

RE-INVENTION OF IDENTITY:  
THE CASE OF DERSIM COMMUNITY  
ASSOCIATION IN BERLIN

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **RE-INVENTION OF IDENTITY: THE CASE OF DERSIM COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION IN BERLIN**

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In fact Dersimi people have constructed a visible population in Europe, there needs to be more studies made about the diasporic existence of Dersimis in Europe. Being aware of this need, this study attempts to contribute to the understanding of the existence of Dersimi people through Europe. In line with this, this study focuses on the re-invention of Dersim identity in Berlin around a Dersimi association, Berlin Dersim Community. According to this, the intensive participant observation conducted around the Dersimi association is the main source for this study.

In the light of this ethnographic fieldwork, the following findings are found out in this study: Self identification on the basis of homeland identity is a significant phenomena for Dersimi people which unites Dersimi people around Berlin Dersim Community Association. And Dersimi people around the association can be defined as diaspora according to Robert Cohen's usage of the term. Being a

part of Turkish labour diaspora in Berlin, Dersimi people have transformed into a cultural diaspora with the passing years abroad.

Keywords: Dersim, diaspora, identity, community, boundary, ethnicity, transnationalism, Kızılbaş-Alevism, Kurdish, Zazaki, Kırmancki, memory, re-invention.

## ÖZ

### KİMLİĞİN YENİDEN KEŞFİ: BERLİN DERSİM CEMAATİ DERNEĞİ ÖRNEĞİ

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Dersimli göçmenler Avrupa'da hissedilir bir nüfus oluşturmalarına rağmen, Dersimlilerin Avrupa'daki varoluşları akademik yazında görece az çalışılan bir fenomendir. Bundan ötürü, bu konu üzerine daha çok çalışma yapılması gerektiği düşünülmektedir. Bu noktada, bu çalışma, Dersimlilerin Avrupa içerisindeki varoluşlarını anlama çabasına bir katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Buna göre, çalışma, Dersim kimliğinin Berlin' de bir Dersim Cemaatinin etrafında yeniden keşfedilmesine odaklanmaktadır. Bu kerte, Berlin'deki Dersim cemaati üzerine yapılan yoğun katılımlı gözlem bu çalışmanın esas kaynağını oluşturmaktadır.

Bu etnografik saha çalışmasının ışığında; çalışmadan aşağıdaki bulgulara ulaşılmıştır: Memleket üzerinden kendini tanımlama Dersimlileri Berlin Dersim Cemaati Derneği çevresinde birleştiren önemli bir durumdur. Berlin Dersim Cemaati Derneği çevresindeki Dersimliler Robert Cohen'in diaspora kavramına göre diaspora olarak tanımlanabilirler. Berlin'deki Türk emek diasporasının bir parçası olan Dersimli insanlar yurt dışında geçen süreyle birlikte kültürel bir diasporaya dönüşmüşlerdir.

*To my grandmother,  
who has not had chance to teach her mother tongue to her children...*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BDC</b>	Berlin Dersim Community
<b>Cemevi</b>	Berlin Anatolian Alevis Culture Center-Cemevi
<b>CHP</b>	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
<b>Dev-Sol</b>	Revolutionary Left. (Devrimci Sol)
<b>EDAF</b>	European Dersim Associations Federation
<b>OHAL</b>	The Emergency Rule. (Olağanüstü Hal)
<b>PKK</b>	The Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan)
<b>TKP/ML TİKKO</b>	Turkish Workers and Peasents Liberation Liberation Army (Türkiye Komünist Partisi/ Marksist Leninist Türk İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu)
<b>Töb-Der</b>	The Association of All Teachers Unity and Solidarity. (Tüm Öğretmenler Birleşme ve Dayanışma Derneği)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

According to the predictions of European Dersim Associations Federation<sup>1</sup>, there were almost 200.000 Dersimi immigrants living in Europe in 2007<sup>2</sup>. The expression of these approximate numbers reveals the fact that there has been a visible migration flow from Dersim (today's province of Tunceli in Turkey) to the different regions of Europe, when it is considered in relation to the population of Tunceli in the same year, measured by Turkish Statistical Institute as 84. 022<sup>3</sup>. In fact, this population movement from one of the small provinces of Turkey to the different regions of Europe has created a mass but a scattered Dersimi population in Europe, the mass existence of Dersimis in Europe has persisted to be relatively less studied phenomena in the literature.

Aware of this lack in the literature, this study is mostly based on a fieldwork conducted on a group of Dersimi people in Berlin, gathered around one of the Dersimi associations, Berlin Dersim Community. One of the reasons that I conducted the fieldwork around Berlin Dersim Community is that it is one of the firstly established Dersimi associations not only in Berlin but also in Europe. in relation to this, I thought that focusing on a historical Dersimi organization might provide me the opportunity to understand the scattered existence of Dersimi

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<sup>1</sup> European Dersim Associations Federations is an umbrella organization that unites Dersimi Associations in Europe. For detailed information about the organization, the web page of the organization can be visited: <http://www.fdg-dersim.com/>

<sup>2</sup> The claims of European Dersim Associations Federation about the population of Dersimi people are available at: [fdg-dersim.com/index.php?section=medial&act.../&file...](http://fdg-dersim.com/index.php?section=medial&act.../&file...) internet address.

<sup>3</sup>The population statistics of Tunceli in 2007 is available at the internet adres of: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab id=945>

people in the light of Berlin example in a fruitful way. Furthermore, since I recognized that there was a common sense around Turkish immigrants that Dersimi people were mostly gathering around Berlin Dersim Community, I found the association to be representative for a group of Dersimi people who were willing to construct a Dersimi population around a homeland association. Thus, I can clearly say that, my pre-observations about the community had shaped my decision to study on a group of Dersimi people around Berlin Dersim Community that I overviewed in chapter 3 in a more detailed way.

In addition to this, I was also in contact with some other Kurdish and Alevi organizations such as Berlin Anatolian Alevi Culture Center- Cemevi<sup>4</sup> (Cemhouse), Kurdish Center, Dersim Freedom Initiative and The Renovation of Dersim Association during my fieldwork, since there was a visible organic relation between those organizations and Berlin Dersim Community in general. Accordingly, my observations around those associations had also contributed to the making of this study.

This study aims to analyze the construction or re-invention of Dersim identity in Berlin from an anthropological and sociological point of view. In this respect, the relations of Dersimis with their homelands both mentally and physically are the main interests of this study. Besides this, the social organization of Berlin Dersim Community and its role on the maintenance of this cultural identity are described through the study. It is aimed to depict a vivid picture of the ethnic and cultural boundaries of Dersim identity in Berlin on the basis of the relations that are practiced around Dersim homeland association. While doing this, both the concept of boundary, having significance to understand ethnic relations, and the concept

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<sup>4</sup> Cem is one of the Alevi ceremonies that was practiced in houses (in a secret way) in the leadership of spritual Alevi leaders in company with music historically. Although, with the migration of Alevi people from rural Alevi regions to the urban areas of Turkey and Europe with the last decades, the rituals have started to be practised in Cemevis (Cemhouses) in the public space which have also began to be a meeting point for Alevi people not only for practising the ritual but also functioning like an organizing unit for Alevi people or movement. For a detailed information about Cemevis, see Yaman&Erdemir “*Alevism-Bektashism*” (2006), and Olsson, Özdalga, Raudvere’s edited book “*Alevi identity*”(1998).

of diaspora, being fruitful to grasp the transnational aspect of those relations are utilized in an analytical and instrumental way.

In this respect, exploring the boundaries of Dersim identity in diaspora nourished my research interests both personally and academically during my fieldwork. The permanent efforts of Dersimis to differ themselves from other immigrant communities was another important motivation for me to question the fact or spirit behind their will to preserve their cultural distinctiveness on the bases of their country of origin. In this context, while I was investigating to understand this situation, I found myself questioning about the interactions of different immigrant groups with each other by taking Dersimi community as a reference point during the fieldwork. According to this, this study also aims to shed light on the interactions of Dersimis with different immigrant groups on the basis of their ethnic and religious differences, which might also lead us to see the diversity of different immigrant groups coming from Turkey, and mostly considered to constitute a homogenous unity in the host society.

In this context, it was a significant experience for me to conduct my fieldwork in Berlin, since the city was providing a fruitful atmosphere in terms of diversity of different cultures in the everyday practices of life in general. There is no doubt that this relatively tolerant atmosphere was influencing the immigrants and their interactions with each other or the other groups. While they were mostly tending to preserve their cultural distinctiveness in relation to their religious, ethnic or political affiliations on the one hand, they were also improving a common “we” perception on the basis of being a part of the multicultural city, Berlin on the other.

Finding this tension to be meaningful in order to understand “the adaptation” process of the immigrants, I also focused on the relation between identity making process of Dersimis and its role in the way of “integration” to the host society. In this respect, I found that the people around Berlin Dersim Community were very

eager to integrate, and they were utilizing their cultural identity or background in order to materialize their will to “adapt” in the host society conditions. At this moment, it is clear that the knowledge that is produced with this case study is highly relevant with the conditions existing in Berlin, and do not have capacity to be generalized to the other Dersim communities living in the other parts of Europe. Accordingly, this study aims to be contented with drawing attention to the Berlin case, and shows the necessity to conduct some other studies in order to understand the different integration processes of different immigrant groups in the country of settlement conditions in general.

The methods used in this study were ethnographic research methods as outlined by Fetterman (1998). During the fieldwork, I was always in search of understanding my informants’ view points about the issues that are questioned in this study. Intensive participant observation and semi- structured interviews were used in order to achieve this goal. The fieldwork was mostly carried around Berlin Dersim Community which was thought to be a representative organization for Dersimi people and the observations were done between November 2008 and September 2009 involving almost ten months participant observation within the associations or groups that is outlined above.

In this context, next to visiting some other Kurdish and Alevi associations in Berlin, I also paid a visit to the one of the meetings of Renovation of Dersim Association in Russelsheim due to the fact that the administrators of this association were one of the important sides of the debates relevant with this study. In this respect, as much as the data of this study gathered around Berlin Dersim Community, the observations or interviews carried out in the other associations have also contributed to the shaping of this study. In this context, I can clearly say that, sometimes a small gossip behind the back of Berlin Dersim Community was playing a crucial role for me to understand the tensions that I was not capable to catch during my participation to the Berlin Dersim Community circle.

During the fieldwork, the intensive participation was the main tool of gathering knowledge. In addition to this, I also carried out 20 semi structured interviews in the last months of the fieldwork with Dersimi people whom I thought to give diverse answers rather than repeating the common sense around the association. In this context, while I was choosing my interviewees, I mostly tried to make interview with Dersimi people from different families around Berlin Dersim Community.

In addition to this, I paid attention to the situation that whether the people were voluntary to help me for this study or not in general. According to this, I mostly preferred to make interviews with the people who were willing to contribute to the making of this study. The interviewees were mostly middle aged; and while the 7 of the respondents were women, the rest of the respondents were men due to the fact that it was relatively difficult to arrange meeting women participants. The language of the fieldwork was Turkish except for one English interview made with a German member of the association. In addition to this, the respondents were sometimes using *Zazaki* terms during the interviews in order to shed light on some special points which were not possible to express in Turkish. I have mentioned this language shift in the following pages when it became critical for the content of this study. Also, the short profiles of the interviewees are available at the end of this study, in the appendix part.

In brief, the plan of this study is as follows: In chapter 2, the key concepts and the theoretical framework of the study will be explored. The methodology of the research and my relation with the fieldwork will be presented to the reader in a reflexive way in the following chapter. In chapter 4 the local Dersim identity will be overviewed and how Dersimi people relate themselves with their homeland identity will be explained. Berlin Dersim Community will be described in the following chapter. Chapter 6 will concentrate on the debates turning around the boundaries of Dersim identity, and try to explore its influence on making of

Dersim diaspora in Berlin. In the last chapter a summary of the conclusions and some future predictions about Dersim diaspora will be presented to the reader.

There are also some other points that need to be mentioned in order to tell the reader what this study does not offer. First of all, this study does not aim to describe Dersim culture, past or politics which are highly debated issues in the agenda of current politics both in national and transnational level. In fact those topics were also highly debated issues for Dersimis in Berlin. It is preferred to give a general opinion about these topics in the fourth chapter rather than immersing into the deeper debates. In this respect, the scope of this study does not offer to shed light on these debates.

Second, since the fieldwork of this study is mostly carried out on a group of middle aged or old Dersimis, this study is far away from reflecting the identity making patterns of young Dersimis, which might be another research topic. Thus, my predictions about the future of Dersim diaspora in the last chapter are mostly limited with the impressions that I got from my observations on Berlin Dersim Community circle.

It is also necessary to give a brief knowledge about some of the terms I use in this study in order to prevent some possible misunderstandings. As I mentioned above Dersim is the old Zazaki name of today's Tunceli. In fact the usage of the name of Dersim was banned since 1935 by the state authority, it was an almost a forgotten name for a long time in the public space in Turkey. In a similar vein, since the people of the region were subjected to a massive suppression in relation to their political, ethnic and belief identities, it was not even possible for them to mention their country of origin with the official usage (Tunceli) as well. According to this, the country of origin was a stigma for them which they were not easily expressing in the public space in Turkey since recent years. However, the picture was different abroad. They were very proud of their homeland identity and not hesitating to reveal it freely. Thus, being aware of this fact, I mostly prefer to use

Dersim rather than Tunceli, which was reflecting the common self perception or awareness of the diaspora people.

In a similar way, I do preserve a similar attitude while reflecting their self-ethnic perceptions through the text. Since they were mostly calling themselves to be Zazas of Dersim, I prefer to reflect it as it was and keep my personal opinions behind. In this way, I want to show their efforts for differentiation from other ethnic groups (especially Kurds) in diaspora which might be thought in terms of revival of a specific cultural identity, being one of the main arguments of this study. Thus, as much as these efforts of Dersimis in a transnational context are understood, this study will achieve its goal academically

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

#### **RETHINKING DEFINITIONS AND KEY CONCEPTS**

##### **2.1 IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND BOUNDARY**

As it is told in the previous chapter, this study is mostly shaped around the idea of understanding the construction of Dersim identity in Berlin. Since Dersimi people represent an eager profile to gain voice on the bases of their local identity, there is a need to shed light on the concept of identity in order to comprehend this tendency in a better way. The concept has become one of the popular concepts in the social sciences with the proliferation of identity concerns in the recent years; however Stuart Hall's usage of the term is the main reference point for this study.

Following the footsteps of Foucault, Hall formulated the term by examining the relation between the subjects and the discursive practices in which the question of identity repeats itself. In this context, for him, the concept of identity can be understood in a better way by exploring the term identification which refers to be a process of constructing difference from other person/people or group(s).

In common sense of language, identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the 'naturalism' of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed- always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. (Hall, in Hall and Gay 1996, 2-3)

In this context, since Dersimi people in Berlin were mostly in search of constructing their own group identity, I found it necessary to use the concept of identification in order to reflect this situation through the study. According to me, the ongoing debates about Dersim identity and undecidable characteristics of it can be thought in relation to the identification term.

Furthermore, grounding his concept of identity on the basis of identification, Hall formulates identities to be “a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption”. (Hall, in Hall and Gay 1996, 3). Due to this, identification constructs the subjection of the people with so many maneuvers, such as invoking an origin in a historical past, narrativization of the self, and the invention of tradition in a fantasmatic way within the limits of identities.

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of identical, naturally constituted unity- an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). (Hall, in Hall and Gay 1996, 4)

From this point of view, identity can be thought as an act of constituting power which produces subject positions or subjectivities for the people on the basis of “difference idea”. At this moment, the usage of the term has mostly referred to the will of Dersimis to differentiate themselves from other groups and reveal their efforts to present themselves as a distinctive one in the public space in which they can also potentially enjoy the advantage of it both in a social and political context in the host society conditions.

