mersin explicitly call each other by their true names on the street and do not use a second 'Turkish' name. The case of Mersin in that regard is also in contrast with Kaymak's suggestion that the non-Muslim minorities in İstanbul have been socialized with the knowledge that having a name associated with a different language might result with exclusion.[120] The Christian interviewees of this study all have non-Turkish names which bespeaks their ethno-religious identity in public space. However, they do not feel the need to use a second Turkish name to feel safer in certain social environments. As it was mentioned in the last chapter, one Christian interviewee who has a dynamic social life in the city, elucidates that she has never experienced a problem with her name at the Associations Department in the police station where she had to register her name for membership in associations. Nevertheless, it does not by any means imply that the interviewees have never experi-

118 Rita Ender, *İsmiyle Yaşamak* (İstanbul: İletişim, İstanbul, 2016), 23.

119 Rita Ender, "Arus Yumul – 'İsim denen şey, aslında sembolik bir akit,'" in *İsmiyle Yaşamak*, Rita Ender (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2016), 54-55.

120 Kaymak, 2017, p.308.

enced any problems and been subjected to discrimination and marginalization because of their names. In fact, the same interviewee's narrative below will shed further light on her own experience.

Making an assertion that there are two contexts to look for in the relation between the religious identity and the minority identity, Akgönül portrays that the first one is the relations individuals have with one another within an overall group whereas the second one is the relations between the minority group and the majority group.[121] The experience that a Christian interviewee had in a renowned hospital in Ankara exhibits the major role which the relations that the minority group has with the majority group plays in their lives. It is worthy of note here that the interviewee stresses that she has never experienced such an incident in Mersin; in fact she conveys her surprise that this had happened to her in Ankara since she expects the people living in the capital of Turkey to be more educated but she voices her opinion that it must have been because politics get in the way.

"This differentiation between the Muslim and Christian communities was certainly not present here (in Mersin.) It still is not, honey. Oh, don't worry, the politics get in the way again. I mean, looking (meaning pointing) and saying "Oh…" I experienced it in Ankara. I underwent a big operation. When I went to Ankara (for the operation)… Can you think about it; Ankara is the education center of Turkey. … Anyway, I went there and the doctor read my file. He saw that I was Christian (because her name indicates her Christianity). "Are you,' he said, 'a Christian?' I said 'Yes.' 'Oh,' he said. And I had a sanitary pad covering a huge party of my body; he was supposed to do the medical dressing. He tried to take it off. "Alright,' he said, 'do you think Jesus Christ is dead or resurrected?' I said 'Yes.' A blackmail; how can I tell you; a person who enjoys inflicting pain; he was not a doctor at that point anymore. And do you know how he took off my sanitary pad? I cannot tell you the pain I endured. He is saying 'did he or did he not resurrect?' I said, 'He resurrected; this is our faith.' And he took off my pad and I didn't say anything. He turned over to the

121 Samim Akgönül, *Azınlık, Türk Bağlamında Azınlık Kavramına Çapraz Bakışlar,* çev. Deniz Töreli Esnault, and Deniz Akgönül (İstanbul: Bgst Yayınları, 2011), 48-49.

other ladies staying in the same room; 'have you,' he said, 'ever seen a Christian in your life?' And they all went 'Oh is she? Is she a Christian?' I turned over towards them and pulled a face. One of them said 'Oh, sister, why did you do that now?' I said 'so that it is worth it; so that you would see a Christian ridiculously has a nose here and an ear there and you remember it that way; that's why I looked at you.' God help that doctor and bring him to his senses. I wasn't saddened about what had been done to me; I was saddened about his lack of culture. The next day he came with his attending. His attending asked me how I was and how I spent the night. I thanked him and said it was good. 'However,' I said, 'do you and your colleagues take your Hippocratic oath by discriminating against religions?' I was determined to make him eat his words. I'm generally very reticent but when the time comes… I didn't file a complaint, I didn't say that it was him. A complaint would make him worse and impel him to take revenge. So I asked the attending 'do you discriminate in your oaths by saying 'he is this and she is that?' 'No way,' the attending replied. 'So, Christian, Muslim, atheist, Yezidi; these are all lined up in the oath?' 'No,' he said, 'definitely not. It cannot happen.' I quite egoistically, quite dramatically said 'So, it should not happen, should it?' That boy shrank, stepped back and stopped. 'Definitely not,' the attending said. 'Thank you,' I said. So, even in Ankara, if there is a discrimination in the mind, it is put into action. But here, I have more Muslim friends. We don't experience it here in Mersin. I always say this; we don't. In this gated community, all of my friends know that I am a Christian but there is no such thing (discrimination.) We didn't experience it with my mother, either. My grandmother used to tell; she hadn't either." (Catholic Christian, 71)

Being a member of an ethno-religious identity has unavoidable impacts on people's behaviors and attitudes which imposes a necessity to produce constant strategies in daily life. However, at this point, De Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics come to the fore. De Certeau refers to strategies as serving as "the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct."[122]

122 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984), xix and 35-37.

Yet, strategies are calculative and manipulative power relationships that materialize when a subject with will and power can be isolated. It is an "effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible power of the Other." On the other hand, tactics are calculated actions "determined by the absence of a proper locus." They do not have a space of their own; they play out within a terrain imposed and organized by a foreign power. Therefore, it alludes to maneuvering within the enemy territory and the enemy's field of vision. In other words, it is "an art of the weak" who turns events into "opportunities" and takes advantage of these opportunities. Moreover, tactics "can be where it is least expected."[123] So, tactics are the answers given to the place which was delimited by the strategies from the positions of power.

The doctor who attacked the Christian interviewee's religious identity came up with a strategy by abusing his power as a doctor who was treating her. He intended to distinguish his own place of power both as a doctor and a Muslim. In return, the interviewee came up with a tactic which was least expected by the said doctor. She did not file a complaint but chose to implicitly embarrass him by asking questions to his attending in his presence about the medical oath to treat all patients without discriminating against any. The minorities in Turkey are very well aware of how they should act in their relations with the state; however, in daily interactions where the state is not present, they have to engender a new mechanisms on their own.[124] Yeğen points out that aside from Islam, the second main component of Turkish identity was resolved to be loyalty.[125] Since the ethno-religious minorities are comprised of people whose loyalty is constantly subjected to a test because of their different identities, they feel the need to be extra cautious in public space. This is also evident in the interviewee's anecdote when she says that she's very reticent in general. However, in the case of the incident told by the interviewee above, she instantly produced a tactic to cope with the attack of the doctor and the other women in the room. Both the person's own identity perception and what people think of him/her are decisively important factors in the constitution of the

123 Ibid.

124 Türker, 2015, p.190.

125 Mesut Yeğen, *Müstakbel Türk'ten Sözde Vatandaş'a* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 112.

identities of ethnic groups and despite the exchanges between the groups on personal and social level, the presence of prejudices play a crucial role in the preservation of the boundaries between these groups.[126] Accordingly, the interviewee's narrative about the women in the hospital room who rudely demonstrated their astonishment at her Christianity alludes to these prejudices. Against this attack on her identity, the interviewee reacted by employing a tactic of pulling faces at them.