At this stage, the materialization of a visible Dersim community in Berlin is mostly considered in relation to the identity making process of Dersimis in this study. According to this, rather than utilizing the community concept in its classical meaning which covers the concept with macro- social forces such as class, rationalization or universalism, I preferred to use it with its relation to the

identity concept which refers to the construction of a group on the basis of common symbols, norms or values.

The work of Cohen, "*The Symbolic Construction of Community*" (1985) is a fruitful source which analyzes the concept of community in this context. For Cohen, "{community} is a largely mental construct, whose 'objective' manifestations in locality or ethnicity give it credibility." (Cohen 2000, 108). The people's attachment to a community is mostly shaped around the meaning(s) which they attach to the community, leading them to distinct themselves from other communities or groups. Thus, the boundaries of a community highly depends on this symbolic construction process which might be called as a "fantasmatic" operation in terms of Halls' conceptualization of identity.

In this respect, Barth's theory is utilized throughout the study in order to show the scope of this operation in a more clear way. Barth (1969) conceptualizes the social construction of a boundary as a social process, and characterizes it to be subject bound and situational on the basis of negotiations experienced within the social relations with other groups. In this way, he draws a dynamic picture of social difference which is shaped around the social interactions of different groups rather than considering it to be a continuity of possession of cultural characteristics as it was a dominant approach in social science literature until Barth.

"The critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes ethnic boundary that defines the group not the cultural stuff that it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts." (Barth 1969, 15)

From this point of view, Barth asserts that "the difference is created, developed and maintained only through interactions with others. (i.e., Frenchness is created and becomes culturally politically meaningful only through the encounter with Englishness, Germaness, Danishness, etc.)" (Malesevic 2004, 3). And according to this, the existence of other groups provides the appropriate conditions for a community or identity to emerge and continue its presence.

I also benefited from the family metaphor, since Dersimis were giving importance to their cultural origins as much as their interactions with other groups. In this respect, reflecting the “internal source of identification”, I utilized the family term the way Roosens has instrumentalized before (Roosens 1994, in Vermeulen and Govers) in which he considers family or origins to be primordial element in the making of migrant ethnicity. Considering Barth’s theory as a baseline to develop his ideas, Roosens asserts that using family metaphor can catch some points which boundary concept lacks to shed light on in general.

Of course I fully realize that wherever distance between human beings are created, maintained or organized, the boundary can be used as a heuristic device. I simply state that in a number of situations which develop from migration, the family metaphor referring to the origin may be a useful complementary tool to capture specific phenomena, which are difficult or impossible to catch with the boundary metaphor. (Roosens 1994, in Vermeulen and Govers, 86)

From this point of view, Roosens mentions that “the reference to origin is, without being an indispensable trait, the primary source of ethnicity which makes a socio-cultural boundary into an ethnic boundary.”(Roosens 1994, in Vermeulen and Govers, 83). And he claims that “the construction of a boundary does not constitute identity, nor its ethnic nature *ipso facto*: it can only express, add to, play down, etcetera an ethnic identity which is already there, flowing from another source” (Roosens 1994, in Vermeulen and Govers, 83-84). Thus, ethnicity becomes one of the key concepts for this study which I will make an overview of in the following pages.

## **2.2. ETHNICITY, DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONALISM**

The academic usage of the term of ethnicity is a relatively new phenomena which has been employed since 1960s and 1970s with a wider interest in sociology and anthropology. Despite the fact that the usage of the concept is new, the term was mostly conceived in relation to some classical concepts such as race, nation, and culture in the first decades of its usage. In this respect, it was Fredrik Barth (1969) who distanced the term from its old fashioned implications and related it with the

concept of “cultural difference” which has been mentioned above. It was the first time ethnic boundaries were explained “as a product of social action” (Malesevic 2004, 2) rather than being a stable property in the social sciences literature.

According to this, Barth evaluated ethnicity to be “a collective asset of a particular group; it is a social relation in which social actors perceive themselves and are perceived by others as being culturally distinct collectivities” (Malesevic 2004, 4). In this way he defined ethnic groups to be “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves” (Barth 1969, 10) whose maintenance or boundaries should be the object of study. In this context, I mostly utilized the term to refer to a distinctive Dersim collectivity in Berlin in search of constructing and maintaining its own boundaries on the basis of country of origin. In addition to this, it should be kept in mind that since the term still preserves its “racial” connotations in the minds of the people; I sometimes used the term in order to reflect the perceptions of the people mostly presented to me in relation to their ancestral roots. In this way, as much as Barthian way of the usage is preserved on the one hand, its connotations on the basis of rooting from the same country of origin is also highlighted during the study on the other.

In this context, Dersim community is mostly thought to construct a family view inspiring from Wittgenstein’s “principle of family resemblances” and Roosens’ contribution to Barth’s boundary theory according to family metaphor during this study. As Mishra points out clearly, Derrida (1992) offers us a critical understanding of Wittgenstein’s family resemblances as “where the members of a family possess no common features and yet share a face; consequently the face, belonging simultaneously to all and none, exists outside the order of relationality and representation” (Mishra 2006, 10).

From this point of view, metaphorically speaking, Dersim community in Berlin is considered to belong common Dersimi origins and sharing a common “face” with the other Dersimi people both living in homeland and some other different

geographies by preserving their own “feature” in their own particular living conditions. According to this, I instrumentalized the family metaphor or concept to explain the social formation of a particular Dersimi group in Berlin which is also representative for other Dersimi groups by sharing the same “face” with them metaphorically. From this point of view, Dersim community in Berlin is mostly considered to be an ethnic or minority group in search of preserving its own boundaries in the host society conditions sharing some characteristics with some other scattered Dersimi groups abroad by preserving its own characteristics sourcing from living in Berlin.

At this moment, since the making or maintenance of a specific Dersim culture was occurring at a transnational scale and than not only including one dimensional identity construction process that might be only explained in terms of ethnicity, I found it appropriate to use diaspora concept in order to shed light on those ethnic relations, occurring in a transnational scale. In here, it should be kept in mind that transnational character of the relations refers to the subject positions of individuals or associations rather than states or nations because of the fact that ethnic identifications or positioning of Dersimi people were mostly leading them to practice relations which were crossing the national borders. From this point of view, the definition of Glick- Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1994) can be followed in order to understand what transnationalism refers in a clear way.

“We define “transnationalism” as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders.” (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 2003, 7)

In this respect, I followed the path Tölölyan drew before and considered diasporas to be “exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (Tölölyan 1991, in Wahlbeck 1999, 2). In relation to this, I paid a visible attention to explore the transnational existence of Dersimi people in the light of diaspora concept.

Deriving from the concept of dispersion, diaspora refers to the scattered nature of the people mostly from an original homeland to (a) different geography (ies) in general. In its traditional usage, the term is mostly used to describe the dispersal of some historical communities such as Jews, Greeks, Parsis and Armenians. In addition to this, the increasing migration movements in the last decades has also extended the usage of the term referring to almost any kind of community living on another piece of land far away from their original homeland. In this context, the idea of “home” and “displacement” from it has become the main connotations of the term.

In short, the label has been stretched to cover almost any ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed physically from its original homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to the dispersion, and regardless of whether, and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the community and the home country. (Safran in Kokot, Tölölyan and Alfonso 2004, 9)

In this respect, although the term preserves its potential to shed light on the maintenance of a specific culture or identity in a transnational context; the overextended usage of the term might also lead us to evaluate almost every transnational group or community in terms of diaspora such as tourists, academics, sojourners and etc. Thus, in order not to fall into the pitfalls of using the term that might explain everything and nothing, defining the limits of the term seems to be a necessity.

There is no doubt that the works of Gabriel Sheffer (1986), Walker Connor (1986), William Safran (1991), Robin Cohen (1997) are influential studies in the shaping of the concept of diaspora. With their works, each of them has contributed to the structural definition of the term by focusing on different aspects of the term. For example, while Sheffer conceptualizes modern diasporas to be “ethnic minority groups of migrant of origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining sentimental and material links with their countries of origin-their homelands” (Sheffer 1986, 3 in Mishra 2006, 26), likely Connor focuses on “homeland identification or what he terms ‘homeland psychology’”(Connor 1986,

3, in Mishra 2006, 32) and defines diasporas to be a “segment of people living outside the homeland” (Connor 1986 3, in Mishra 2006, 32). Following them, Safran has contributed to the enrichment of the concept by improving six taxonomical principles to define diaspora concept in a categorical way. Thus, according to Safran diasporas are:

Expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral,” or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, history and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not- and perhaps cannot be- fully accepted by their host society and therefore partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return- when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran, 1991: 83-4)

Accordingly, as Mishra points out clearly “Unlike Connor who argues for the pivotal role of homelands and homeland dwellers in projecting diasporas as dwellers in hostlands, Safran gives prominence to diasporic entities and proceeds to enumerate a host of *features* that sets them apart from other formations” (Mishra 2006, 37). From this point of view, “the ethno-communal consciousness” (Safran, 1991) seems to be a significant moment for Safran shaping his definition which he improves on the basis of considering Jews to be an ideal type.

Cohen also analyzes diasporas by exploring the concept in a categorical way. And like Connor, Sheffer and Safran, he considers diasporas in relation to the homeland- hostland dichotomy by adding some new dimensions on the former identifications. For instance, he criticizes Safran’s usage of the term in relation to specific Jewish example being not able to be capable of reflecting changing diaspora formations at all that has become to be effected from “asynchronous, transversal flows that involve visiting, studying, seasonal work, tourism, sojourning, rather than whole-family migration, permanent settlement and the adoption of exclusive citizenships” (Cohen 1997, 127-128). In this sense, he

avoids to reduce the understanding of diasporas on the basis of single ethno-national categories. According to this, he prefers to conceptualize the term in relation to some thematic terms such as being victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural in order to show the diversity of diaspora communities throughout time. In this way, according to me, Cohen provides a flexible understanding of the term rather than compressing it to the single ethnic relations area as he stresses in his precious work "*Global Diasporas: An introduction*":

It is important to emphasize at the outset that I am not suggesting a perfect match between a particular ethnic group and a specific type of diaspora. Quite contrary. I am fully aware that Jews were not only a victim diaspora, but also one that was periodically successful in trade and commerce and one also that now evinces a high level degree of cosmopolitanism appropriate to our global age. Likewise, the Chinese were indentured labourers (therefore a labour diaspora) as well as a successful trading diaspora. In the case of the Indians, exactly the reverse holds. While they are regarded as archetypes of a labour diaspora, they also have an important mercantile history." (Cohen 1997, x-xi)

In this context, since Cohen's usage of the term reflects the diverse experiences of diaspora communities, I prefer to use it as an analytical tool in the way of understanding Dersim case in Berlin. Coming to Germany as a labour diaspora like other Turkish immigrants, with the following years they have started to construct a cultural diaspora by differing themselves from other Turkish groups. Furthermore, while re-inventing their cultural identity in the host society conditions, they have also discovered their parents' traumatic expulsion from their hometown to the Western regions of Turkey years ago, in 1938, which made them to feel contextually like a victim diaspora. Thus, according to Cohen's theory, it will not be an exaggeration to think of Dersim diaspora as a labour, cultural, and victim diaspora at the same time in different contexts.

In this respect, Cohen points out that "dispersal from an original centre is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together." (Cohen 1997, 23). From this point of view, the construction of a Dersim diaspora in Berlin is mostly thought to be a product of remembering a common past and re-

invention of the distinctive cultural identity in the host society conditions. Due to this, the creation of Dersim diaspora in Berlin is evaluated to be “an ex post facto construction” if it is a necessity to call it with Cohen’s term.

At this point, there needs to be a short overview made about Cohen’s diaspora definition in order to shed light on in which sense the concept utilized during the study. For Cohen, diasporas shows several of those characteristics that is outlined above:

(1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members of other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries (Cohen 1997, 180)

In this respect, this study also aims to explore whether Dersimi people in Berlin fulfill the conditions of being diaspora in terms of Cohen’s diaspora definition or not. From this point of view, I utilize the term to discover the transnational relations of Dersimi people in Berlin from an analytical point of view.

At this moment, during this study, I attempted to examine the hypothesis that Dersim diaspora in Berlin construct a diaspora or not in terms of Cohen’s usage of the term. And in the light of the fieldwork constructed in Berlin, it is concluded that Dersimi people in Berlin construct a diasporic entity despite the fact that they do not well fit the ninth criteria of Cohen’s usage. In this sense, for me, while it is appropriate Dersimi people as a diaspora in Berlin, lack of a “troubled” relation with the host country should be kept in mind when the peaceful relations of Dersimis within the host society is thought. From this point of view, whereas it is a weakening point for Dersimis to call them as diaspora, on the other hand, it can be also interpreted in relation to their potential to enrich social life in the host society.

To sum up, I mostly considered Dersimi people in Berlin to be a “labour diaspora” which has transformed into “a cultural diaspora” by getting aware of their distinctive cultural identity throughout the 30-40 years in Berlin. They have started to construct their own “imagined homeland”, instrumentalize it to create a distinctive group and an effective diaspora in Berlin strategically on the basis of coming from the same country of origin. Thus, this study presents an attempt to use the notion of diaspora to shed light on these newly emerging identification processes and aims to explain the reader this experience of Dersimis in a fruitful way.

## CHAPTER 3

### (UN)LEARNING FROM THE FIELD: MAKING ETHNOGRAPHY 'AT HOME' 'ABROAD'

“The anthropologist is not the same at the end of his research as at the beginning: there is often a deeply personal learning experience in which one learns about oneself” (Gullick 1977: 90, Du Bois 1960 in Crick 1982)

Assuming the ethnography as “the art and science of describing a group or culture”(Fetterman 1998, 1), making good ethnography is mostly related with how the ethnographer achieved to be in touch with the group(s), ethnographer has been ‘studying on’ or ‘learning from’. Therefore, ‘participating’ or ‘immersing’ into the lives of the people is one of the most critical moments of producing anthropological knowledge. As Judith Okely points out the importance of participation, “She {Okely} insists that quintessence of what makes ethnographic fieldwork anthropological continues to be a commitment to a process of utter social immersion”(Amit 2002, 5)

In this respect, ‘the social immersion’ of the ethnographer has a vital importance, including so many personal and professional inner tensions on the basis of the interaction of the ethnographer with the group s/ he is focusing on. According to this, the unique and mostly solitary experience(s) of the ethnographer with the group on the basis of ‘lived experiences’ can be thought as one of the important characteristics of doing anthropology. In relation to this, making ethnography can be conceptualized as “both a product and a process, our lives as ethnographers are embedded within the experience in such a way that all of our interactions involve choices.” (Tedlock 1991, 72). In this context, ‘lived experience(s)’ of the

ethnographer during the fieldwork is/ are worth stressing in order to see the knowledge production process of the ethnographer in a more vivid and exciting way.

Moreover, by evaluating the fieldwork experience(s), ethnographer gets an opportunity to make self reflections about how s/ he constructed his/ her own identity during the fieldwork process. As Amanda Coffey demonstrated before “ethnographic fieldwork cannot be accomplished without attention to the roles of the researcher” (Coffey 1999, 23). From this point of view, the autobiography of the ethnographer in relation to the field and its role in the making of fieldwork are important elements of understanding the odyssey of the ethnographer during the fieldwork.

At this level, how the ethnographer participates in the social relations for an extended period of time, in which conditions the fieldworker make his/ her observations about the group, what kind of interactions with the people shape the field, how the fieldworker constructs his/ her own identity during the field, and how s/he locates him/ herself into the group, and similar questions might be raised to shed light on to the research process, or to learn about how the fieldwork is experienced by the ethnographer. In this respect, in order to give satisfying answers to these questions, using binary opposition of ‘home’ and ‘away’ is one of the anthropological strategies to focus on to the dual belongings of ethnographer to his/ her personal and professional autobiography.

Home is the life from which we venture forth and ply our trade, the interpretation of that which is not home- the field- a domain of work which in practice we distinguish from the rest of life by means of various devices. Home and field invoke the duality of belonging and alienation, familiarity and investigation, which implicitly function as fieldwork strategies. (Knowles in Amit 2002, 54)

From this point of view, “the separation between here and there/ home and field is a spatialized symbolism in which place becomes a way of distinguishing work from non- work, us from them and social investigation from life itself” (Knowles in Amit 2002, 55). Accordingly, in order to evaluate the role of the ethnographer

during the fieldwork, the binary opposition between home and field can be used strategically to create a kind of ‘scientific distance’ for the ethnographer in the ethnographic writing process. In this way, the ethnographer can also separate him/herself from the personal or emotional embeddedness of the ethnographic research task, and also s/ he can review the fieldwork experience to understand the contribution, it provides for the ethnographer’s personal and professional growth.

In this respect, focusing on to the voluntary move out of the ethnographer from his/ her ordinary way of life, and his/ her adaptation into another possible form of life is an important element to understand the intersubjectivity of the fieldworker about his/ her study. In this sense, the access story of the fieldworker into the field is worth stressing to understand how or in which conditions s/ he ‘worked’ or ‘participated’ into the group’s reality. In this way, how s/he depicted the picture of the reality of the group and present knowledge about the group, s/ he studied on, can be understood in a more vivid and clear way.

From this point of view, having made an ethnographic study about a group of Dersimi people around Dersim Community in Berlin between 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 and 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2009, I find it a necessity to describe my immersion or access process into the social environment of a group of Dersimi people. In this way, how I constructed my field and completed it in relation to my autobiography can be better understood.

Born in 1983, in Elazığ, one of the neighboring cities to Dersim, I grew up and lived in a Dersimi family, and then moved to Ankara for my university education, when I was eighteen years old. Living in Fevzi Çakmak Neighborhood in Elazığ, where Dersimi and Alevi people are mostly populated, I can say that, I was familiar with Dersimi people and Dersimi way of life in this neighborhood. In this sense, face to face, close and warm relations in my neighborhood with Dersimi people are the source of my ‘familiarity’ with Dersimi people until my early adolescence years.

Furthermore, as for much more than warm neighborhood relations, as a family we were also in close contact with our family members living in Dersim such as my father's or my mother's relatives. Being mostly peasants and coming from the rural areas of Dersim, they were visiting us as guests and providing their own needs from the city, Elazığ, and going back to their villages after these chores. In return, we were also paying visits to them in their villages, and tasting rural way of life in the villages mostly in the summer times, in my early childhood. To summarize, as a family we were also in a close and reciprocal relation with our large family members living in the villages of Dersim.

However, in the early 1990s, "the environment of insecurity" (Sirkeci 2006) situation in Dersim cut our lively relations with our relatives. Due to the civil war in the region between Turkish Army and Leftist and Kurdish organizations, not only my relatives but also thousands of Dersimi people were forced to migrate from their villages. Furthermore, the nature or forests of Dersim was destroyed and the villages were emptied by security forces using the excuse of "civil war" in the region. In those years, mass migration of the people from Dersim to our neighborhood was also making me the witness of Dersimi people's forced migration from an outsider perspective like other people living in the same neighborhood with me. As time passed, those newly arrived people have also adapted to life in our neighborhood and become inhabitants of everyday life in our life.

Afterwards, I moved to Ankara for my university education, and since then my relations with my hometown has been weakened and limited with my visits in semester breaks or holidays. On the other hand, with the decreasing conflict in the region, the emergency rule (Olağanüstü Hal, OHAL) was abolished in 2002 in Dersim, and entrance into the city has become easier comparing to 1990s. In this sense, I began to make family visits in the holiday times much more often, and I am still in relation with Dersimi people in my hometown because of my family and friendship relations.

In case, I was so familiar with Dersimi people in Turkey, it was not in my mind to make a study about Dersimi people in a transnational context. Before coming to Berlin as an Erasmus student, I designed to make a study about the perceptions of Kurdish refugees on Kurdish question in Turkey. Since I began to visit some Kurdish Associations and get in touch with some immigrants coming from Turkey, I began to recognize the mass presence of Dersimi people in Berlin. Furthermore, some of the people were also suggesting me to visit Dersim Community<sup>5</sup> for help about my study in general.

Following their advice, I visited Dersim Community when there was a commemoration and panel discussion about 1937/ 38 massacres as an ordinary listener. The mass crowd of the audience and the issue discussed in the association was so amazing for me that I was bewildered. It was a panel about the massacre of Dersimi people in 1938, which I had never come across as a topic to be talked about or discussed in public sphere in Turkey before. In this way, it started to become more interesting for to me to change the design of my study and focus on a group of Dersimi people at a transnational level.

Furthermore, after a while, one of the colleagues of mine studying transnational Alevi movement, sharing and telling his academic observations about the importance of Dersimi existence in Berlin influenced me to make a decision on studying Dersim Community in Berlin. At this point, my pre- observations with different people in Berlin led me to focus on Dersimi people in a transnational context, about which there were not so many academic studies.

In this context, on the other hand, I was a bit hesitant to make a study about Dersimi people whom I was assuming to ‘know’ since my early childhood years.

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<sup>5</sup> I prefer to use capital “c” to refer the association and the people around the association while writing Dersim Community. To refer community’s own meaning, I prefer to use miniscule ‘c’.

Anthropologically speaking, my familiarity with Dersimi people was preventing me to render the group exotic at the very beginnings of my study. However, the more I was became in touch with Dersimi people, the more they were falsifying my pre- assumptions in several respects.

First of all, they were showing different characteristics from Dersimi people in Turkey, whom I became familiar with through my relations. In this respect, the more differences they were showing, the more I was getting to feel that I did not know them at all, and it was motivating me to investigate about them. Second, the access into the field was not that easy, and I was starting to experience the difficulties of making ethnography on the basis of tensions in relation to my participation into the group efforts. Thus, the fieldwork itself was contributing to my personal and professional growth while I was doing it.

### **3.1. GETTING AROUND DERSIM COMMUNITY**

Deciding to study about ‘my own’ community abroad, I was in search of an easy access into my field. With this assumption, I was trying to use my Dersim identity to construct new relations with the people coming from the same country with me. However, it was not so easy to get close to them at the very beginning of my field, and it took a few months to be in a close relationship with Dersimi people or get their sincerity in general.

First of all, the inner tensions between people were creating an unfriendly atmosphere in the very first months of my participation into the Dersim Community. There were many unending and aggressive debates dominating the general assemblies. In this sense, not knowing much about me, people were acting in an obsessive way as if I might be a potential enemy towards them in the future. Thus, I was feeling desperate about how to act, and I was suffering from not being able to decide on how to position myself according to discussions. Furthermore, the subjects of the discussions were asking me to be in the right side after the discussions. At this point, in order to construct good relations with the people, I

was acting reluctant when the discussions were arising. As a result, I preferred to make passive observation in order not to have trouble with the people in general.

Second, the negative attitudes of the administrators, also early founders of the association, were delaying my access into the field. At this point, being the permanent and stable faces of Dersim Community, they were not showing hospitality to me, as well as to other Dersimi people they did not know or trust in general. And they were mostly accused of positioning themselves as the host of Dersim Community, but not welcoming the people willing to participate the events, organized by the association.

One of the critical members of the association was telling the reason of problem by making a comparison, saying that “the founder group of the association was seeing the association like their child”. According to this, they were afraid of losing their child, if people started to get interested in with their child”. Not only this man, but also many other Dersimi people I met were accusing the founder group for not being willing to encourage other people to join the association, in order to maintain their own control over the group. Thus, much more than perceiving me as a new comer from homeland, and welcoming me friendly, they were acting as if I were a stranger that they did not want to accept easily. From this point of view, I was suffering from the suspicious attitudes of the people towards me, and it was making me to feel unsecure in the early days of my fieldwork, and delay my access into the group to a later time.

At this point, my Dersim identity was not a sufficient criterion for the people to accept me at all, and they were willing to know more about me in order to trust and let me to join their group. First of all, they were very old or middle aged people, and it was unfamiliar for them to see young people around the association in general. In this sense, by participating in the world of these old and middle aged people, I was feeling that I was disturbing them in a way, and it was creating a kind of tension between me and them in general.

Furthermore, there were other doubts about me creating an untrusting atmosphere in the beginning. It was strange for them to see a student, coming from Turkey with scholarship and living abroad alone without any family members around. In this sense, I was hearing so many gossips on me that they were asking about , whether I had a family around Germany or Europe or not. In this way, they were also in search of knowing more about me and story of my immigration into their own social environment. Thus, by being concerned about me and my family, they were showing their doubts about me.

Eventually, they were also not so familiar with being the subject of a qualitative research. In this sense, rather than my participation to their group, they were expecting me to make a survey, or construct a “question- answer” relation with them. Thus, it took time for me to tell them the motivation behind the participation idea. Due to this, until they got used to my participation in their group, they continued to question my presence in their lives.

At this level, in order to earn their trust, I began to hang around at the association more often. In this way, I was trying to create a kind of “familiarity” between me and the people around the community. Since the association was mostly empty on weekdays, I was visiting there at weekends. During my visits, I was telling about myself in order to earn their trust, and create a common base for our relation. While doing this, rather than dealing with their inner problems, I preferred to talk about the topics they wanted to talk and making kahve muhabbeti (coffee chat) with them about everything from politics to sport, as much as I could in order to become closer.

In this way, without pushing them away with my penetration into their lives in a masculine way with my researcher identity, I was trying to “join” their community like a new comer from homeland. Because of the fact that my hometown identity did not open the doors at all at the very beginning of my field,

I was trying to create a close and sympatic relationship by taking on ‘a new comer role’ who was in search of socialization with people around.

At this point, except some suspicion or negative implications like being “a spy” of Turkish government, ‘newly coming from Turkey’<sup>6</sup> was a positive phenomenon, for which people were also trying to get in touch with me. According to this, perceiving me as ‘modern’ and ‘successful’ person coming from Turkey, some young immigrants were trying to construct relations with me and my friends, coming from university circles. In this social atmosphere, as far as I was constructing new relationships in Turkish- German environment, I was also having chance to position myself like a normal student coming from Turkey and hanging around Kreuzberg or other districts of Berlin.

### **3.2. BEING IN DIALOGUE WITH THE SELF AND/ OR THE FIELD**

As much as I was normalizing my existence in Berlin and becoming familiar with more people throughout time, I began to adapt myself to a new kind of social environment dominated by immigrants of Dersim origin in Berlin easier. In this way, I was passing from “passive adaptive phase” of my field to the “active research phase” (Freilich 1977a, 18, in Crick 1982, 24) in which, I was feeling that I was entering into the world of Dersimi people in a deeper sense. At this point, becoming part of the field was creating some kind of inner tension for me, which was the characteristic of the latter phase.

In this phase, visiting the association, and showing my face in the Turkish-German environment more often, I was becoming familiar with more people than before. According to this, people were also trying to learn more about my personal details and they began to question me and my Dersim identity in a deeper

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<sup>6</sup> Newly coming from Turkey’ was not only important phenomena for the people around Dersim Community circle, but also it was so significant almost in all my interactions with the immigrants coming from Turkey. Referring to the homeland, Turkey, it was creating a kind of sympathy about me, and people were acting in a kind and friendly way in the everyday life in Berlin.

way. By asking about my family tree, tribal belongings etc, which I was not used to answer in my everyday relations in general, they were willing to know more about me. In this sense, the more I was meeting new people or I was becoming familiar with people, the more question marks were arising about me. With the questions, I was identifying myself again and again, and it was becoming exhausting for me to tell about myself throughout time.

Furthermore, some of the questions of Dersimi people were so profound that I was not capable of giving satisfying answers to them, and it was leading me to question my family's ethnic and religious identities in general. For example, the time I was invited to dinner in a friend's house, I met with a middle aged Dersimi woman by coincidence. Learning that I was from the same hometown with hers, she got curious about me and began to ask my hometown and my hometown connections. After having some kind of knowledge about whom I was and what I was doing in Berlin, she began to ask about my grandparents' tribes and attempted to make a kind of categorization about me in relation to my tribal roots. At that moment, I felt a bit uncomfortable, and told her that it was first time a person was trying to talk about my tribal roots in order to identify me. Moreover, I began to tell her that I did not find it necessary to give so much importance to my tribe in my self identification, and it sounded so archaic to me to hear those kinds of questions at first sight. Afterwards, I began to ask her about the importance of tribal relations in her personal relations in a humorous way, and the talk went on.

Thinking about the event afterwards, it was amazing for me to be questioned about my tribal root, and I also began to question myself about my knowledge about my ancestors or tribal roots. At this scale, I recognized my lack of knowledge about my family tree, and began to call my parents and grandmother to ask about our tribal roots. As a consequence, not being familiar with those kinds of questions or priorities in my everyday life practices, during the field, with my interaction(s) with the people, I was beginning to see my lack of knowledge about my ethnic roots.

At this point, people were very willing to investigate my knowledge about my ethnic or religious roots. One other time, it was another man questioning me about whether I knew some of the belief leaders living in hometown or my knowledge about important leftist leaders who were known to be Dersimi. In this context, the attitudes of people on the basis of investigation about me were irritating me a bit, but on the other hand, it was also motivating me to learn more about Dersim and Dersim culture in general. Furthermore, the perception of the people about me as “a Dersimi student investigating about his own culture” was also leading me to fulfill my lack of knowledge about my own culture. According to this, level of involvement in the community was directing me to change my own perception about my own ethnic identity. As the time passed during the field, I was trying to learn about my own ethnicity or ancestors by asking my own family.

Moreover, the same perception of the people was also creating a friendly atmosphere in the field, in which people were becoming much more open to talk and share with me. At this point, in relation to time and energy I spent with the people around Dersim Community, the situation of context began to create a kind of peaceful environment for our relations. In the influence of this situation, I began to construct my field on the basis of “learning idea” that my study subjects were also fine with to hearing.

However, although it was a learning process, at some point it was also turning to be an unlearning process for me personally deeper inside. In a comparison with me, the high consciousness of the people about Dersim and Dersim identity also led me to unlearn some of my old habits that I got from my early socialization with Dersimi people around my own neighborhood in Elazığ, or in the university circle in Ankara. Giving importance to my Dersimi identity, people were willing to regard me as proud as them about revealing Dersimi identity. At this point, they were willing to manipulate my other identities implicitly, and calling for me to be a person like them in general. Thus, it was not easy for me to forget about my old

habits and improve a kind of Dersim consciousness that they grew up with years in Dersim diaspora at abroad.

In this context, one of my conversations with a member of the community is worth stressing. While I was waiting for a panel to begin in Dersim Community, I began to talk with a man while we were drinking tea. In the very beginning of our talk, the same question that I got used to answering came up one more time. He was asking where I was coming from, and I responded him in a way that I accustomed to and I said “I grow up in Elazığ, but my family is originally from Tunceli”. Confusing me with his overreaction, he was repeating my sentence in a way like he was a teacher who detected his student’s fault. At that moment, he made an emphasis on the word “Dersim” in his sentences and said: “What does it mean? What does it mean my family is originally from Tunceli? You must say: I am from Dersim!”

Not only in this little conversation but also in general, as I was immersing into the field, Dersimi people were also asking me to show consciousness about my own Dersim identity. In this respect, my field was a learning process about my own ethnic or religious identity, on the other hand it was turning into a kind of unlearning process about my past, which covered my Dersim identity and made me rethink about my own ethnic and belief identity in general.

In relation to this, forgetting my old habits during the field, I was beginning not to hesitate to mention my Dersim identity in public, preferring to use Dersim instead of using Tunceli, visiting Cemevi which I had never visited in my life before, or sometimes trying to use my mother tongue, Kurdish/ Zazaki instead of Turkish, for simple sentences while talking with my some of close informants and etc. In this sense, while performing ethnographic participation, I was also practicing some of the necessities of my own culture, which I did not practice and give importance before. Thus, through denying some of my old habits, mostly based on denial of Dersim identity, I acquired a new form of nativeness about Dersim

during my field. In this sense, from saluting people in my mother tongue to participating in the Alevi belief rituals, I was also practicing the necessities of my own cultural heritage, along with performing a field practice. In this way, while doing fieldwork, I was also improving a dialogue with, and understanding of myself, which I could not even have chance to practice in the everyday life neither in my Dersimi people dominated neighborhood nor in well-protected university campuses.