All in all, in spite of the obvious problems that belonging to an ethno-religious minority community bring, the Christians living in Mersin can afford to express their ethnic and religious identity in public space, thanks to the common multicultural and multiethnic plural life culture.

§ 5.8 Silences in the Narratives of the Christians

"My grandfather was so wealthy. The wealthy of Tarsus are 'Christian wealth'. Do you understand? (meaning the wealthy of Tarsus today are the ones who seized the property of the Christians.) They overhauled it, overhauled it. My father used to cry when he went to Tarsus. The house he grew up in is still standing. The other houses, six or seven attached buildings; they are all gone. All the property is gone." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The role of subjectivity, as in 'the conscious and unconscious meanings of experience as lived and remembered,'[127] in history, and particularly in oral history, is unveiled by Passerini who demonstrates that inconsistencies and peculiarities and especially silences in a personal narrative represent how much leverage public culture and ideology have on individual memory.[128] She also denotes to the importance of silences in oral history. For instance, when she was working on the working class ideology under Italian fascism, she theorized that there were two types of silences of the interviewees: one was when life stories involving political interest were told without any mention of fas-

126 Barth, 1969, p.33.

127 Perks and Thomson, 1998, p.3.

128 Passerini, 1998, p.58-59.

cism and one was when the interviewed person experienced the negative influence of the institutional power themselves and their narratives left a chronological gap around the time when fascism was at its peak.[129] What Passerini ascertains regarding silences of the interviewees is in line with the silence of the interviewee who gave the last anecdote above. The interviewee does not want to get in too much detail because the appropriation of the Christian property is a 'touchy' subject. She just says the current wealth of Tarsus depends on the Christian wealth of the past and leaves it there after only one sentence.

Furthermore, the interviewee who gave the last quote above did not mention it herself but I learned from another Christian interviewee that her father was subscripted in the military service which was obligatory only for the non-Muslim men during the Second World War; *Yirmi Kur'a Askerlik*.[130] In fact, her father was away doing his service when she was born. While elaborating on *Yirmi Kur'a Askerlik*, Kaymak asserts that the ethno-religious minorities have established a coping mechanism for the painful experiences of the past by 'repressing' such memories through either silencing the memory or censoring certain parts of it when transmitting the memories of the past to next generations.[131] In a similar vein, Truillot urges that "the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."[132] The interviewee's choice of not mentioning her father's subscription in *Yirmi Kur'a Askerlik* during the interview seems to have been the result of the repression of that memory by keeping silent and not transmitting it at all because there is an unevenness between the transmission of a memory of a Muslim man's military service and a non-Muslim's man's forced subscription in *Yirmi Kur'a Askerlik*.

129 Ibid.

130 Rıfat N. Bali, *II. Dünya Savaşı'nda Gayrimüslimlerin Askerlik Serüveni: Yirmi Kur'a Nafıa Askerleri* (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2008). Neyzi, a.g.e., 2005.

131 Kaymak, 2017, p.48.

132 Michel-Rolph Truillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

Another Christian interviewee explains that her husband's family owned vast amounts of land in Mersin. The government intended to expropriate a big part of the land so her husband's father had to apply to the court. He won the case but he ended up donating the land anyway; however he affixed an annotation that it was only to be used by the military. Later on, in the times of the interviewee's husband, most of the remaining land was expropriated by the state when the Mersin Port was being built in the early 1960s. Likewise, she tends to not say much about the subject other than a couple of sentences. Her short narrative evokes what Taussig refers to as the notion of "what not to know" and "which is generally known but cannot be spoken."[133]

"They built it all around here and the port and everything; all that land was taken. And all that land was taken and they gave a very cheap price in return. What a very shameful thing." (Orthodox Christian, 78)

Similar to the other interviewee who kept silent about her father's forced subscription into military, *Yirmi Kur'a Askerlik*, the interviewee who gave the last quote above has also decided not to talk about one particular incident in the course of her life story. The interviewee mentioned that she has Greek heritage and she once held Greek citizenship but then she had lost her passport somehow and cannot apply to renew it because she cannot prove that she once had it. However, her daughter elaborated on this and explained it further to me later on. According to the narrative of her daughter, during the times of the Cyprus conflict in the 1960s and 1970s, the Greek government issued citizenship and distributed passports to the Orthodox Christians who had Greek heritage in Mersin and Hatay. Nevertheless, after a military coup, which the interviewee's daughter assumes to be the one on 12 September 1980 but is not sure and says it could be the one on 12 March 1971 as well, a rumor spread that the military would carry out searches in the homes of the Christians. The interviewee got quite scared and burnt her Greek passport without leaving any trace. It turned out that no one from the military made searches in their homes and it was just a rumor. However, since she cannot provide no other records to demonstrate that she was once issued a passport, the interviewee, and her

133 Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 51.

family, cannot prove today that she had once held Greek citizenship and passport. The interviewee's decision to keep this narrative to herself and stay silent about it even though she mentioned her once having a Greek passport, again illustrates the repression of a traumatic memory and silencing it.

In a similar vein, Brink-Danan denotes to a quiet cultural citizenship practiced by the Turkish Jews in order to not draw attention to themselves which induces the "Jewish Turkishness to exist in small, symbolic gestures as well as in the idea that the Jews still retain a private collective which is not privy to non-Jews."[134] She further cites Bali[135] who clarifies this posture using a local vernacular in Judeo-Spanish which means 'silence' or 'quiet' but Bali construes it as 'low-profile.' Equivalently, the Christian interviewee mentioned above does not disclose this anecdote to me and keeps her silence about it; in other words, retains a low-profile about the fact that at some point she feared the possibility of her Greek passport to be found by the military in their home to such an extent that she entirely burnt it. Moreover, after more than forty years, she still refrains from revealing it to a non-Christian. My identity as a Muslim Turk and being a researcher from an educational institution might have impacted her to keep this memory to herself and not disclose it to me.

Due to the diminishing Christian population and the Foundations Law,[136] church buildings in Mersin have gone through a lot of legal problems. The Maronite Church[137] at the city center and one Greek Orthodox Church[138] in a village called Hıristiyanköy, which is known as the Osmaniye neighborhood today, were turned into mosques. The other Greek Orthodox Church, built by

134 Brink-Danan, 2011, p.452.

135 Rifat Bali, "The Alternative Way to Come to Terms with the Past/Those Who Try to Forget: Turkey's Jewish Minority." *From 'Milieu de Mémoire'to 'Lieu de Mémoire' Istanbul, Izmir and Athens as Strongholds of Trans-Cultural Societies in the 20th Century*, *Karl Franzes University, Graz, Austria*, (June 2005), 9-11. Cited in Brink-Danan, p.452

136 Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar: Kavramlar, Teori, Lozan, İç Mevzuat, İçtihat, Uygulama* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015). Kaymak, 2017, p. 275.