### **3.3. GETTING CLOSER**

After a few months, locating myself inside Dersim Community on the basis of my student and Dersimi identity, and achieving some other good relations with some of the people around Cemevi and Kurdish Center, I began to feel much more comfortable with the field and myself. In relation to this, I started to become friends with some of my informants with whom I was also discovering Turkish-German way of life around Turkish dominated districts of Berlin, Kreuzberg.

In this context, as I was becoming close with new names, I was discovering new realities about Dersim Community in particular and other Alevi and Kurdish groups in general. Furthermore, being in close contact with some people around the community circle also constituted a kind of hidden reference in which people were not questioning me any more in a detailed way. Thus, suspicious or testing characteristics of relations were leaving its place to a kind of relation of trust in which, there was no place for doubts of any kind about me anymore.

At this stage, feeling relaxed around the association and Turkish- German circles, I began to act as if I was a member of the association and asking people to participate in the events, celebrations or commemorations organized in Dersim Community. Furthermore, I was sometimes helping the people, when they were working to prepare the association building for the organization or doing other kinds of work in general. At this moment, my small gestures were creating a kind

of peaceful environment in which we began to share the beauty of working together, and having good, funny moments.

As time passed, it began to be a kind of habit both for me and some of the community members to see each other around the association or meet around Kreuzberg. They got so used to seeing me that they were wondering about me when they did not see me around for a while. In this respect, we were practicing a kind of sweet dependency towards each other in which we got used to see each other so often. Furthermore, some of them were showing a great responsibility on me and caring about me so much that I was feeling like I was in a family away from my “home”. At this point, I can clearly say that my relations with the people around the association were transforming from “strangeness” into “familiarity” in which, I was feeling like at “home” far away from my “home”.

Herein, being familiar with each other, they were trying to show me their closeness in many respects. For example, they were inviting me to their houses to drink tea or eat meal, or asking me to join grill parties, in which they were also having friendly chat while drinking Raki or beer etc. Thus, with those kinds of small but important sharing, the conflicts had turned into a kind of reciprocal adaptation. In this way, some of my informants were turning into friends and I was feeling the satisfaction of sharing so many good moments, in which I was feeling condition of “home” abroad. In return, some of the people were also expressing their gratefulness to me for my participation into their lives.

#### **3.4. ‘LEAVING’ THE FIELD**

While I had so many troubles in order to get in touch with the people around Dersim Community in the very early days of my field, it was not easy to depart from them when I was at the end of my fieldwork. Because of the fact that I created another “home” in Berlin, and a kind of belonging to the group I built up in time, I was not really willing to turn back to my “home”, Turkey, at all. In this sense, some of my informants/ friends were trying to show me some of the ways

of extending visa in Germany in order to keep me in their lives. According to this, they were willing to see me around and stay in touch with me in general. Being such a friendly atmosphere, it was creating some emotional moments for me, which I could not imagine while the people were irritating me with their negative attitudes or questions in the beginning of my field.

From this perspective, fieldwork experience was a strange but a fruitful process for me because of the fact that I met with people and left good memories/ friendships behind. In this respect, not willing to drift apart from each other, we exchanged our communication details to meet again in the future with some of my early informants and newly friends. Today I am still communicating with some of my friends/ informants via mail or messenger.

According to this, I got a taste of to making ethnography first time, in which I was feeling the satisfaction of getting knowledge from 'lived experiences' in a systematic and productive way. Getting away from sterile atmosphere of university, I had chance to (un)learn from the field, while I was trying to construct and perform my fieldwork.

To sum up, personally, it was a unique experience for me to have so many friendships and close relations with Dersimi people in Berlin and improve self consciousness about my own ethnic and belief identity after these relations or interactions. Also, professionally, I discovered some critical points of making ethnography in general which I did not practice before.

## CHAPTER 4

### DERSIM;

#### AS A HOMELAND IN BERLIN

“I guess there is a kind of commonality uniting Dersimi people in Berlin” Ü.

It was in Oranien Strasse (Street) in Kreuzberg, in Berlin we were five men coming from Turkey, sitting in a bar with a French name, Bateau Ivre, which had Turkish art performance on the walls of it, as a German waitress was serving us Beer or tea. While enjoying our drinks, we were talking to each other and looking at the people walking on the pavement. After a while, a hot debate raised between two friends in the group after Tekin introduced himself as “Dersimli” (coming from Dersim, hereafter Dersimi) by referring to the old name of a region in Eastern Anatolia, in Turkey. However, on the other hand, the other one, Kemal, began to oppose him in an aggressive way by saying “You are not from Dersim, because you (here Kemal means Tekin and his family) were not there in 1938 when people were dying on the mountains of Dersim and paying for the price of being Dersimi!” According to this, Kemal was considering Dersim identity in relation to its bloody and violent past, which happened in a relatively narrower area, presently called Tunceli. From this point of view, born in one of the villages of Erzincan, neighboring to Tunceli, and not witnessing the 1938 massacre, or the other bloody events in the region, for Kemal, Tekin did not have any right to identify himself as Dersimi and mention Dersim as his country of origin.

At this level, it was clear that Kemal was drawing a kind of boundary between him and his friend on the basis of negotiating the homeland identity. Furthermore, insisting on the significance of history in the making of Dersim identity, he was not only excluding Tekin from his own homeland identity, but also he was

idealizing the Dersim geography in order to create a personal belonging to it. From this point of view, coming from close regions but not sharing a common past, Kemal was differing himself from his friend, although they share so many commonalities like the same ethnicity (Kurdish Alevi)<sup>7</sup>, religious identity (Alevi-Kızılbaş), mother language (Zazaki) and etc.

In this respect, while changing the friendly atmosphere on the table in particular on one hand, for me, the negotiation around a specific local identity was “contributing” to the so called “multi-kulti” (multicultural) ambience of Kreuzberg, full of the traces of ethnic diversity around, on the other. From this point of view, while the discussion around homeland identity was making some of us learn more about the past of Dersim and ethnic diversity in the region, on the other hand, talking Turkish in a louder and aggressive way, Kemal’s attitudes were potentially confining us to the multicultural picture of Kreuzberg as “aggressive Turks” in the eyes of some other people, sitting next to us in the bar and witnessing our louder, hot debates in a way.

However, no matter what the people were thinking about us, the ongoing discussion was presenting the fact that Dersim geography was a significant element of self definition among some of Kurdish Alevi people in Berlin. Many Kurdish immigrants, who were mostly coming from Varto, Hınıs, Erzincan and Tunceli, were all calling themselves “Dersimi” to represent their diverse political, religious or ethnic affiliations<sup>8</sup>. Due to this, they were still giving a kind of priority to their homeland identities. At this point, I can clearly say that being Dersimi was including and indicating so many implications for those people and

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<sup>7</sup> Although I am aware of the fact that large number of people coming from this region to Europe do not prefer to use the term “Kurdish Alevi”, and identify themselves as “Zaza” or “Turk”, I will follow the path in the academic literature to name these people without participating unending ethnicity debates among Kurdish Alevis.

<sup>8</sup> At the very beginning of my research, it was very confusing for me to see that the Kurdish Alevis coming from Hınıs, Varto, and Erzincan were defining their homelands as Dersim because of the fact that I was considering Dersim as only the old name of Tunceli.

the content of the term was shifting from one person to another or one group to another in Berlin Dersim diaspora at first glance.

For instance, when I was talking to one of the former Dersimi PKK (Partiye Kalkeren Kurdistan) militants, he was conceptualizing Dersim region as one of the administrative provinces of the Ottoman Empire in order to stress on to the ethno-politic unity of Kurds in the region. Both making a larger Dersim description, one of the dedes (grandfather, spiritual leaders of Alevi belief) was focusing on to the ocak (seyyid lineages) networks, centered in Dersim and having branches around that Kurdish Alevi region. In a similar way, some of the people from Hınıs, Varto and Erzincan were choosing to call themselves as Dersimis to make an emphasis on their ethnic and Alevi belief roots.

On the other hand, it was Dersimi people coming from present day Tunceli who were feeling themselves uncomfortable with the enlargement of this local identity and trying to define Dersim in the borders of Tunceli province. Due to this, it was not only Kemal, but also so many “Tunceli originated Dersimis” who were trying to differentiate themselves from other communities in order to retain their own cultural difference in Berlin.

From this point of view, in order to understand the maintenance of Dersim homeland identity in Berlin, there needs to be an overview made about some of the basic characteristics of Dersim’s culture and past. Therefore, in this chapter, I will firstly attempt to outline “Dersim’s distinctive culture” (Bruinessen 1994) briefly. Afterwards, I will explore how Dersimi people in Berlin attached themselves to their homeland in 1990s, and Dersim has become a significant reference point for their self definitions.

#### **4.1 LOCALITY, ETHNIC AND BELIEF IDENTITY**

Since there are so many negotiations among Kurdish-Alevi immigrants about the “cartography of Dersim” region in Berlin, it will not be easy to make a clear cut

Dersim definition which will embrace all different perceptions about Dersim geography. Despite this, it is a common sense that; the historical district of Dersim was in fact larger than Tunceli, and included parts of neighboring Sivas, Erzincan, and Elazığ provinces. However, afterwards, the region began to represent a smaller area. “In December 1935, {after} the National Assembly accepted the Bill of Tunceli, the Tunceli Kanunu, in the form presented to it by the government. {And} It provided for the creation of the province of Tunceli, which included the Dersim region” (Kieser, in White and Jongerden 2003, 193). According to this, after the province was renamed, the province of Tunceli began to correspond to Dersim.<sup>9</sup>

Until 1930s, Dersimi people<sup>10</sup> lived their own way of life in “an inaccessible district of high, snowcapped mountains, narrow valleys, and deep ravines in central Eastern Turkey. It was inhabited by a large number of small tribes, eking out a marginal existence by animal husbandry, horticulture, and gathering forest products.” (Bruinessen 1994, 145) Although the different tribes were showing a scattered existence, it was the Kızılbaş- Alevi belief, ‘heterodox Alevi sect’ (Bruinessen 1994, 145), which was creating a kind of religious commonality and unity in social life.<sup>11</sup>

In social life, the dedes<sup>12</sup> were important figures in the making of this unity and social cohesion. Like the other Alevi communities, the social life was mostly

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<sup>9</sup> Because of the fact that the new name of the province, Tunceli (coming from Tunç eli, the bronze hand) was implying the military campaign of Turkish government towards region in 1930, the people were preferring to use the old name of the region. In this context, it was revealing a kind of awareness towards the history of the region.

<sup>10</sup> Being aware and regarding the Kurdish Alevi people coming from Hınıs, Varto or Erzincan, and identifying themselves both Dersimi, hereafter I will begin to use Dersim to refer today’s the province of Tunceli and Dersimi referring to the people coming from Tunceli, whom I focused on both in my fieldwork and study.

<sup>11</sup> It is known that there were also Sunni Kurds and Christian Armenians in the region. See Ahmet Kerim Gültekin “Tuncelide Sunni Olmak” (To Be Sunni in Tunceli, 2010) for a detailed analysis of the minority position of Sunnis in the region.

<sup>12</sup> Dede means grandfather in English. In Alevi belief culture, it is also used to call spiritual belief leaders whom were directing Alevi communities with the voluntary support of Alevi people.

constructed on “a specific system of communal-religious institutions” (Vorhoff, in White and Jongerden 2003, 94) in the leadership of spiritual leaders. In this context, the dedes were mostly constructing their authorities on the bases of voluntary and devotional promises of their followers. In addition to this, the religious authority of the spiritual leaders was also in cooperation with the political power of ağas (landlords) and tribal chiefs.

Also, as Bruinessen demonstrates “the beliefs and practices of the Alevis of Dersim, as they are known to us from 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>- century sources, appear to be more heterodox and ‘syncretist’ than those of the Tahtacı and the central Anatolian Alevis<sup>13</sup>” (Bruinessen in Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner- Heinkele & Otter- Baujean 1997, 4) . In this respect, they differ themselves from other Alevi groups with their nature and sun oriented belief practices<sup>14</sup>. Also worshipping to the sacred places is another distinctive component of Dersim belief identity. In this respect, the region still houses so many ziyarets (sacred places) preserving their spiritual meaning(s) for the Dersimi people<sup>15</sup>

Like the belief identity of the people in the region, Dersimis differentiate themselves from other neighboring Kurdish communities with the languages, they

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Conducting the cem ceremonies or taking a directing role in the social life were some of the responsibilities of dedes in social life. In return, the followers of them were showing a significant respect to them. Although with the migration flows of Alevis from rural areas to the urban regions, as a religious institutions, the roles of dedes in Alevi society has started to decline, and it has begun to get a more symbolic meaning than it was before dedelik. For further information about dedes, see Yaman& Erdemir (2006), or Olsson, Özdalga and Raudvere (1998).

<sup>13</sup> In fact Alevi belief identity seems to present a homogenous structure in Turkey; Alevi people of different regions also differ from each other in the way they practice their belief identity. Tahtacı and Bektashism are two of them. Generally speaking, while Tahtacı known to live in Aegean and Mediterranean part of Turkey, Bektashism is more institutionalized form of Alevism practiced in the middle Anatolia of Turkey. But, since the diversity of Alevi belief identity is not the focus point for this study, it will be contented to be mentioned only here.

<sup>14</sup> Worshipping to the sun (mostly in the morning time) was one of the basic praying ceremony in traditional Kızılbaş-Alevi belief culture. My informants were mostly mentioning the existence of this traditional ceremony in an operational way to differ themselves from other Alevi groups by asserting themselves to have more nature oriented belief practices.

<sup>15</sup> To see a well documented study about sacred places in Tunceli, see Ahmet Kerim Gültekin “Tunceli’ de Kutsal Mekan Kültü” (The Sacred Place Cult in Tunceli, 2004)

were speaking<sup>16</sup>. Although the strong assimilation policies of Turkish government has led to “a dramatic language shift to Turkish” (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 198), in the past, the people in the region were mainly speaking Zazaki, and a minority was communicating in Kurmanci. Also there were some tribes who were using both of them. In this context, the bilingualism in the region was not only differing Dersimis from other communities in the region, but the language diversity was also an inner distinctive moment for different tribes in the region.

The Dersimis themselves perceive a cultural difference between the (Zaza-speaking) Seyhhasanan tribes of western Dersim (Ovacık and Hozat with parts of Çemişgezek and Pertek) and the Dersimi tribes proper of eastern Dersim (Pülümür, Nazimiye, Mazgirt), among whom there are both Zaza and Kurmanci speakers (Bruinessen in Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner- Heinkele & Otter- Baujean 1997, 2).

Here is a relatively clear picture about the language(s), and the belief identity practiced in the region, however, it is not possible to be that so clear when it comes to talk about ethnicity of Dersimi people<sup>17</sup>. In this context, while Kurdish nationalists have been mostly trying “to convince the Alevi Kurds that they really were Kurds and nothing else” (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 204), on the other hand, there are also Zaza nationalists who assert Dersimis to be Zaza, “a distinct people, or even a distinct nation” (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 201) “based on distinct Zaza vernacular” ( Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 200). Furthermore, there is also another claim that “the Kızılbaş and Zazas could well have had a common ancestor, the ancient Dailamites, from the Dailam region in northern Persia” (White, in White and Jongerden 2003, 18)

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<sup>16</sup> Dersimi people do not use their mother tongues both in the region and diaspora in their everyday life. They mostly use Turkish except some old people. This is why I am using past tense, while writing about their languages or mother tongues.

<sup>17</sup> Since I do not want to give the details of discussions, see White, ‘Ethnic Differentiation among the Kurds: Kurmanci, Kızılbaş and Zaza’ (1995), and Bruinessen “Aslım inkar eden haramzadedir”, The Debate on the Ethnic Identity of the Kurdish Alevi for more detailed knowledge about the ethnicity discussions about Kurdish Alevi (1997).

At this point, I can say that different claims seem to influence Dersimi people in different ways and there is an abundance of ethnic diversity in Dersim according to Dersimi people<sup>18</sup>. From my observations, being Kurdish Alevi, Zaza, Turk, Kırmancki, Alevi, Alevi- Kızılbaş are the some basic definitions of Dersimi people when they try to mention their own ethnic identity. Despite the diversity in the self definitions, they were mostly mentioning that they were a different group of people in the Kurdish region. According to this, the way that they were differing themselves from other groups was very common. Religiously, rather than being Sunni or Shafi' ite Sunni they were mentioning that they were Alevi or Kızılbaş Alevi. While they were talking about language difference, they were both emphasizing the fact that they were not capable of understanding Kurdish language. Furthermore, they were both perceiving their past in a peculiar way.

#### **4.2. A TRAUMATIC PAST**

Since Dersimi people enjoyed living their own way of life according to their tribal relations, it made it difficult for central governments to take control of the region historically. According to this, “in previous times, the tribes of Dersim had never been subdued by the Ottoman administration” (Kehl-Bodrogi in White and Jongerden 2003, 65). After the Turkish Republic was established, this situation had not changed and the region continued to be an autonomous area since 1930s.

Dersim was, by the mid-1930s, the last part of Turkey that had not been effectively brought under central government control. The tribes of Dersim had never been subdued by any previous government; the only law they recognized was traditional tribal law.” (Bruinessen 1994, 145)

According to this, they were not considering the laws of newly established government. They were refusing to pay taxes, avoiding military service which was making the region to be the target of Turkish government, in search of practicing its authority in the region. Therefore, the denial of state authority

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<sup>18</sup> I will analyse the ethnic identification of my informants in the latter chapters. Thus, I will be content with only mentioning the existence of different ethnic perceptions among Dersimi people.

provided the appropriate conditions for the republican government to intervene the region with its military forces. In this respect, the military operation against the region took two years and resulted with the events “representing one of the blackest pages in the history of Republican Turkey, gracefully passed over silence or deliberately misrepresented by most historians, foreign as well as Turkish”(Bruinessen, 1994, 145)

Initially, in 1935, the republican government renamed the province as Tunceli, signaling the coming operation. Afterwards, roads, telephones, bridges, telegraphs, military, and post office were built, which might be thought as some of the symbols of state authority. It was the next year when the republican government gave authority to the military, making possible the military rule in the name of “civilizing” the region.

“In 1936, Dersim was placed under military government, with the express aim of pacifying and “civilizing” it. The tribes’ response to the modernization brought by the state, consisting of roads, bridges and police posts, was ambiguous. Some chieftains sought accommodation with the military authorities, others resented this interference in their former independence” (Bruinessen, 1994, 146)

At this moment, Abbasushaghi, Yusufkhan and Demenan tribes united their forces in the leadership of Seyyit Rıza, in order to resist against the military forces, “while others {tribes} co-operated with the government forces” (Kehl- Bodrogi, in White and Jongerden, 2003, 66). Despite this, the republican government was very clear to construct its political power and hegemony in the region. According to this, the military campaign had started in March 1937.

The military campaign against Dersim was mounted in response to a relatively minor incident, and it would seem that the army had been waiting for a direct reason to punish the tribes. One day in March 1937, a strategic wooden bridge was burned down and telephone lines cut. Seyyit Rıza and the tribes associated with him were suspected (...) In any case, the army had its warrant for intervention. The first troops, sent in to arrest the suspects, were stopped by armed tribesmen. The confrontations soon escalated. When the tribes kept refusing to surrender their leaders, a large campaign was mounted. Military operations to subdue the region lasted throughout the summer of 1937. In September, Seyyit Rıza and his closest associates surrendered, but the next spring

the operations were resumed with even greater force. They must have been of unprecedented violence and brutality.” (Bruinessen, 1994, 146)

In the year 1938, the military operation was enlarged by practicing its power on some other tribes such as Kureyshan, Bakhtiyar, Karabal, Ferhad and Pilvank even if they were not rebellious like the Kırgan tribe. One way or another the tribes in the region were mostly ‘destroyed’, ‘tortured’ or ‘annihilated’ (Bruinessen, 1994, 147) Dersimi people in the region in different ways. The leader of the rebellion Seyyit Rıza was “arrested, together with his retinue of some fifty men. They were summarily tried and eleven of them, including Seyyit Rıza, were immediately executed” (Bruinessen, 1994, 147). The operation lasted until the end of 1938, and “resulted in the annihilation of at least 10% of the population” (in White and Jongerden, 2003, Kehl- Bodrogi, 66), and “many more deported to the west of Turkey” (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 198). In this sense, while some of the exiled Dersimis returned to their hometowns later on, some others continued to live in Western part of Turkey.

Afterwards, the region experienced large scale assimilation policies of Turkish government in search of attaching Dersimis to the modernization process of Turkey. However, whereas the assimilation policies have achieved to transform Kurdish Alevi Dersimis into Turks, on the other hand, it has led Dersimi people to show interest in Turkish politics, especially in the left side. According to this, after a long term of silence period on the remnants of 1937/ 38 events, Dersimis mostly began to organize themselves around the leftist radical parties such as TKP/ML (Türkiye Komünist Partisi, Marksist Leninist, ‘Turkish Communist Party, Marxist Leninist’) and Dev-Sol (Devrimci Sol, ‘Revolutionary Left’), and legal social democrat parties such as CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, ‘Republican People’s Party’) in the 1970s<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the armed wing of TKP/ML, TİKKO (Türk İşçi Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu, ‘Turkish Workers and Peasant Liberation Army’), which was known to be a Maoist organization defending guerilla war,

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<sup>19</sup> For an overview about Turkish Leftist Movement of that period of Turkey, see Haluk Yurtsever “Marksizm and Türkiye Solu” (Marxism and Turkish Left, 2002)

began to get support from the inhabitants of the region (mostly in Ovacık), in the ally of workers and peasants in order to overthrow the Turkish state.

At this moment, the influence of Leftist Movements made Dersimi people take a stance against the central authority after 1937/ 38 events again in a different context. The inhabitants of the region began to participate in, or became potential militias of those radical organizations. On the other hand, the radical organizations began to familiarize the inhabitants of the region with the Marxism and Socialism. In this way, there have been a kind of leftist consciousness constituted, making the Dersimis “potential” opponents of the Turkish government.

In 1980s, the rise of PKK and the collapse of the left movement had also influenced the region. “It was precisely during this time that the PKK tried to establish itself among the Alevi Kurds of Dersim. Although there had always been significant numbers of Dersimis in the PKK’s upper echelons, Dersim was the only region of Turkish Kurdistan where the PKK had not yet gained a firm foothold” ( Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 199).

At this level, it can be said that, Alevi identity of the region was getting a priority, and therefore Sunni domination inside PKK groups was leading Dersimi people to improve a kind of skepticism towards Kurdish Movement. “If they (PKK forces) get the power, they will cut (kill) us more than Turkish government” {anonymous} was the general motto of the people reflecting the Sunni Kurdish phobia of Dersimi people because of the fact that they were in a minority position in Kurdish region religiously. Thus, they did not support PKK as much as they support leftist and Marxist organizations in the region.

Moreover, the nationalist character of the PKK was also creating another dilemma for Dersimi people. In this respect, rather than giving priority to the Kurdish question due to their former leftist socialization, they were giving importance to the class struggle on the bases of international fight against capitalism

ideologically. From this point of view, sharing the viewpoint of Turkish leftists, they were considering the domination of Kurdish people in terms of economic exploitation of Kurdish region and supporting the self- determination rights of Kurds according to Leninist principles.

In 1990s, the conflict between the Turkish state and PKK reached its height in East and south- eastern Anatolia. It was also in these years, whereas “many Kurdish leftists joined the PKK, which also started its activities in the Alevi Kurdish region” (Jongerden, in White and Jongerden, 2003, 83), but, on the other hand, the existence of the PKK in Dersim was still in question for the inhabitants of the region. The conflicts between TIKKO (famous with its local support in the region) and PKK guerillas are significant to reflect this tension and the existence of efforts of PKK in Dersim region.

There, in the summer of 1994, the PKK stepped up its guerilla campaign and intensified attacks, not only against military targets, but- according to local sources- also against TIKKO guerillas. The latter actions were especially significant, as they indicated the PKK’s wish to impose itself, by force if necessary, as the sole legitimate representative of Kurdish revolutionary aspiration in the region. (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 205)

In this respect, the attempts of the PKK to be the only power in the region did not result in a successful way, and PKK failed to get the mass support of people in Dersim region comparing to other Kurdish areas in those years.

On the other hand, the continuing civil war led Turkish Army to take some preventions in Dersim which led to the human right violations to the region at the same time.

In 1994, however, the situation quickly escalated. During the months of July and August, the army burned down large stretches of forest. A strict embargo was imposed on the entire province: locals would only be allowed to bring severely restricted quantities of foodstuffs to their home villages. By this draconian measure, the army tried to prevent villagers from providing guerillas, with supplies. At checkpoints along the main roads of access, the military also routinely denied passage to Turkish citizens not born in Tunceli province, let alone foreigners trying to enter the region. (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden, 2003, 206)

In this respect, it can be said that the security perception of Turkish Army was mostly shaped on viewing the civilians in the region as in cooperation with the illegal organizations. At this point, while the local inhabitants were marked as “potential terrorists” (anonymous), and they were asked to evacuate the rural areas/ their hometowns forcibly. Thus, it was second time the people of the region were forced to migrate by the military forces after 1937/ 38 events. The extent of the destruction figured by four CHP parliamentarians was impressive.

They claimed that 417 villages in the region, 287 had been evacuated and condemned the hardships suffered by the local population as a result of the continuing food embargo and the unabating military repression. (Leezenberg, in White and Jongerden 2003, 207)

According to this, ‘the destruction of the region’ and the human right violations forced Dersimi people to migrate either to Western Turkey or abroad. In this respect, they were getting their share of repression in Kurdish region of Turkey by leaving their hometowns and cultural traditions. As a result, as Bruinessen demonstrated earlier “not much is left of Dersim’s distinctive culture” (Bruinessen, 1994, 155) in the region.

#### **4.3. DIASPORIC SENSIBILITIES & SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS**

In fact, Dersim was becoming an uninhabited region and the distinctive Dersim culture was going to disappear with the civil war in the region, however, on the other hand, Dersimi people in Europe began to show a kind of sensibility against the destruction of the region in the early 1990s. They were concerned about the region, since they had still family connections there. According to this, by protesting the events and trying to attract the attention of public opinion in Europe, they were building solidarity with the people in their homeland. In this way, the reactions of Dersimis abroad were connecting them to their homeland in a way.

In a similar way, Dersimi people living in Berlin also began to be concerned about the situation and organize themselves in order to show their reactions against the

events in Dersim. They participated in demonstrations and organize solidarity nights to show their sensitivity towards their hometown. At this level, their aim was to constitute a public opinion to stop the violence in the region. Furthermore, they collected money and sent it to the people in Dersim in the name of solidarity. At this scale, the increasing awareness towards the region was transforming the typical homeland nostalgia of Dersimi people into a political reaction, uniting Dersimi people in the diaspora. As one of my informants, also one of the organizers of the events was describing briefly;

We wanted to show that we will not stay silent to the events happening in the region. We wanted to help the people, living in our hometowns, by announcing the events to European public opinion C.

At this level, sharing the common problem about their homeland, Dersimi people began to gather around their homeland identities by participating the solidarity nights. Also the increasing interactions of Dersimi people were preparing the conditions for the establishment of a homeland association in Berlin. At this moment, it can be said that the sensitivity of Dersimi people towards their homelands was creating a kind of togetherness on the basis of country of origin, and providing them the opportunity to relate themselves to their homelands. According to this, the establishment of Dersim hometown association can be thought as the self expression of the increasing homeland awareness.

From this point of view, a group of Dersimi people realized the increasing homeland awareness and decided to unify them around a hometown association. A comment of one of the early establishers of the association is worth stressing in this context.

We (a group of Dersimi people) saw the potential here (in Berlin). Our relations had improved with Dersimi people in Berlin, and we were willing to see Dersim folk coming together from our hearts H.

Furthermore, one of the aims of the association was impressive due to the fact that it was reflecting the need for unifying this increasing awareness. According to this, it was a group of people who were trying to unite Dersimi people according

to their country of origin and aiming to keep the distinctive culture of Dersim alive.

Our aim was to keep that culture (Dersim culture) alive and fresh. (...) A culture, which did not have the chance to live anymore. C.

At this level, with the increasing awareness towards homeland and its distinctive culture, Dersimi people have started to build up a belonging towards their homeland by distancing themselves from Kurdish movement in relation to inner political tensions between PKK and local leftist Dersimi guerilla forces. In this way, the people in diaspora began to give proximity towards their homelands rather than considering themselves as a part of Kurdish totality and Kurdish question. From this point of view, Dersim, as a homeland, has become to be a significant element of their self definition with reference to itself. According to this, it has begun to refer their ancestral land where they were living their culture in its purest form before they were dispersed from their homeland. It has also led Dersimi people to feel a belonging to their homeland historically.

We, Dersimi people, are like the Munzur Suyu (a sacred river passing in Dersim). It sources from Munzur Mountains. In there, it is so pure. However, like the river, we have all got away from our sources, Dersim. S.

Also tree was another common metaphor among Dersimi people when they were referring to the dispersion of Dersimi people from their original cultural roots.

The tree is there, in Dersim. We are the branches of it, and separated from there to the different parts of the world” C.

At this scale, while they were giving priority to their homeland, both their religious and political viewpoint was playing a significant role. In this context, they were imposing a religious meaning to the Dersim geography. According to this, I can say that, the homeland geography and religious identity were closely connected to each other that it was not possible to separate one from another in Berlin Dersim diaspora, since the geography was also including a sacred totality.

Dersim... The place where I was born and my childhood passed. When I think of Dersim, I am going back to my roots. (...) Teberik... It is a small piece of homeland... Teberik stone<sup>20</sup>...It is like a normal stone. (He is taking it with himself to Berlin). But I impose it a religious meaning. At the same time, it is a piece of my homeland. I believe that it gives me spiritual power. Y.

From this point of view, they were idealizing their ancestral home and relating themselves to their homeland in a spiritual way. According to this, being the symbolic center of Kızılbaş Alevi ocaks, and housing so many sacred places, the people in diaspora were perceiving Dersim geography as a sacred place. One of my informants was reflecting this perception by making a comparison between Mecca and Dersim.

Like some others (he means Muslims) are affiliated with Mecca, the Dersimis, connected to ocaks, are connecting themselves to Dersim.H

In the idealization of homeland, the role of traumatic past was also effective on Dersimi people. In this context, as much as they were stressing Dersim as the source of their common culture, they were also believing that they shared a common traumatic past in that geography in relation to both apart from Kurdish question in the region. As I told in the very beginning of this chapter, Dersim was referring to a geography, for which the ancestors of Dersimis fought. On the bases of this “fighting” towards authority idea, they were imposing both a “victimized” and “heroic” meaning on the geography. As Daimi Cengiz reflects in one of his article published in a Dersimi journal; for him;

Dersim...! It is (means) rebellion for some people, and for some other it is (means) resistance. But massacre and resistance are two elements, remembered in Dersim history. (Daimi Cengiz, 1995, 60)

According to this, for him, the common past was becoming a reference point to identify Dersim geography.

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<sup>20</sup> Teberik is one of the important figures of nature oriented Kızılbaş Alevi belief. It is a normal stone taken from mountains, thought to be sacred. By taking and hanging it to their houses, Kızılbaş Alevi people believe that they carry goodness from sacred mountains to their houses.