137 Aydın, 2011, p.83. ; Yorulmaz, 2019, p.103-104. Şerife Yorulmaz, "Doğu Akdeniz'de Bir Cemaat Serüveni: Liman Kenti Olma Sürecinde Mersin'de Gelişen Marunî Taifesi", in II.*Tarih İçinde Mersin Kolokyumu, (*Mersin: Mersin Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005), 73.

138 Aydın, 2011, p.107. ; Develi, 2001, p.117.

Hacı Konstantin Mavromati, at the city center was also turned into a mosque at first but it was not used much since there were several other mosques in the city.[139] It was eventually demolished in 1944 on the grounds that the Greek Orthodox community was diminishing.[140] The stones of the demolished church were used in the construction of the People's House[141] building which is turned into the Culture Center today.[142] The fact that the stones of the demolished church was used in the construction of the People's House is acknowledged by a priest of the Orthodox Church.[143] Yet, one Muslim interviewee does not mention this detail and tells that the governor, Tevfik Sırrı Gür, was able to build the People's House and Merchants Club only by collecting financial donations from people because of lack of capital in the dire economic conditions during the Second World War. It is also possible that the Muslim interviewee might be unaware of that detail. However, once again, Halbwachs's assertion that collective memory is not given but a socially constructed notion is manifested at this point.[144] This also explains the difference between the Muslims' memory about the People's House building and that of the Christians. The Christian women have a different kind of memory about the People's House building as they know that the stones used in its construction were taken from the ruins of the demolished church. In contrast, the Muslim women remember the construction of the People's House building as a

139 Fikri Mutlu, "Mersin Şehri Nasıl ve Ne Zaman Kuruldu?", *İçel Mersin Halkevi Dergisi*, Yıl:3, Sayı 35 (Birinci Kanun 1940): 7.

140 Develi, 2001, p.116.

141 For more on People's Houses in the early Republican era, please see Arzu Öztürkmen, "The Role of People's Houses in the Making of National Culture in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 11, (1994): 159-181. Alexandros Lamprou, *Nation-Building in Modern Turkey: The 'People's Houses', the State and the Citizen* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

142 Ali Murat Merzeci, "Hagios Georgios Kilisesi," *İçel Sanat Kulübü Bülteni*, (Ocak 2003), accessed on November 12, 2018. http://www.yumuktepe.com/hagios-georgios-kilisesi-ali-murat-merzeci/

143 Personal interview

144 Lewis A. Coser, "Introduction to Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), in *On Collective Memory, Maurice Halbwachs*, ed. Lewis A. Coser, Lewis, A.,(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

collective enterprise built by the donations collected from the people of Mersin.

"Tevfik Sırrı Gür built it (the People's House) when he was the governor in the 1940s. He also built the Merchants Club, all by collecting money from people. Tevfik Sırrı was such a valuable governor then. The People's House is the house of the people as its name implies." (Muslim, 70)

"The Catholic church (in Mersin) is a remainder of sultan inheritance.[145] It used to be such a large area. 'The road is going to pass here,' and they expropriate; 'this and that will be built here' and they expropriate. It was taken with such a huge effort through court decisions by stating 'this belongs to the Catholic church.'" (Catholic Christian, 71)

"… That church (meaning the Maronite church) was turned into a mosque. No problem; for instance, its interior has still stayed the same. I go there from time to time because that church was a very beautiful church. You could say that I grew up in there. We used to go there on the religiously festive days every day for prayer. It has become the Nusretiye Mosque on the Uray Street. But it doesn't matter. For instance, the top level priests coming from abroad want to see it sometimes. I go and the Hodja there opens the door. They get in and look inside; the order is the same. They wouldn't have been able to change the old monument anyway but still. But what does it matter if it is a mosque? It is another door of God, it doesn't matter." (Orthodox Christian, 72)

The interviewee's visiting the mosque which was transformed from a church because it was a part of her childhood, ascribes a new meaning to that church/mosque other than religious purposes. It has turned into a ritual for her to go and see that the interior is still the same even though it is turned into a mosque. The fact that she is asked to take the visiting priests to show the interior of the church also portrays that it is still an important symbol for the

145 The foundation established on behalf of Bezm-i Alem Valide Sultan, who was Sultan Abdülmecid's mother, owned a vast amount of land in Mersin one of which the land of the Latin Catholic Church. Şinasi Develi, "Bezm-i Âlem Valide Sultan Mersinimizin İlk Sahibi," *İçel Sanat Kulübü Aylık Bülteni*, sayı 48, (Haziran 1996).

history of the Christian community in Mersin. According to Geertz, such rituals and symbols provide guidance for meaning and behavior; for he defines symbolic activities as "attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand."[146] In this case, the church, which is turned into a mosque, acts as a symbol to explicate the interviewee's behavior of still visiting it from time to time. The visits to that church/mosque reinforce her religious identity and the visits of the priests to the church when they are in Mersin serve as a symbol of the perpetuation of the communal identity as Christians.

The demolition of churches and transformation of them into mosques is very common in Mersin, as it is in Turkey over all. In spite of their resolute discourse that Mersin is different than the rest of Turkey in regards of rarity of discrimination against the Christians, one particular thing that offends them is the disorderly state of the old churches in the region, especially the one in Tarsus. The St. Paul Church in Tarsus is quite important for the Christian community just like the St. Paul Well as both are named after one of the twelve apostles, Saint Paul. Nevertheless, the church is only open to visitors as a museum and any kind of religious ceremony is not allowed. It is opened for a religious ceremony only once a year; on the last Sunday of January when the Christians living in Adana, Hatay and Mersin come to meet there and perform the Sunday service. Yet, the organization of that ceremony is subjected to the official consent of the governor of Mersin which is obtained by the committees of the Orthodox and Catholic churches in the city. The disorderly state of the church of which the use for religious purposes depends on the consent of the governor of Mersin, is a source of distress in the narrative of the interviewee below. The tenacity to not repair and renovate the church building even though it is used as a museum today, incites her to believe it is an intentional act. As Lowenthal exhorts, "like memories, relics once abandoned or forgotten may become more treasured than those in continued use; the discontinuity in their history focuses attention on them."[147]

146 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* (USA: Basic Books, Inc.,1973), 140-141.

147 Lowenthal, 1985, p.240.

"They do not want to renovate that church. What is it to glaze the windows – what happens if they do it? 'No, it is not going to be renovated.' I think in a negative way from now on. I mean, why do they not renovate it? I guess they want to leave it like that so it would rot away; rot away and finish." (Catholic Christian, 71)

Another recent incident in regards to the relics in Tarsus which offended two Christian interviewees was that a deputy of Mersin alleged that the archeological excavation in Tarsus which continued for more than a year and was known as "the mysterious excavation" in public[148] was intended to discover the lost Bible of St. Paul and was financed by Vatican.[149] One Christian interviewee states that it was an unnecessary remark and a groundless allegation about Vatican just to draw attention.[150]

One Christian interviewee speaks of an experience which took place at a dancing contest held at the Merchants Club when she was a fresh high school graduate. She and her partner won the contest and got their award from the governor himself. During the award ceremony, a group of men sitting in the front row threw glasses at the couple and protested them. The interviewee again did not accede to give much detail but briefly said that the group of men made some discriminatory remarks which did not befit with the multi-religious and multicultural structure of Mersin. However, she also says that years later in business life, she happened to come across one of the protestors and helped him to solve a critical problem which left him mortified and led him to apologize when she invited him to her office to have coffee.

148 "Tarsus'taki gizemli kazı bitti, tartışma bitmedi: Tonlarca altın bulundu," T24, last modified on 5 November, 2017, accessed on 28 February, 2019. https://t24.com.tr/haber/tarsustaki-gizemli-kazi-bitti-tartisma-bitmedi-tonlarca-altin-bulundu,482780

149 "CHP'li Aytuğ Atıcı: Tarsus'taki kazıda İncil bulunduysa, Hristiyanlar için ülkemiz Kâbe olacak", T24, last modified on 3 November, 2017, accessed on 28 February, 2019. https://t24.com.tr/haber/chpli-aytug-atici-tarsustaki-kazida-incil-bulunduysa-hristiyanlar-icin-ulkemiz-kabe-olacak,481316

150 Later on, after the excavation came to an end, another deputy of Mersin, who also served as the Minister of Culture in the 1990s, made a statement that the excavation was conducted to search for the lost grave of St. Paul. "CHP'li Sağlar: Tarsus'taki kazıda Aziz Paul'ün mezarı arandı," T24, last modified on 13 November, 2017, accessed on 28 February, 2019. https://t24.com.tr/haber/chpli-saglar-tarsustaki-kazida-aziz-paulun-mezari-arandi,488691

The narratives of the Christian interviewees clearly exhibit that they are no strangers to discrimination in daily life. As they are talking about their experiences, they insist that they do not take offence in such cases and they are rather saddened about the lack of education and understanding. However, the fact that they clearly remember these kinds of remarks demonstrates that such treatment and remarks have inflicted unforgettable marks on their memories. In fact, one of the Christian interviewees tells me about an incident towards the end of our interview. She relays an anecdote about her cousin who is an academic and was expected to be appointed to an important administrative position in the university a couple of years ago but at last minute he was not. The reason of that last minute change is not known but the interviewee believes that it was because her cousin was a Christian. However, she once again enunciates her opinion that politics is the main issue and these kinds of things are more common in big cities rather than in Mersin.

"That is the biggest marginalization issue. I did not want to dwell upon it; I did not want to tell it at first so that it wouldn't come to gossiping. We always say 'we Christians are friends with Muslims' but politics have always stood in the way of that friendship. İstanbul and Ankara experience these kinds of things more." (Catholic Christian, 71)

These kinds of anecdotes repudiate what the interviewees have been telling all along about the appreciation and tolerance regarding the multi-religious and multicultural façade of the city. Yet, as it has been mentioned before, despite singular experiences they have shared, the interviewees pay strict attention to underline that this is not common in Mersin. For them, Mersin stands out between the other Turkish cities in terms of the multi-religious and multiethnic life culture in the city.

§ 5.9 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I put my focus on the perceptions of the interviewees through their narratives on two aspects. First of all, I aimed to unveil their perceptions regarding Mersin and the demographic change it has been going through. In order to do that, I intended to disclose the perceptions of the interviewees about being from Mersin. Their strong sense of belonging to Mersin is relayed

through their oral accounts which also brings forth their perceptions regarding the newcomers of Mersin who migrated to the city in the last couple of decades. Thus, secondly, I aspired to work on the narratives regarding the cosmopolitan structure of Mersin which elicited their opinions and perceptions about how that cosmopolitan structure has been changing. Following that, I attempted to explore their narratives about immigration and modernity. The reason I decided to work on the narratives about these two concepts together is because the interviewees have a common perception of modernity, it leads them to believe that the modernity of Mersin has encountered an unavoidable rupture after the mass rural migration and immigration it has received. They believe that the migration wave from the southeastern Turkey in the 1990s and the immigration wave from Syria in the 2010s have irretrievably altered the socio-cultural characteristics of Mersin and turned it from a modern urban center into an unrecognizable metropolis. In their narratives, there is a predominant discourse on differentiating themselves from the newcomers of Mersin on the basis of their modernity.

The narratives regarding the demographic change in Mersin in this chapter allude to the perceptions of the interviewees about the decadence and deterioration of the city. The demographic change in the city is perceived as the main reason of the decadence in modernity and the urban fabric of Mersin. While the non-Muslims gradually left Mersin for İzmir, İstanbul or other countries, the newcomers most of whom are Kurdish arrived in the city. The non-Muslims who left are talked about in nostalgic sentiments whereas the mention of the newcomers bear hints of resentment. However, the reason as to why the non-Muslims decided to leave in the first place is not articulated.

In the narratives, there is a difference between the perceptions of the interviewees regarding the members of the Cretan community who were also immigrants when they first arrived nearly a century ago and the newly migrated communities in the city such as the Kurds and Syrians. The Cretan community is embraced whereas the newcomers are marginalized in the narratives of the interviewed women. These middle and upper middle class women, who affiliate themselves with modernity to a great extent, consider the Cretans as more compatible with Mersin's modern image. However, studies focusing on the oral testimonies of the members of the Cretan community

manifest that they had not been not embraced by the locals for a long time and experienced discriminatory attitudes from the locals when they first arrived. In the narratives of the interviewees, the Kurds who have started migrating to the city in the late 1980s and the Syrians who have begun to immigrate to Mersin since 2011 are considered as to not conform to the modernity of the city. Moreover, the newcomers are thought to have been one of the major reasons of the ever-increasing decadence of the city.

The narratives include a strong longing for the past and a strong emphasis on the feeling of loss which again implies a story of deterioration in Mersin. They believe that they will not be able to live in a secure environment from now on which makes them feel insecure and unsafe in the city in which they grew up and have lived for most of their lives. As Mersin evolves into a metropolis of which the population has almost reached 2 million, the feeling of loss and unsafety, which they associate with the decadence of Mersin, suggests a rupture in the middle class modernity of which they are a part. Their opinions about the demographic change is so reproachful that it is as if they believe that Mersin would have been able to stay like how it was in their childhood, had it not been for the advent of rural migration and immigration.