To sum up, it can be asserted that the answer of the simple “where are you from?” question was becoming a way of self expression for Dersimi people in which they had practiced their own political and religious identity. In this respect, in order to connect with their homeland, they were imposing a symbolic meaning to it. According to this, they were perceiving and idealizing it as their ancestral home. Furthermore, the common past perception was contributing to it since Dersimi people shared a traumatic past in the region. In this way, their homeland identity was becoming a ‘boundary expressing symbol’ (Cohen, 2000, 14) in Berlin.

#### **4.4. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued how Dersimi people in Berlin diaspora relate themselves to their homeland. The belief oriented distinctive homeland culture and common past of the region have been two key elements in the construction of commonality among Dersimi people in general. From this point of view, they have created a kind of sensibility towards their homelands (mostly on the bases of destruction of the homeland/ culture) and tended to idealize or imagine it on the basis of their cultural, belief and past identities. In this way, Dersim as a homeland has become the expression of the distinctive features of Dersim culture in general. In this context, showing a tendency for the “idealization of the supposed ancestral home” (Cohen, 1997, 180), Dersimi people around the association can be described as a diaspora according to Cohen’s definition of the term. In this respect, in order to understand how this “idealization” works in the association, there needs to be an overview made about Dersim homeland association. In line with this, in the following chapter I will attempt to describe the construction and working of Dersim homeland association.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **BERLIN DERSIM COMMUNITY**

“In there, Dersimi people make family meetings. Some particular families go there. They meet, than they leave. There won’t be anything else” M.

The sensitivity of Dersimi people towards their homeland and the commonality it provides for them have been described in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the commonality among Dersimi people on the basis of country of origin has also constructed interpersonal relations and informal social networks. In this respect, as I mentioned above, the establishment of a homeland association in the early 1990s can be thought as the expression or institutionalization of increasing Dersim consciousness in Berlin. Also, considering diaspora not only as a consciousness, culture or identity, but also as social organization of a specific group, the homeland association of Dersimi people needs to be explored in the way of understanding diasporic existence of Dersimi people in Berlin. From this point of view, in this chapter, I will describe the social organization of Dersimi people around Berlin Dersim Community and its functions for its members. According to this, the role of the homeland association in the maintaining of Dersim homeland culture and its potential to enrich the social life in the host society will be argued in the light of diaspora concept.

#### **5.1. THE ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS**

Berlin Dersim Community (hereafter BDC) was established in 1993 with the gathering of a group of Dersimi people in Berlin. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the reactions against the human right violations in the region is an important factor preparing the conditions for the establishment of the

association. Despite this, it was not easy for the early founders of the association to establish the homeland association.

1990s were the years, in which the Kurdish Movement was at its peak and the Alevi revival was increasing in reaction to Sivas (1993) and Gazi (1995) events<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, some Zazas in Europe began to insist on their assertions that Zazas was a different nation. In this context, the Kurdish Nationalists has started to take a skeptical and oppositionary stance towards those new revivals by claiming {anonymous} the fact that those new social movements were aiming to weaken Kurdish Movement (strengthening itself both in national and transnational context) with the support of Turkish government. From this point of view, PKK opposed the establishment of a Dersimi homeland association, and blamed some of the founders of the association to be “spies” {anonymous} of Turkish government working in coordination with Turkish consulate in Berlin. However, despite the visible opposition of PKK, a group of Dersimis established their homeland association with the support of mass Dersimi population and Turkish Leftist organizations.

At this moment, the personal and political profiles of the BDC’s founders played an important role in the establishment process. First of all, they were mostly coming from Dersim and had lived in Dersim for a period of their life until their early 20s. In relation to this, they were mostly capable of connecting themselves with their homeland identities. During the establishment process, they used their personal autobiography and leftist identities in order to improve a kind of “sameness” with the other Dersimi people living in Berlin strategically. From this point of view, they tended to organize Dersimis around Berlin homeland identity after they broke away from their leftist organizations. According to this, it can be

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<sup>21</sup> Being in minority position, the Alevi people in Turkey experienced several massacres and human right violations in Turkey. In Sivas, during the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival, 35 people were killed in a fire set in Hotel Madımak by the right wing and Islamist demonstrators. The Gazi events took place in one of the Alevi populated neighborhood of Istanbul. The events began with a shot by unknown assailants to a coffeehouse. In the continuity of the events 19 people were killed.

said that there was a kind of interconnectedness between the autobiographies of the founder group and the establishment of the association, which they were both aware of;

In Turkey, in the place where I was working (Dersim), I was a board member in in Töb-Der (Tüm Öğretmenler Birleşme ve Dayanışma Derneği, ‘ The Association of All Teachers Unity and Solidarity’). I sympathized with Halkın Kurtuluşu (People’s Liberation Army) before. (...)After I came here (Berlin), I was also one of the founders of Halkın Kurtuluşu Association in Berlin. But, due to some political disagreements, I broke up with the association. C.

When I came to here (Berlin), I became a member of Almanya Türkiyeli İşçiler Derneği. (The Association of Workers from Turkey in Germany)(...) I began to see TKP/ ML as a Kurdistan organization, and I separated from the association in 1986. After we (he means himself and some of his friends) separated, we began to make organizations like Dersim culture festivals. K.

In this sense, although they were mostly explaining their departures from the leftist organizations in terms of paradigms shifts or political disagreements, there was a visible continuity between leaving the old group and establishing the new one. In this context, there were so many gossips about them that they were in search of taking the advantage of establishing a new group as much as they were willing to work for their homeland identities. According to this, it was not a coincidence that some of the early establishers were also organizers of the Dersim solidarity events, and known for their negative fame of making large amount of money with those kinds of organizations which might be thought in terms of corruption which is hide behind organizing activities in the name of Dersim culture or identity.

One way or another, the founder group began to shape their new interests by giving priority to their homeland identities and criticizing their leftist pasts. In this way, they were not only doing self-criticism, they were also inviting other Dersimis to criticize themselves. For them, the mass existence of Dersimis in Leftist organizations in the past was a kind of failure, in which Dersimi people did not have chance to give priority to their own culture. Thus, they were seeing the

establishment of BDC as an opportunity to focus on their homeland identities which they could not achieve in leftist organizations.

Dersimis were not doing anything in their own name. They were always working (he means doing political activities) for everybody else. (He means leftist organizations). But today, Dersimis see the right to say something about their own name C.

In this way, as far as they were distancing themselves from their orthodox Marxist past, they were also attaching themselves to the multiculturalism and globalization discourses, which were effective in 1990s. In this context, making politics on the basis of minority rights and culture have become one of their mottos, in which they also got a chance to defend the survival of the destroyed Dersim culture in a transnational context. From this point of view, it can be said that sensitivities of Dersimis towards their homeland identity and their self identifications on the basis of this have prepared the conditions for a group of Dersimi people to see themselves capable of defending rights of Dersimi people in general:

Defending the rights of minorities is a democratic right. (...) There was a denial as well as assimilation policies towards Dersim culture, and due to this Dersim culture did not have chance to continue itself in Turkey. Therefore, we began to defend the rights of maintenance of Dersim culture in here. C.

At this moment, it was also suitable with the necessities of Dersimi people who were in search of doing something for their homelands. In this respect, the destruction of the homeland was creating an atmosphere in which Dersimi people were ready to support any kind of organization in relation to their homeland.

It was the years in which Dersimi people were returning to their own culture. Dersim was set on fire... Dersim was destroyed for ever and ever... There was a nostalgia and longing towards Dersim culture, and our mother tongue. The people were willing to do something for their homeland. U.

In this atmosphere, many Dersimis in Berlin responded to the gathering call of the founder group in a positive way. It was approximately 300 voluntary people who participated to the first introduction meeting of the association. According to this,

it is possible to say that the association has been established with the mass support of Dersimi people in the leadership of so the called “ex- leftist” people.

## **5.2. THE COMMUNITY CIRCLE**

After the establishment process, Dersimi people have continued to participate in the activities of the association, and BDC has started to create its own Dersimi circle. The political repression in the region and the nostalgia towards the homeland also mobilized Dersimi people to give support to the association. As one of the ex- administrators were telling to me, the 1990s were the years “the association was swarming with the people”

When we were making activities about Dersim, the people were participating in the activities and supporting us. {In those years} people were missing their homelands, and they were interested in our activities very much. U

At this moment, the core founder group was showing a significant effort to create solidarity among Dersimi people by using their informal, mostly family networks.

We were willing to construct a strong solidarity among Dersimi people. In this sense, we were visiting the families to show our togetherness. We were with them in their illnesses, weddings or sadness. U.

Although the efforts of the core group resulted in a positive way, and a visible Dersimi circle was created in Berlin on one hand, through the years, some personal problems or disagreements have started to arise inside the association, on the other. The problems have also begun to affect the participation of the people to the association. In this context, the relations of the founder group were significant to determine the volume of participation to the association. The worse the relations, the fewer the participation to the association, as it was expressed by one of the founder of BDC in one of the general assembly of the association in a reactionary, but a clear way.

We are not able to abide each other. I guess we have not reached to that level as a society.(...) A man is having a sulk with me, and he is beginning not to come to the community (he means BDC) M.

According to this, it can be asserted that face to face and informal relations of the people were shaping the participation to the association. In this respect, when I was doing my fieldwork, I witnessed similar tensions. For example, when I began to my fieldwork, there were 138 members in the association. After a few months, 20 members quit from the membership due to personal disagreements, and the separations continued in the following months. Thus, it was clear that, the informal networks, constituting the appropriate conditions for the establishment of the association, were also including the potential to disperse the unity of Dersimi people around the community circle in general.

Keeping this tension in mind, I can say that BDC had approximately 100-120 members while I was doing my fieldwork. The members were mostly middle aged or old male immigrants, coming to Germany in 1970s or 1980s with the labor migration. Since they lived a period of their life in Dersim, they were also capable of relating themselves to their homeland identities.

The membership of each man was mostly representing one family around the association circle. The women, being capable of relating themselves to their homeland identities, were also participating to the events with their husbands or families. In this context, the association was reflecting the continuity of traditional patriarchal relations, assuming the man to be the representative of the family, and attributing woman a relatively passive role in the social life.

In addition to this, there was a small group of women, working in the administration unit of the association and having an active role in the organization of the events. Although they were representing a relatively “independent” picture in comparison to the other women, coming along to the association with their families, the visible presence of those “independent” women was also possible with the patriarchal relations deeper inside. The so called “brother and sister relations” (abi-kardeş ilişkisi) was providing them a “trustful” environment to come, visit and work for the male-dominated association.

Moreover, being woman in a male-dominated group, they were also witnessing the masculine practices of the male members in the association. In this way, they were discovering the male world by observing their male friends with whom they were mostly working together. At this scale, they were not hesitating to recount me the “bad sides” of the male world that they met after working in BDC.

I saw prostitution, gambling and behaving in a bad way towards the woman in the association (...). The man, glorifying me as a woman in the association, was going to his house and beat his wife. I saw this in the association. A.

The educational background of the community members was relatively high compared to the other labor immigrants, who came to Germany in 1970s and 1980s. They were mostly graduated from high school, perceiving themselves as “well educated immigrants”. This self perception was significant due to the fact that it was contributing and shaping their self intellectualization processes in Berlin. They were mostly seeing themselves capable of making investigation about an issue via books or internet, or participate into the symposiums or conferences organized not only by BDC, but also some other Alevi or Kurdish associations in Berlin. According to this, the symposiums or conferences were earning a symbolic significance for some of the community members, in which they were also showing their intellectual performance to each other through their participation, questions and etc. Also, after the discussions, some of the participants were narrating their dialogues or discussions with the speaker to the other people like a kind of success story. In this context, participating in those kinds of events was becoming a way of self expression for some of the community members in the public space.

Economically, the members of the group were relatively in good conditions. They were mostly working as workers in different but regular jobs. Some of them were owning their own private shops or businesses. According to this, it was easy for them to find free time to participate in to the activities of the association mostly on weekends. In order to make a comparison, I was also meeting some Dersimis outside the association, working in long hour shifts and not capable of finding any

free time for themselves. Thus, compared to Dersimis working in hard conditions with less free time, Dersimis around the association were in an advantageous position to spare time for the association activities.

They were also making or planning to make some kind of investments to their homelands in relation to their economic wealth. In this sense, they were buying houses or lands in Dersim or some other cities of Turkey, in which they have family connections or some other networks. The attitudes of their children were also playing a significant role in the decision about where to make their investments. For instance, from my observations I can say that, while the older generations were so willing to visit Dersim and make future plans to about Dersim, the following generations were not paying so much attention to those plans of their parents.

Since the members of the association were at or near retirement age, they were mostly willing to make some kind of investments (mostly houses) in Dersim which might be thought in terms of a return move to the homeland with the retirement. For instance, one of my key informants, who made an application for early retirement, was planning to return to his hometown after living in Berlin for 34 years. He was renovating his house in his village, and planting trees in the garden of it and beginning to communicate with his co-villagers in Dersim more often than it was before. In this context, his excitement about his retirement is worth stressing to see the motivation behind the idea of returning to the homeland in general.

I go to my hometown every year. I take care of my field and garden. I am in here (Berlin), but my spirit is in Turkey (...) I missed my village life and my hometown so much. From now on, all I think is of my homeland (...) You should come and see my garden! (He is asking me). I have turned it into a heaven (...) I will be a farmer. I will take a hose and water my trees. I will pick my tomato and cucumber... It is so nice... Z.

At this moment, it was not only my key informant, but also some other Dersimis around the association, who were also willing to return to Dersim when they

retire. According to this, the nostalgia towards homeland was meeting with their “will of return”, constructing another kind of commonality for Dersimi people around BDC. Thus, they were willing to keep their relations fresh with each other due to their common interests about their homelands.

Furthermore, they were also maintaining their relations with their relatives or friends, living both in Dersim and the other cities of Turkey or Europe in several ways. They were mostly communicating via phone or internet. In this context, the developments in the telecommunication technologies were providing a significant opportunity to keep their relations alive with their homeland. They were mostly calling their relatives or meeting with them over chat programs easily. In this way, they were having chance to follow the developments in their homeland and getting in touch with co-villagers in Europe in a more detailed way, which was not possible through televisions or satellite dishes.

Visiting their homeland in their vacations was also another way of empowering their relations with their relatives or co-villagers in a transnational context. During their visits, they were fulfilling their longings, coming together with their extended family members, and participating to the events such as weddings, festivals and etc. They were also bringing presents with themselves to give their relatives and contributing to the economy of their relatives which might be thought in terms of remittances. In this sense, such organizations were taking place mostly in summer season, considering their visits from abroad. At this point, it can be said that, through their visits to Dersim, they were not only constructing the continuity of their relations with their homeland, but also contributing to the economy of their relatives in Dersim.

To sum up, it can be said that, although Dersimi people around the association migrated from Dersim to Berlin a long time ago, they were still in close contact with their homelands both mentally and physically. In relation to this, they were in search of continuity of their homeland culture in diaspora. In this context, BDC

was offering some kind of facilities, and organizing some kind of events in order to respond those needs of their members which I will overview in the following pages.

### **5.3. THE FACILITIES AND EVENTS IN BDC**

When I was asking my informants about what BDC was offering them, they were mostly mentioning that it was a place where “they feel at home”, as they entered from the door of the association. According to them, it was like “a roof”, under which Dersimi people were meeting and interacting with each other. In this sense, first of all, the association was providing them a place where they have a chance to come together with their co-ethnics or co- villagers. And the location of the association was also suitable for these meetings. Next to a green area in Kreuzberg, (Waterloo Ufer 5-7) it was easy for Dersimi people to meet in the association since it was a central place for them to come together. In relation to this, the community members were mostly visiting the association in search of socializing with other Dersimi people as if they were in Dersim. In this way, they were creating a kind of “we feeling” around the association in relation to their homeland identity and personal relations.