The intimations about the Syrian immigrants implicate a tension between the locals and newcomers of the city. As the interviewees still has not come to terms with the newcomers of whom most are Kurdish and who have migrated to the city since the 1980s, the Syrian immigrants are perceived by them as extreme. While complaining about the rarity of coming upon true *Mersinli*s, one Muslim interviewee hints at the high reproduction rate of the Syrian immigrants. As a Christian interviewee commends to me, and all the young people in general, to look after our country, she urges that otherwise 'we' as Turkish citizens would turn into the young Syrians who left their country and escaped to Turkey. Most of the interviewees remind that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk said "*Mersinli*s, look after Mersin" in a speech during one of his visits to Mersin. In fact, one Muslim interviewee makes a remark that Atatürk must have predicted the present situation of Mersin from then. These remarks serve to manifest an implicit bias towards the Syrian immigrants and at the same

time demonstrate the pessimistic outlook the interviewees have for the future of Mersin.[151]

Through their narratives which underline their perceptions about modernity, the interviewees endeavor to differentiate themselves from the newcomers of Mersin by emphasizing their modern tastes and habits. The common use of sentences like "Mersin was a Mersin like this" (*Mersin böyle bir Mersin'di*) and "That is the kind of *Mersinli* we are" (*biz böyle bir Mersinliyiz*) explicitly assert how the interviewees position themselves distinctively in the socio-cultural context of Mersin.

Göçek dissects that after the increase in close interactions with Europe, taking piano and French lessons, adopting a dog as a pet, attending activities such as balls, dances and operas and embracing a European style of dressing had become parts of the daily lives of the middle and upper middle classes in the second half of the nineteenth century.[152] Correspondingly, Duben and Behar interpret on the alteration of urban habits and feature the influence of the European tastes and habits, which they refer to as Europeanization, on the Ottoman middle and upper middle classes at the turn of the twentieth century. This European influence paved the way for a divide between the traditional family codes and the Western-French *alafranga* norms and values upon which

151 Critiques of the urban and demographic development of Mersin by making a reference to Atatürk's warning about looking after Mersin is very common. In fact, even long before the Syrian immigration wave started, criticizing the city's situation by referring to what Atatürk said was commonly practiced. For instance, an article which was originally published in an issue of İçel Art Club's magazine in 1999, discusses that on his last visit to Mersin in 1937, Atatürk was agitated to see that the mayor Toroğlu did not implement his former advices in regard to the urban reconstruction of the city. The author of the article further mentions that the mayor Toroğlu admitted to him in his elderly days in 1957 that he could not have imagined Mersin to turn into what it was then. So, it turns out that even in 1957, the old *Mersinli*s were disappointed with the urban development in the city. Hamdi Gözneli, "Atatürk'ün Mersinlilere ve Belediye Başkanına Son İkazları," *İçel Sanat Kulübü Bülteni*, (Nisan 1999), accessed on February 9, 2019. http://www.yumuktepe.com/ataturkun-mersinlilere-ve-belediye-baskanina-son-ikazlari-hamdi-gozneli/

152 Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of the Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 119.

intrinsic dynamics of family life were constructed.[153] Likewise, Kandiyoti articulates that modernization "involved a selective appropriation of items of material culture, habit, and taste by different strata of society, creating styles that were also insignia of social status." The changes in tastes, habit and culture were not merely refashioning but also indicated a hierarchy of worth whereby former habits and tastes were considered uncivilized.[154] Referring to Bourdieu, Kandiyoti states that the reinterpretation of ordinary physical practices establishes an endeavor to refashion habits among social groups which are seeking to shape new subjects.[155] She further argues that different internalizations of modernization accommodate indicators and symbols of different social status, manufacturing interpretations of modernity which disguises subtle social class codes.[156] Thus, she elucidates that gender is one of the key arenas in which different constructions of what it means to be modern might be asserted and suggested.

Equivalently, the narratives of the interviewees about having a refrigerator in their houses, about being taken to vacations by their mothers even back then, about praising their modernity for not finding it odd when their son had to be roommates with a female student, corresponds to what Kandiyoti discusses about appropriation of material culture items as markers of different social status and different interpretations of what it means to be modern. These narratives demonstrate the interviewees' interpretations of modernization in certain habits and tastes. The strong emphasis on the fashion sense of women in Mersin has also "become entangled in local idioms of social status and ideological predilection as well as in global media and advertisement images of modern womanhood."[157] Through the expressions of codes of consumption patterns, habits, tastes and fashion sense, feminine identities have

153 Alan Duben, and Cem Behar, *İstanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 202.

154 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan, and Reşat Kasaba, Reşat (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 119.

155 Bourdieu, 1999, cited in Kandiyoti, 1997, p.119

156 Kandiyoti, 1997, p.120.

157 Kandiyoti, 1997, p.128.

grown into redefinitions of modernity as well and this is evident in the narratives of the interviewees of this study.

The second aspect on which I concentrated in the narratives of the interviewees is their perceptions of intercommunal relations between the Christians and the Muslims in Mersin. In order to unravel their narratives, at first, I focused on their perceptions about intercommunal marriages. Studying their perceptions on intermarriages between Muslims and Christians was crucial because the narratives of the Christian interviewees exposed that although inter-denominational marriages in Christianity, between an Orthodox and a Catholic, are much more common today than they used to be in the past, in such marriages it is generally expected of the woman to change her denomination and switch to that of her husband's so that their future children will be raised in accordance with the father's denomination. However, it should be underlined that today this is not a norm and not all Christian women who married a Christian man from a different denomination does that. In fact, one Catholic Christian interviewee who is married to an Orthodox raised her children as Catholics.

Then, drawing upon the inter-denominational marriages of the Christian interviewees, I focused on the perceptions of all interviewees regarding exogamic marriages between Muslims and Christians. Tracing the way intermarriages are perceived in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society like that of Mersin's, offers serious insight into the intercommunal relations between the different ethno-religious groups. Accordingly, the narratives of the interviewees have been enlightening in regards of revealing the difference between the perceptions of the Muslim and Christian interviewees. While the Christian interviewees explicitly assert that they are in favor of everyone marrying from within their own religion, the Muslim interviewees refrain from making such a statement and exemplify the intermarriages they have witnessed in Mersin instead. However, although the Christian interviewees have concerns about the perpetuation of their community as a minority and explicitly state it is better for everyone to marry people from within their own religion, they do not consider intermarriages as a taboo. Furthermore, they have siblings and relatives who are married to Muslims and make it clear that they have not experienced any kinds of problems with them. However,

the Muslim interviewees, who maintain that they are not against intermarriages in any way, do not have any family members who are married to Christians or to people from religions other than Islam. So, while the Christian interviewees speak from their own experience in their families, the Muslim interviewees only have friends and acquaintances to present as examples for the presence of intermarriages in Mersin. Leaving all that aside, both the Muslim and Christian interviewees concur that the young people today place less importance on the religion of their partners and have much more different concerns for marriage such as economic and financial problems. Consequently, the Muslim and Christian interviewees assent that the advent of intermarriages between the two ethno-religious communities are much more common today than they were in the past.