At this moment, their family or tribal relations were playing a significant role in the making of this unity. Also the membership to the organization was so easy and voluntary since the membership was possible by paying a small amount of money (10euro) to the association monthly. And it was easy for the members to have role in the administration or inspection unit of the association which were the two main apparatuses of the functioning of the association. Every year, the members were determining the people who would have tasks in these units by voting in the general congress in a democratic way. Despite this, since the members were mostly interconnected to each other with family ties, they were mostly preferring similar people to govern the association whom were close to each other and the core founder group. In this way, so much as the members were determining the

people who would govern the association, they were mostly preserving their personal relations and governing to the functioning of the association. According to this, they were creating a common address for themselves which they might easily go and continue their family relations by visiting the association as one of my informants was mentioning in a clear way:

They are all family friends (...). They are all our people (...) It is almost the same faces, coming to the association. We also go to the association to see our family friends. H.

According to this, the core group was organizing some kind of meetings in order to respond those needs of their members. In this respect, “The Sunday Breakfasts” was the most regular organization held in the association every first Sunday of the month. With the organization, the families were gathering and enjoying having breakfast altogether. In a similar way, when the weather conditions were suitable, they were also organizing grill parties in front of the association. The location of the association, being next to a large and green area, was becoming important due to the reason that it was presenting a kind of friendly picnic atmosphere for the families.

For me, those meetings were very crucial in the making of unity for Dersimi people in Berlin. Although they seem to be ordinary family meetings at first glance, the regularity and the frequency of them were empowering personal relations among the community members. In this context, the organizations were creating a visible family atmosphere, fostering family networks and making the families aware of each other in general. According to this, BDC was representing a big family picture, in which so many Dersimi families were meeting and organizing themselves around some kind of activities and organizations.

Furthermore, BDC was also presenting some kind of religious and cultural activities for its members. Since the homeland identity was primordial for the community members, the organizations were mostly in relation to Dersim homeland identity or past. In this respect, the core group was aiming to retain

Dersim homeland culture alive with the help of those cultural activities in diaspora. According to this, “turning to the tradition” was the basic motto of the organizations.

For instance, with this aim, they were organizing ayin-i cem rituals<sup>22</sup> for the community members, which is one of the basic rituals of Alevi- Kızılbaş belief traditionally. They were trying to perform the ritual similar to its original form, practiced in their homelands, in the leadership of dedes. Also by showing their respects to dedes (during and after the rituals), they were reflecting their loyalty to their traditions. In this sense, dedes were becoming symbolically prestigious figures around the association. Thus, as much as they were practicing their religious identities around the association, they were contributing to the actual creation of their homeland conditions in the diaspora.

With a similar motivation behind, they were also organizing Gağan<sup>23</sup> and Newroz<sup>24</sup> celebrations, known to be traditional in local Dersim culture. Furthermore, with those celebrations, they were trying to relate their cultural traditions to the culture or politics of the host country. In this sense, the celebrations were including the potential to enrich the social and cultural life in the host country. For example, celebrating the Gağan at the last week of December, they were trying to create a kind of closeness between their traditions and host society’s culture with reference to Germany’s Weihnachts(Christmas day). In this respect, they were mentioning the similarities between their local culture and Christian culture, and creating (at least) sympathy to the culture of the host society around the association.

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<sup>22</sup> As it is told before ayin-i cem ritual is one of the traditional ceremonies of Alevi communities that is conducted in the leadership of dedes and in company with music.

<sup>23</sup> Gağan is known to be the last month of the year for Dersimis, and it represents the ending of the year. Celebrated in the local Dersimi culture in the past, it is almost a forgotten traditon at homeland.

<sup>24</sup> Newroz is the traditional welcoming of the spring for the Kurds and has diverse meanings for some other middle eastern societies in many respects.

In a similar way, they were symbolizing Newroz celebrations with an emphasis on its opponent characteristics to the authority, and organizing it in coordination with some Kurdish Alevi associations and German leftist parties. In this respect, during the events, they were revealing their potential ally organizations through host society and showing their presence in the host country's political life. In this way, the celebrations or activities were becoming the terrain of expressing their diasporic existence in the host society. According to this, it can be said that while they were creating their own actual homeland conditions by re-inventing their traditions during the celebrations, they were also attaching themselves to the host country's cultural and political atmosphere in a positive way in terms of "adaptation" to the host society. In return, German leftist parties were supporting some of the activities of the association and it was leading the association to have a positive image in the eyes of German people who were involving in with their activities.

In this context, the activities organized around the commemoration of 1938 events are worth stressing. The core group was organizing many activities such as panel discussions, conferences or film screenings in order to commemorate the 1938 events. Furthermore, they were evaluating the events that took place in Dersim as "a massacre", and asking the bill of the past from Turkish government with their petition drive (Where are the graves of our Seyyit's?) throughout Europe in coordination with European Dersim Asssociations Federations. With those kind of organizations, they were willing to carry a historical event into a transnational context and draw attention to the victim position of Dersim in Turkey's history. The handouts of one of the conferences, prepared both in Turkish and German, was exemplary to show this perception of organizers clearly.

Over 70.000 people, many of them with Alevi beliefs, Kirmanc (Zaza-Dımılı.), Armenians and Kurds were killed in Dersim (Middle- East Anatolia), burned alive or immured in caves. This applied for all population groups as well as all age categories of Dersim (children, older women and men)! The Republic of Turkey (Atatürk's modern Turkey as is it likes to be called by many Europeans) has been denying the genocide of the people of Dersim up until this day...

Furthermore, as much as they were trying to demonstrate the fact that 1938 events were a massacre in a transnational context, they were also using the past as a resource strategically to create a solidarity spirit or collective opinion around the association. At this moment, Dersimis around the community circle were showing their interest or awareness towards the events with their mass participation to the organizations. Since their parents or grandparents were the witnesses of the events and they grew up with the stories of this traumatic past, they were supporting the activities of BDC from their hearts. Accordingly, with their mass participation to the organizations, they were both remembering and refreshing their memories about the events inherited to them from their families. Thus, as BDC was touching to the sensitivities of Dersimi people emotionally, they were getting their support in general.

From this point of view, I can say that memory was playing a key role in the construction of a collective self consciousness among Dersimis around BDC. In this sense, the traumatic memory of 1938 was repeating itself unconsciously as an action or performance during the activities of the association, and it was becoming a principle ground for their identity formation. The more they were capable of remembering their selective past and culture, in a better way they were performing and re-inventing their homeland identity, which was shaping the construction of their diasporic existence in Berlin. According to this, it can be said that they were constructing their own community as far as they were capable of creating commonality on the basis of their past and traditions. In this respect, they were symbolizing the past and traditions in order to maintain their personal and family relations in diaspora. From this point of view, the community constituted around BDC was “a mental construct” (Cohen, 2000) rather than being “a structural community” (Cohen, 2000).

However, although they were constructing their own way of relations on the basis of re-invention of their traditions and past, it was leading BDC to be a kind of closed community in Berlin. They were mostly utilizing the association to

continue their small, face to face and family relations, rather than enlarging the association by considering mass Dersimi population in Berlin. According to this, creating their own social relations around the association, they were not welcoming other Dersimis and excluding them in one way or another.

In my opinion, at this moment, there was a significant gap between what the association founders were saying in the public space about the association's activities and targets, and what they were doing in general. Although they were pretending to represent Dersimis in Berlin in general, they were representing only a small group of Dersimis. Furthermore, they were not willing to organize cultural activities that might increase the number of members or get the attraction of other Dersimis around. In this sense, although they were asserting to make cultural activities for the continuity of local Dersim culture, they were not materializing it at all.

To illustrate, they were mostly mentioning that their mother tongue, Zazaki, was in danger and going to disappear, with reference to Unesco's 2009 "Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger" report<sup>25</sup>. In this way, they were creating an atmosphere as if their mother language was going to disappear in a close future, and there must be something done to save it. They were mostly talking about the necessity to open Zazaki language courses in the association in order not to let their mother tongue to die. However, opening a Zazaki language course did not come true for almost a year, just like some other organizations such as folk dance or baglamas (a basic instrument of local Dersim music) courses that might attract the attention of young generations and contribute to the transfer of the culture to the following generations.

Similarly, although they were always complaining about the absence of young Dersimis in the association, they were not providing any social and cultural

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<sup>25</sup> For further information about the loss of Zazaki, the report of Unesco is available at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00139> website.

facilities for the young people that might motivate them to visit the association on the regular basis. Since the activities held in the association was mostly addressing the homeland interests of middle aged or old Dersimis, the young Dersimis were mostly considering the association not worth visiting. For them, the association was not appealing to their interests and they were mostly evaluating the association to be a place only for some Dersimi families to come together. From this point of view, ironically, targeting the continuity of the local Dersim culture, BDC was not offering many facilities and activities for the following generations, whom might be the potential carriers of local Dersim culture in the future.

#### **5.4. CONCLUSION**

Presenting a place for Dersimi people to come together, there is no doubt that BDC provides an atmosphere for them in which they can keep their family networks and personal relations alive on the basis of coming from the same country of origin. From this point of view, it won't be exaggeration to evaluate BDC like "a big Dersimi family" constituting by the gatherings of different Dersimi families in Berlin. In this context, the role of the founder group is significant in both its establishment and shaping, in almost the past 15years time.

By establishing the association, the founder group has achieved to gather a group of Dersimi people who are sensitive to their homeland both mentally and physically. Furthermore, they have also contributed to maintenance of local Dersim culture in diaspora by organizing activities and events mostly based on the ground of their common origins and traditions. In this respect, it can be said that, the efforts of the core group and the high interests of Dersimi people have met under the roof of BDC. Furthermore, they have constructed "a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time" (Cohen 1997, 180) on the basis of "a collective memory and myth about the homeland" (Cohen 1997, 180) which might be thought in relation to Cohen's diaspora definition. In addition to this,

their homeland consciousnesses have fostered their “myth of return” to their homelands, which might come true with their retirements in the future.

In this context, as much as they are willing to return their homelands with the retirement, they also show their will to “adapt” into the culture of the host society, revealing itself during the celebrations symbolically. From this point of view, their efforts to integrate some of their traditions into the cultural and political atmosphere of the host society can be evaluated as “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life” (Cohen 1997, 180) potential in tolerant host society conditions. According to this, the association has a potential to become a melting pot for both traditional Dersim culture and the host society’s culture, if they continue to give importance to the unity of different cultures inside the association. However, they mostly tend to preserve and maintain their own ethnic and cultural boundaries in order to attach themselves into the politics of host society, which I will explain in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE BOUNDARIES OF DERSIM IDENTITY

#### AND DIASPORIC POLITICS

“We are multicultural, but I am mostly close with Dersimi people” S.

As I have explained in the previous chapters, Dersimi people have constructed their own community around BDC with reference to their country of origin. The family networks and personal relations on the basis of coming from the same country of origin have played a crucial role in the making of this unity in relation to their sensitivity and consciousness towards their homeland identities. From this point of view, it will be appropriate to consider Dersimis like “a big family” in the diaspora, as I have mentioned before. In this respect, using family metaphor can also provide us the opportunity to understand the making of Dersim identity in diaspora in a more clear way. At this moment, I agree with the ideas of Eugene Roosens (Roosens, in Vermeulen and Govers, 1994, 81-102) who is in search of combining the family metaphor with the boundary metaphor in the understanding of formation of immigrant’s ethnicity operationally.

From this point of view, I will try to shed light on Dersim identity by considering it like a family, in search of mapping its own boundaries. In this chapter, representing an area for Dersimis to practice their own boundaries, I will try to explore the interactions of Dersimis with the neighboring groups such as Alevis, Kurds, Turks and Germans specifically. In this way, how Dersimi people around Dersimi associations attempt to attach themselves into the politics of the host society on the basis of being a distinctive group will be presented to the reader.

## 6.1. DERSIM IDENTITY: RECONSIDERED IN DIASPORA

There is no doubt that moving from one place to another place has influenced the self perception of Dersimi people in general. In this sense, Dersimis were mostly considering the pre-migration period of their life to be surrounded with mostly Dersimi people in their hometowns, asserting that they have started to know different identities and cultures after they migrated from Dersim to Berlin. In fact, this perception was reflecting the general tendency of their interactions with new groups; it was also including a risk for us to miss the interactions of Dersimis with their neighboring communities when they had been living in Dersim, since it was one of the most emphasized points for them in their boundary making process in diaspora.

For instance, when I was making a deeper investigation about their interactions with some other different groups during their pre-migration term, they were mostly mentioning the existence of “Sunni” or “Shafite Sunni” Kurdish people in their hometowns whom they were perceiving as “strangers” or “others”. They were mostly telling me that they had been calling the hawkers (çerçi) or shepherds, visiting their hometowns for a short period of time (also praying to God and wearing different costumes comparing to local Dersimi people) as “Khur” {anonymous} in order to differ themselves from those temporary visitors. According to this, it can be said that “disturbing” the ordinary way of life in the region with their short term visits, “the Khurs” were representing the so called “outsiders” for Dersimis in their common memories.

In addition to this, after they migrated to Berlin, they have begun to meet with many different groups of people, with whom they did not have the possibility to interact before. Despite this, Dersimis have mostly tended to follow the path that the other immigrants coming from Turkey followed, and mostly located themselves through Turkish immigrant groups or communities<sup>26</sup>. In this way, as

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<sup>26</sup> By using Turkish immigrant, I refer to the people coming from Turkey, not Turkish ethnicity.

they have started to discover the cultural diversity among Turkish immigrant groups on one hand, they have also begun to question their own cultural origins on the other. According to this, they have started to be aware of their cultural distinctiveness by meeting with new immigrant groups, as demonstrated clearly by one of my informants;

I have started to ask myself the questions of who I am and where I am coming since 15-20 years. (...) I have a belief culture, differing from other communities. (...) We were speaking a different language, but I did not know why. (...) There was a Dersim event in the past, but it was a secret... A.

From this point of view, as much as Dersimis have started to be aware of their distinctive local culture at personal scale, they have also attempted to organize their awareness by gathering around BDC in the public space, as I have explained in the previous chapter. According to this, their local identity has become the tool of their self representation, and they have started to mark their differences from other immigrant communities by emphasizing their distinctive Dersimi culture or identity.

At this scale, the usage of two terms “Dersimcilik” (to be in ally with Dersimi people) and “Dersim Milliyetçiliği”(Dersim Nationalism) are worth stressing. The people, mostly in an outsider position to the Dersimi circles, were usually using those terms to explain the encouraging role of Dersimi people to support each other, and their opponent characteristics towards the other exterior groups. In this light, they were seeing Dersimi people to be in good cooperation with each other, and become destructive when they locate themselves inside some other different communities. For me, this outsider perception was fitting well to expose the loyalty of Dersimi people towards each other, which Dersimi people were just mentioning like “an ordinary will” that was making them closer to their co-ethnics in a natural way.

I feel myself happier when I am with my own folk. It is not because I exclude the other folks. But it is because I feel better when my mother tongue is spoken, or my local meal is cooked... Errr... I feel better in an environment when my own culture is practiced. I feel myself like I am in my hometown, and I feel better. A.

According to this, “feeling better” with their own, Dersimis were mostly in search of differing themselves from other groups. However, it was not easy for Dersimi people because of the fact that their homeland identity was embedded into so many ethnic, religious or national identities. Thus, it was mostly creating a negotiation atmosphere for Dersimi people when they were willing to differentiate themselves from other immigrant groups or communities in general.

First of all, it was the Turkish immigrant identity for Dersimi people to deal with in order to reveal their distinctiveness through other immigrant communities coming from Turkey. Being well aware and object of the stigmas about Turkish immigrants in Germany (mostly related with crime, backwardness, discrimination against women, Islamic fundamentalism and so on), Dersimis were mostly denying Turkish national and immigrant identity, and trying to show that they were a different ethnic group through Turkish immigrants. In this way, they were in search of escaping from the negative attitudes of German people, which they got used to since their arrival to the host society. Therefore, the featuring of the local Dersim identity can be thought in relation to the negative attitudes of native people towards Turkish immigrants which were leading Dersimi people to improve an inner sub-ethnic category in order to cope with this situation.