In her study about being Cypriot in North London for which she interviewed several Turkish and Greek Cypriots, Göker notes that in the course of daily life and everyday conversations, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots are enthusiastic about emphasizing the commonalities between each other; such as food, culture and mentality. Conversely, their approaches to intermarriages highlight the differences and discrepancies between the two groups.[158] In a similar vein, the Christian and Muslim interviewees of this study accentuate the good relations between the two communities in Mersin but when it comes to intermarriages, these blurred boundaries between the two groups get clearer. The boundaries between the two communities are flexible "so long as they remain unchallenged by a more 'serious' matter such as marrying each other."[159] These boundaries are highlighted at the very most on the subject of intermarriages. Nevertheless, today these boundaries are much more flexible and the interviewees are more opened up the idea of intermarriages.

In the last section of the chapter, I aspired to examine the narratives of the interviewees on their perceptions about the intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians in Mersin. As all the interviewees are firm advocates of the multicultural and multi-religious social structure of Mersin, the first part of the narratives by the Muslim and Christian interviewees focus on

158 Göker, 2007, p.178

159 Ibid.

the strength of the relations, especially in the past. When there were many more Christians and other non-Muslim communities in the city, almost every interviewee had at least one non-Muslim neighbor with whom they had bonded over by exchanging visits and foods. They also knew about the other communities' religious festive days and celebrated the religious festive days of their friends and neighbors from those communities. What is more, they even attended one another's celebrations. In spite of the diminishing number of Christians in the city, the eligiously festive days of Christianity, such as Christmas and Easter, are still celebrated at the churches in the city today and Christians invite their close Muslim friends to these celebrations from time to time. Likewise, rituals such as weddings and funerals of both communities are attended by the members of the opposite community as well. Correspondingly, the Muslim interviewees go to the churches for the weddings and funerals of Christian acquaintances. While intermarriages, determined by differences in religion, have constituted one of the most significant factors for the preservation of boundaries between the communities, living side by side and entering cultural interactions for years have created the impact of blurring the boundaries and diminishing the prejudices between the two communities.

However, although the intercommunal relations are on a strong basis in the city, the Christian interviewees are subjected to discriminatory attitudes and behaviors from time to time. They are not inclined to express those kinds of experiences and even when they do, they tend to censor and conceal certain parts as they do not feel safe to talk about them with a Muslim interviewer. When they relay the the marginalizing experiences they have had pertaining to their identity, they are determined that discrimination on the basis of their religion takes place very rarely in Mersin and more frequently in big cities. Furthermore, expressions of their religious identity in public space is not frowned upon or received with astonishment in Mersin, unlike it is in other cities of Turkey.

Nevertheless, the Christian interviewees experience encounters in which their 'Turkishness' is questioned or even close friends sometimes call them '*gavur*s' which reveals how they are perceived as a member of an ethno-religious minority. Therefore, as much as there is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious plural life culture which enables the Christians to express their ethno-

religious identities in public space, there is the omnipresent possibility of becoming targets of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors even in Mersin where they feel much more secure than in any other Turkish city. So, it might be said that in spite of the cosmopolitan structure of Mersin, the Christians feel the need to establish a balance between cosmopolitanism and a cautious discourse which incites them to think about what to say, how to say it, when to say it and to whom to say it.[160]

160 Brink-Danan, 2011, p.457.

6

Conclusion

The lives of the women of Turkey went through a solid transformation process after the proclamation of the Republic in 1923. An extensive body of scrutinizing material on gender and women studies focusing on this era and the following decades have been published throughout the years. Until the influence of the second wave feminism started to undertake the Turkish academia, most of the studies on these issues were either official written discourses or writings and biographies of the Republican elite. What was lacking was women's own oral accounts and written life documents regarding the transition process that their lives had gone through. Personal narratives only recently have begun to be valued as academic resources explicating and unfolding the lives of women. Since the perceptions, experiences, narratives and accounts of the women have turned out to be essential to comprehend their lives, the importance of personal narratives to understand and realize how women dealt with the massive social changes in a newly transforming society was accordingly appreciated. However, the personal narratives and experiences of 'ordinary' women who have not been politically active or have not had professional careers, especially those of the women in the peripheral regions, are in need of being studied more.

This study adopted the oral history method through a feminist perspective to analyze how a group of women with different ethno-religious backgrounds of Islam and Christianity, over the age of 70 in a particular city of Turkey with

a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population have experi-enced the social and cultural transformation that the Turkish society has gone through after the Republic. By giving voice to the women's own narratives about their everyday lives and experiences, this study employs these women as social actors.

One of the main aims of this study has been about displaying the perceptions of modernity in the narratives of the thirteen women, between the ages 70 and 84, interviewed for this study. As this is a complicated issue, in order to tackle this massive load, I approached this question by focusing on two subquestions. The first one was to analyze the women's perceptions on the Republican reforms and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk whereas the second one was to scrutinize their perceptions of modernity and the recent urban and demographic change in Mersin in their narratives. The accounts of the interviewed women contain a high level of nostalgia and longing for the past because they believe that there is a serious decay and deterioration in the modernity of Mersin due to the recent flux of immigrants. The interviewees feel an immense yearning for the bourgeoisie modernity which defined their lives and that they believe to have lost now. Their narratives point to feelings of a loss of community; they are unhappy about the present situation of their hometown and complain about not knowing the people they see on the street. The complaints about not seeing any familiar faces on the street comprises a significant part of their narratives. However, even though they believe that Mersin has decayed in the last couple of decades, they still preserve the memories of the past which they relate to the modern habits, fine urban culture and good taste of the city. As Halbwachs formulates "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated."[1] Therefore, even though these memories run the risk of having "lost the form and the appearance they once had"[2] because they are repetitions, they still serve to perpetuate a strong sense of local identity, the identity of being a *Mersinli*, in the interviewees.

1 Halbwachs, 1992, p.47.

2 Ibid.

The second main aim of this study focused on disclosing the perceptions of intercommunal relations between the Muslims and Christians of Mersin in the narratives of the interviewed women. While six of the interviewees were Christians, seven of them were Muslims which portrayed a nice balance over all. The first sub-question here was to examine the perceptions of these women regarding the intercommunal marriages between the Muslims and Christians. The second part was dissecting the Muslim and Christian interviewees' perceptions of each other and what it is like to live in one of the very few multi-religious cities in Turkey and how it affects the relations between the two communities.

The interviewed women in this study come from the traditional urban secular middle and upper class and they are 'ordinary' women in the sense that they are neither nationally nor globally renowned figures. They are not politicians and have not been active in any kind of political movement throughout their lives. They are not among the prominent women of the Republic whose lives have been studied in several oral history projects, either. They were born, raised and have lived a great deal of their lives in an urban center in the peripheral region of Turkey. While some of them had professional careers until retirement, some of them worked for a certain period in their lives and quit; and some of them never worked in the professional sense at all. However, these details do not render their agencies and their narratives any less worthy to be studied. On the contrary, studying how and in which ways these women living in the periphery have interiorized the impact of being among the second generation of Republican wom-en who seized the opportunity to receive education and participate the public life, unlike their mothers and the previous generation of women in their families, is going to contribute to developing an intrinsic approach within the viewpoints of these women, rather than merely within the framework of the historical and social context they have lived in.

Very little number of academic works have solely and exclusively concentrated on the personal narratives of the women of ethno-religious minorities in Turkey. As Mersin is one of the very few cities in Turkey which still has a Christian population, six of the thirteen interviewees of this study were Christians. Their accounts have been illuminating in the sense of discovering the depths of bourgeoisie modernity because they are adamant that the Christian

community was already modernized and progressive before the foundation of the Republic. Their insistence that the Christian women already had the opportunity to get an education before the Republic is evident. They reiterate that they were already modernized back then but it should be underlined that the opportunity to get an education was likely to be exclusive for the Christian women of upper and upper middle classes.

The oral history interviews conducted with seven Muslim and six Christian women who have been born, grown up and lived a better part of their lives and still live in Mersin reveal a nostalgic conceptualization of modernity. The nostalgia they cultivate for their personal past and the past of Mersin constitute a strong part of their narratives. They have a profound yearning for the Mersin of the early Republican era where the transformations introduced by the Republican reforms were going on in full speed. With the social and cultural transformations which brought along the emergence of the traditional secular urban middle class, these women went through various forms and degrees of public space experience, education and work experience while retaining the roles that were forced upon them in the private space.

Moreover, conducting oral history interviews with these women to listen to their narratives about their lives and experiences and their viewpoints on Mersin allowed me to grasp an understanding of the urban and demographical transformation of Mersin in the last couple of decades. It provided a different kind of outlook to the study by displaying how and why these women remembered the Mersin of their childhood and youth in a certain way. Nostalgic memories constitute a considerable part of these women's narratives and have inescapable impacts on how they remember the past. As expressed by Huyssen, "the act of remembering is always in and of the present, while its referent is of the past and thus absent."[3] The complaints of the interviewees about the present Mersin and the heavy immigration the city has received since the beginning of the civil war in Syria refers to a conscious forgetting on the point that Mersin was founded by immigrants in the first place because as Geiger heeds, the preconceived notions that we have about what is significant

3 Andreas Huyssen, "Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts," *New German Critique*, No. 88, Contemporary German Literature, (2003): 4.

or marginal, favors certain voices and covers unexplored subjects.[4] As Mersin is a city which was founded by immigrants in the late 1800s at a relatively later time than most of the other Anatolian cities, the ancestors of these women were very likely to be immigrants not more than a century ago but they seem not to remember that part of their pasts in their disapproval of the most recent immigrants of the city.

This study, in general, scrutinized the relationship between the middle class and modernity. Since the interviewed women belong to middle and upper middle class, their relationship with modernity is at the center here. Keeping the time span covered by the narratives of the interviewees in mind, the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees whose ages vary between 70 and 84, are in line with the formation and gradual rise of the traditional middle class in Turkish society. The cultural patterns and socio-economic practices deeply rooted in the lives of the interviewees designate the formation of gender and class codes in this secular and urban middle class of the Republic. The interviewees, members of the secular urban bourgeoisie of Mersin and the professional class with Western aspirations, consider themselves as the true *Mersinli*s as opposed to the newcomers who migrated to the city in the last couple of decades. As members of the urban secular middle class which was a product of modernity, they feel anxious about having to relinquish the status that has been acquired by virtue of modernity which makes them critical against the recent migration wave in Mersin. Because they have lost the bourgeois modernity in which they had grown up and spent a great deal of their lives, this loss makes them feel a strong longing for the past which is now the only place they can turn to when they want to relive those days. Cherishing the memories of the past and resisting to adapt to the recent migration wave induces them to embrace an exclusionary attitude towards the migrants and immigrants as a way of withstanding and opposing the social, ethnic and demographic change in their hometown.

The tendency to look at the past through the perspective of the present is quite apparent in their narratives. This perspective inevitably affects how they

4 Geiger, 1990, p.172.

remember and evaluate the events of the past because "remembering is a dynamic process by which images of the past are influenced by discourses in the present and reinterpreted according to the context in which they are articulated."[5] Their remembrances about the past are unavoidably influenced by the discourses in the present; leading them to reassess those remembrances in accordance with the context in which they are expressed. As the interviewees are not content with the present, the past seems much better to them now than how it used to be when they actually experienced it. The good times of the past have a precedence over the bad times and makes everything about the past seem much better to them than it was. Since the memories of the past "provide security, authority, legitimacy, and finally identity in the present," the interviewees' narratives turn the "struggles over the possession and interpretation of memories" into "deep, frequent and bitter" processes.[6] Oral historians usually experience these kinds of confrontations over the course of interviews where "stories of personal pasts that are ways of making sense of contemporary dislocation and loss in the lives of older people."[7] In my case, the interviewees are not experiencing contemporary dislocation since they still live in their hometown; but the rapid urban and demographic transformation of the city makes them feel like they are experiencing a contemporary loss since they repeatedly complain that they cannot recognize the city anymore.

The study also brings to the fore the differences between the Muslim and Christian interviewees in terms of their perceptions of and their affiliations with the past. As the Christian interviewees underline their families' role in the founding of the city, the Muslim interviewees do not make such claims but feel the need to emphasize their belonging to families who have been in Mersin for many generations which proves their being a true *Mersinli* in their eyes. In fact, for both the Muslim and Christian interviewees, the local identity of

5 Susana Kaiser, "To Punish or to Forgive? Young Citizens' Attitudes on Impunity and Accountability in Contemporary Argentina," *Journal of Human Rights,* 4, no. 2, (2005): 173.

6 David Thelen, "Introduction: Memory and American History," in *Memory and American History*, ed. David Thelen (Indiana University Press, 1990), xvi.

7 Paula Hamilton, "The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives," Alistair Thomson, Michael Frisch, Paula Hamilton, *Oral History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (Autumn, 1994): 40.

being *Mersinli* serves as an important part of who they are and distinguishes them from the newcomers of the city. As conferred by Mills, since "the geography of memory – that is, the social space through and upon which memory is constructed – is complex, constituted together with the making and the telling of the memory itself", memory and narrative are perpetually found in locality which paves the way for the relationship with a certain place, serve as the constitutive of identity.[8] For the interviewees of this study, their relationship to Mersin and their local identities embody a significant part of their identities and are essential to who they are.

The narratives demonstrate that there is a dual structure in terms of the source of modernity in Mersin. Whereas the Christian interviewees assert that the modernity in the city attests to historical background as a port city and the pre-national form of the cosmopolitan population of Mersin, the Muslim interviewees underscore the modernization which was instigated with the Republic. These two perceptions of sources of modernity generally overlap but they tend to diverge at certain points from time to time. However, there is no tension between the two because the Christian interviewees are very appreciative of the Republican modernization and reforms in the same way that the Muslim interviewees acknowledge the modernity that the Christians and other non-Muslim communities have generated in the city at the peak of its port city status.

Although the Muslim interviewees and their families were highly receptive of the transformation that the Republican reforms and the gradual rise of the middle class brought to the fore, the Christian interviewees maintain that their families were not much influenced by the same transformation as they were already members of a middle class which was generated in the late nineteenth century due to the port city status of Mersin. Be that as it may, in spite of having been modernized and able to get an education, the Christian women were also married off at early ages and were expected to undertake roles in the private space rather than having a profession and working outside the home, just like the Muslim women. Therefore, the narratives of both the Christian and the Muslim women display a notable increase in women's education and

8 Mills, 2008, p.396.

participation in work life after the Republic. However, when it comes to the roles they had to assume in the private space, not much has changed as they still were expected to become dutiful wives and mothers and take care of the household. Their narratives in that regard is in line with the experience of Turkish women in general as modernity and the Republican reforms have fallen short to bring along any kind of change in women's roles in the private space.

There is a slight implication of a superior tone in the narratives of the Christian women which suggests their pride of having been members of the families who were among the founders of the city and been living in Mersin for more than 150 years. They consider themselves as the pioneers of modernization in Mersin. A similar superior tone emerges in the narratives of the Muslim interviewees when they are talking about the newcomers of the city. They adopt a superior tone when they express their being a true *Mersinli* whose family has been there for many generations. So, it might be said that the amount of time for which their families have been in Mersin, and not being among the families who migrated to Mersin in the last couple of decades, are sources of pride and gratification in the narratives of these women because they differentiate themselves from the newcomers on the ground of their local identity as *Mersinlis*.

Another source of gratification in the narratives of these women is the multiethnic and multi-religious social and demographic structure of Mersin. Mersin as a city furnishes them with a sense of belonging which supersedes ethnicity and religion. The Christian interviewees especially point out to the city cemetery which is a common cemetery for people from the three main monotheistic religions and assert to its presence as the determinant of the specificity of Mersin. In comparison to the other cities in Turkey, they talk about the specific characteristic of Mersin which allows them to express their ethnoreligious identity in a relatively open way. When it comes to the narratives of the Muslim interviewees, they also underscore the harmonious common culture in Mersin which is shared by both Muslim and Christian communities but interestingly, they do not make a reference to the city cemetery at all since it has evolved into one which mostly belongs to the tombs of Muslims now. They praise the contributions of the Christians in the sense that they

bestow a distinctive and peculiar modernity to the city which is not likely to be found in other Turkish cities and even in the geographically close urban centers such as Tarsus and Adana. The fact that the Orthodox Church is located right next to old People's House building which is used as the Culture Center today and the Atatürk statue in front of it are demonstrated as the proof of the harmony and understanding in Mersin. They appreciate the presence of the Christian community and consider them as the indicator of Mersin's distinctive modernity in Turkey.

All in all, this study has attempted to analyze the perceptions and narratives of a group of women of Mersin about modernity, the Republican reforms, their hometown Mersin and the intercommunal relations between the communities of Muslims and Christians. As a coastal Mediterranean city which was found much later than other Turkish cities and came to the fore as a significant port city and a major trade center in the eastern Mediterranean region, Mersin stands at a different place than other cities in Turkey. Apart from serving as the port city of the Çukurova hinterland in the nineteenth century, it had also prospered by the non-Muslim tradespeople who had migrated to Mersin from several places. Even after the proclamation of Republic and the population exchange with Greece which induced a major decline in the non-Muslim population, Mersin has managed to preserve a portion of its Christian population of which descendants still compose a community in the city today. Aside from receiving high numbers of Kurdish migrants in the 1990s due to the armed conflict in the southeastern region of Turkey, it is once again going through a swift demographic change today with the Syrian immigrants who have started to arrive since the civil war broke out in Syria in 2011. Therefore, the stories that the Muslim and Christian interviewees told resonate with the social, ethnic and demographic change that Mersin has gone through since the late nineteenth century until the present day.

This study, more than anything, demonstrates the vital importance of personal narratives and feminist oral history method when it comes to analyzing the social and cultural everyday lives of women. Aside from the evident methodological contribution this study is going to make into the literature about Mersin and Mersin's women, it will also shed light on the women of a multi-

ethnic and multi-religious city, not to mention the fact that it will provide insight about the Christian community of Mersin as well. Further research in feminist oral history and narratives of women will assist to improve our understanding of the context in which women narrate their lives and, eventually, the significance of the crucial turning points where individual lives and historical moments converge. The recognition and appreciation of disparities among the narrated lives of women, as well as the accentuated similarities, serve to alleviate the complicated matters of women's experiences within the private and the public space.

Appendix A The Interviewees

	Religion	Age	Education	Marital Status	Meeting the	Marriage Age	Children	Profession	Duration of professional life
1	Muslim	80	University	Widowed	Indp.	23	2	Literature Teacher	Until Retirement
2	Muslim	74	University	Married	Indp.	22	3	Banking & Private Sector	8 Years
3	Muslim	73	Teacher Training School & Univ.	Widowed	Ar.	33	2	Teacher	Until Retirement
4	Muslim	70	University	Married	Indp.	28	1	Various Jobs and Tutoring	Until Retirement
5	Muslim	79	High School	Widowed	Indp.	22	2	-	Never Worked
6	Muslim	77	University	Widowed	Indp.	25	2	Geography Teacher	Until Retirement
7	Muslim	80	University	Widowed	Ar.	35	2	Math Teacher	Until Retirement
8	Catholic Christian	80	High School (abroad)	Divorcee	Indp.	25	1	Private Sector	Until Retirement
9	Catholic Christian	80	High School (abroad)	Widowed	Indp.	24	3	Private Sector	3 Years
10	Catholic Christian	84	Primary School	Married	Ar.	16	6	-	Never Worked
11	Catholic Christian	71	High School	Married	Ar.	19	2	Banking	Until Retirement
12	Orthodox Christian	72	High School (İstanbul)	Single				Banking	Until Retirement
13	Orthodox Christian	78	High School (abroad)	Widowed	Indp.	26	4	Private Sector	2 Years

Indp: Independently Ar: Arranged

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