In this sense, they were mostly emphasizing their distinctive Alevi- Kızılbaş religious identity in order to distance themselves from both Turkish immigrant groups and “the negative” implications of Islam existing in the host society. Being in a religiously minority position in Turkey, they were mostly considering their religious identity outside of Islam, like a philosophy of life and in an “open minded” position towards the common European enlightenment values.

From this point of view, implicitly or explicitly, while they were marking the Muslim people as being potential “backward”, “conservative”, and “not capable of integrating” immigrants in the host society, on the other hand they were representing themselves as “more liberal” subjects, capable of showing

performance to “adapt” into the social life of host society in “a good way”. At this point, being appreciated in personal relations by German people was a welcomed situation for Dersimis, in which they were feeling that they were different from other Turkish immigrants as one of the woman informants was telling to me proudly;

When we talk about Turkish people, there is a negative situation here. We (she means people coming from Turkey) have tried to integrate here, but we could not (...) Despite this, my German friends are telling me that I am so different. In fact, I say that I don't have any different characteristics (talking in an ironic way); they are telling me that I am different. (...) For example, they were asking me if I can stay longer outside at night at first times... When I was saying; “Yes, I can stay without asking to my family”, it was amazing for them. (...) (In a similar way) when we talk about Turkey, they have so many prejudgments like the girls being forced to marry in an early age or all women being exposed to violence by the society.(...) However, since they have come to my house, get to know me and my family, they see that those prejudgments are not true for our community A.

According to this, Dersimi women were not hesitating to create a relatively “free woman image” in the public space mostly on the bases of their cultural or religious identity. Correspondingly, Dersimi men were also attaching themselves to this “relatively liberal” subjects discourse by explaining “the place of woman” to be more relaxed in their own community in general. Through this, both Dersimi men and women were using their religious identity and its liberal vision in the public space to create “a positive” Dersimi image in the minds of people, mostly the German ones. Thus, I can clearly say that, they were mostly constructing their relations with Germans by emphasizing their differences from other immigrant groups, and willing to get the acceptance of German people in their everyday personal relations.

In this respect, since being Alevi was including a “positive” content in terms of seeing self recognition in the host society, Dersimis were not hesitating to improve good relations with other Alevi people by considering them as their co-religionists. On the bases of this commonality, they were creating a kind of “we” category with the Alevi people, revealing itself in their everyday language when they were calling the other Alevis as “bizden” or “bizimkiler” (people from us) by

maintaining their Alevi-Kızılbaş and Dersimi clique position in their interactions. Therefore, they were mostly in search of empowering their relations with Alevi people and constructing an ally position with them, among the Turkish immigrant groups, in their social and institutional relations selectively.

To illustrate, I can say that, it was very common for me to see Dersimis in a good interaction with the Alevis of Hınız, Varto and Erzincan in their social relations, since there was a visible Alevi immigrant population from these provinces of Turkey in Berlin. As much as they were showing solidarity in their personal relations, they were also gathering around an umbrella Alevi association, Berlin Anatolian Alevis Culture Center- Cemevi (Cemhouse, hereafter Cemevi), representing their unity in the public space. Since each group was seeing Cemevi to be vital for the continuity of their religious identity, they were showing a mass participation to the activities of the association. According to this, it was clear that the common religious identity was making Alevis of different regions to become closer in Berlin.

There was a visible Dersimi population around Cemevi, and they were mostly considering the association to be “a second address” after BDC. In a similar way, it was offering Dersimis to practice the necessities of their religious identity inside larger and more heterogeneous Alevi groups. Also, since some of the members of BDC were also the members of Cemevi, the two associations were working in coordination with each other like fellow organizations. To sum up, it can be asserted that the unity around Cemevi was creating a friendly atmosphere for Dersimi people, in which they were not hesitating to become a part of a larger community by maintaining their distinctiveness.

Although Dersimi people were so clear about identifying their religious identity one the one hand, on the other hand, the same clarity was not existant when they were trying to identify or differentiate themselves on the basis of ethnicity. Being well aware of their distinctive culture in Dersim during their pre-migration term,

they were harshly rejecting to name themselves as Kurd or Zaza at first glance, which were also referring to the neighboring Sunni or Shafi'te Sunni Muslim groups in their hometowns. Due to this, they were mostly trying to explain their ethnic distinctiveness by giving reference to their grandparents' narratives and how they were differing themselves from the other communities in the older times.

During my interviews, when I was asking how they were expressing their ethnic identity, they were mostly shifting their language from Turkish to Zazaki and saying the same sentence which they got used to listen from their grandparents before, "Zonema Kırmancki, Ma Kırmanciye" (I speak Kırmancki, I am Kırmanci). For me, this language shift and reference to the old generations in order to explain their ethnicity was significant due to the fact that it was reflecting their efforts to categorize themselves as a distinctive ethnic group in diaspora. In this way, they were willing to identify themselves as "Kırmanci" which does not refer any defined ethnic group in the literature.

At this moment, being aware of this "problematic fact", they were mostly trying to solve "this dilemma" by considering their mother tongue as the sign of their ethnic distinctiveness, and asserting Zazaki to be an independent language rather than a dialect of Kurdish. From this point of view, they were mostly identifying themselves as Zazas contextually, since Zaza ethnicity was very well known in public space and academic circles.

Our mother tongue is known to be Zazaki. People know it in general. Due to this, we say that we are Zaza people. Z.

However, this situational identification was not solving the ethnic dilemma of Dersimi people at all, and they were still preserving their doubts about defining themselves as Zaza in discussions. As it has been mentioned before, since Zaza term was also referring to the Shafi'te Sunni people, they were not willing to be put in the same ethnic category with those people, whom they were not sharing a common group feeling in terms of their religious identity. According to this, since

their religious identity was cross cutting Zaza ethnicity, it was becoming confusing for Dersimi people to categorize themselves in the same ethnic category with Zazas, as one of my informants was telling me desperately.

We are all in contradiction... We are really living contradiction when we talk about race (he is using race instead of ethnicity). (...) When our old people were talking us in the past (about their ethnicity), they were saying that we were Kırmanci. (...) But right now, we start to say that we are Zaza. But I don't really know if we are Zaza or not. In terms of language it is possible, but other than that it is a contradiction. We are really in contradiction. N.

In this respect, the contradiction of Dersimi people about their ethnicity was creating a kind of atmosphere of negotiation for them, in which they were reconsidering or renegotiating their ethnic identity repeatedly. Thus, rather than being decisive, the discussions around ethnicity were creating a visible uncertain situation for Dersimis which was leading to an abundance of opinions about the ethnicity of Dersimis.

In this context, peculiarly in Berlin, while Dersimis around the association circle were mostly tending to accept Zaza identity by stressing their religious distinctiveness, on the other hand, there were also many Dersimis identifying themselves ethnically as Kurd or Turk. Due to this, it can be asserted that the discussions of ethnicity were fragmenting Dersimi people rather than uniting them around idea of one ethnicity. At this point, for me, the ethnic identification of Dersimis was open to change and take new forms in the light of those discussions in the future.

At this scale, it was Kurdish Nationalists who were willing to give a direction to the ethnicity debates of Dersimi people and making the situation much more complex with their political intervention to the issue. They were mostly expecting Dersimis to accept Kurdish ethnicity automatically, which was creating “a tension” between them and Dersimis not only in Berlin but also in Europe, gathering around some other Dersimi associations. Thus, showing the boundaries of Dersim identity in a political context, I will explain this “ethno- political

differentiation” or “gap” on the basis of Dersim ethnic identity in the following pages.

## **6.2. A GAP IN ETHNIC IDENTITY? : ONE DAY TWO FESTIVALS**

In fact, although Dersimi people around BDC were mostly telling their sympathies towards Kurdish people, and considering them as a folk struggling for their own ethnic recognition both in national and transnational scale; they were also trying to distance themselves from Kurds ethnically. Similar to rejecting Zaza and Turkish identity, Dersimis were mostly using their religious identity as a tool in the way of rejecting Kurdish ethnicity as well. As one of my informants has clearly told me, they were not seeing any common cultural ground between Kurds and Dersimis in general.

We have never said that we are Kurds. We have always said that we are Alevi. (...) The religious identities of Kurds and Zazas are almost the same. But ours is totally different. (...) Now no one can say that Dersimis are Kurds. They are so different from us. Hizbullah (a marginal Islamic organization known with its unidentified murders in Turkey in 1990s which it has committed in the name of Islam) is composed of Kurds also. Can you compare it with Dersimis? Z.

In addition to this, language difference was another step for Dersimis to reject Kurdishness, since they were not capable of communicating with Kurds in their own mother tongue. From this point of view, they were evaluating this situation to be the sign of not belonging to the same ethnic group.

When a Kurd talks in Kurdish, we don't understand even one word. Similarly, when we talk in our mother tongue, they don't understand us. H.

In this context, they were again referring to what their grandparent had been telling to them, due to the fact that they were lacking proof for their claims in any other academic or scientific level. According to this, they were mostly evaluating Kurds to be a group of people, whom their grandparents were calling as Khurs in the previous times, when they were living in Dersim. It can be asserted that the narratives of the old people, based on the denial of belonging to the neighboring

ethnic communities were playing a significant role, determining the boundaries of Dersim identity in diaspora.

The efforts of Dersimis to mark the other groups as “different ethnicities” can be thought to be operational in the way of constructing their own group identity, mostly based on coming from the same country of origin. In this respect, implicitly or explicitly, they were replacing the well known ethnicity categories with the cartographic imaginations, taking place of ethnic categories. Therefore, “being the child of Dersim” (a defined and ascribed cartographic category) or self identifications on the basis of coming from Dersim geography was becoming the main baseline for Dersimis, in which they were having chance to reject Turkish, Kurdish and Zaza ethnicities in different ways.

For example, while Dersimis were mostly differing themselves from Zazas (a relatively accepted ethnic identity) by calling themselves as “Dersim Zazaları” (the Zazas of Dersim), in a similar way, they were asserting that they do not have any common ground with Kurdish people, and rejecting Kurdish ethnic identity totally. Although these differing efforts were not disturbing Zaza people, Kurdish Nationalists were mostly considering this situation to be problematic since they were seeing Dersimis as a Kurdish group, having a distinctive religious culture in the Kurdish region of Turkey. According to this, for Kurdish Nationalists, Dersimis were in a kind of “identity crisis” {anonymous} in which they were rejecting “their Kurdish ethnicity” in relation to their political affiliations. And as much as they were distancing themselves from Kurdish ethnicity, they were also getting away from Kurdish Movement in general.

In this context, the intervention of Kurdish Nationalists was significant because of the fact that it was adding a political dimension to the ethnicity debates, and dividing Dersimis into two camps according to whether they support Kurdish Movement or not. In this respect, there was a visible tension around BDC which was revealing itself with the separation of a group of Dersimi from BDC, known

with their closeness to the some other Kurdish associations. The separating group was asserting that they do not to have chance to continue their participation in BDC, whereas, on the other hand, the core group of BDC was always explaining the separation in terms of their efforts for control over the association.

At this level, it was not coincidence that the clique group established another organization after they separated from BDC. Giving a more provocative name to the newly established organization, Dersim Freedom Initiative (DFI), they were willing to create an alternative formation for Dersimi people, which would be more interested in the current Kurdish politics in comparison to BDC. In this respect, they were defining their difference from BDC as being a “Kurdistani organization, signaling their interests on Kurdish politics and referring to the point that they see Dersim not as a specific locality, but a part of larger Kurdish totality.

Furthermore, it was also common for me to hear the claims of Dersimis around BDC that PKK was in search of getting the control of their association due to the fact that Kurds were willing to kurdify Dersimis ethno-politically in order to enlarge their national struggle. Whether the claims were true or not, for me, the obsession of Dersimis on the basis of “assimilation” or “kurdification” was an important moment for Dersimis, influencing both their self identifications, and relations with Kurdish people or Dersimis asserting to be Kurdish.

According to this, they were mostly considering the approval of Kurdish identity in relation to the sympathy towards PKK, and constructing “a distanced-closeness relation” with “Kurdishness” in general. In this context, while they were considering the success of Kurds in preserving their distinctive culture in national and transnational scale like “a role model” ; on the other hand, they were criticizing violent activities of PKK as being wrong, in order to attach themselves to the general public opinion in the host society. In this way, they were in search of assuring their “positive” immigrant group image in the public space by comparing themselves with the other Kurdish groups in Germany strategically.

At this stage, illustrating the so called “ethnic dilemma of Dersimis”, the organization of two Dersimi festivals in the same day by two different Dersimi groups is worth stressing. In fact, Dersimis had organized a Dersimi culture festival in Germany for three years in the leadership of European Dersim Associations Federation (hereafter Federation, since it was also the common usage), the unity of Dersimis around one culture festival was destroyed with the organization of another Dersimi festival in the fourth year of it, (13<sup>th</sup> of June 2009).

There were groups of people gathering around Haydar Işık, who organized another Dersim culture festival in Russelsheim in search of being alternative to the one the Federation was organizing in Bonn. At this stage, the organization of an alternative festival was reflecting the tension when it is thought in relation to the image or position of Haydar Işık both in Dersimi and Kurdish circles. Being a writer of Yeni Özgür Politika (New Free Politics) newspaper, known with its closeness to PKK, and the founder of Dersimi Yeniden İnşa Derneği (The Renovation of Dersim Association) in Germany, he was a significant figure for both Dersimi and Kurdish people due to the reason that he was inviting Dersimis to accept Kurdish identity in his writings. Furthermore, he was also criticizing the Federation so harshly for being in search of separating Dersimis from Kurdish struggle by making Dersim or Zaza nationalism.

From this point of view, the organization of another festival can be thought as the continuity of this “Kurdishness call” in another context, in which Haydar Işık and the circle around him were also becoming the players of “the same ethnicity game”. In this respect, while they were asserting the Kurdishness of Dersimis, they were also condemning the ideas and activities of the Federation. For them, the core group of Federation was in search of denying “Kurdish ethnicity”, and trying to impose their ideas on Dersimis with the help of Dersimi associations in Europe. According to this, by organizing a different activity in the same day, besides desiring to show their reactions against the Federation, they were also

willing to call Dersimis to make a decision about their ethnic confusions, and accept Kurdish ethnicity.

In this context, while the participation to the festivals were thought to be a moment of decision for Dersimis about their ethnicity by the organizer groups, “the ordinary” Dersimi people<sup>27</sup> were uncomfortable with the situation because of the fact that it was leading them to participate either one event or another. In this respect, they were mostly evaluating this situation to be “an arbitrary tension”, reflecting the interests of two different groups, being in search of entrepreneurial roles in ethnic politics, rather than reflecting the wills of Dersimi people in general. In this line, they were mostly stressing the potential dangers of dividing Dersimis into two poles, and criticizing the position of organizer groups to be in search of having the right to speak for Dersimi people in a transnational public space. As one of my critical informants was telling to me clearly;

The debates are like a play. It is like a play between two different groups (...) Dersim identity is like a pie. Different groups want to get their share from this pie. It is the fight of getting a share (...). They think that if they own Dersim identity, they will get the property of it. Ö.

Whereas my critical informant and many Dersimis were reluctant to be a side to those ethnicity debates and hesitating to participate neither one festival nor the other one, Dersimis around BDC and DFI were choosing to go to Bonn or Russelsheim to show their support to the groups which they were in an allies with. While BDC circle was going to Bonn and showing their mass support to the festival of the Federation, on the contrary, DFI circle (being relatively a smaller group) was following the path Haydar Işık was drawing, and participating to the festival in Russelsheim. Thus, it can be asserted that, the participation to the different organizations was representing the interests of two different Dersimi

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<sup>27</sup> I used the word “ordinary Dersimi people” in order to refer to people, who do not take a role in the organizations of the festivals, and represent relatively neutral viewpoint towards the debates around the ethnicity.

groups, which are not possible to generalize as the tensions of all Dersimis, living in Berlin Dersim diaspora.

Despite this fact, those two groups were mostly tending to generalize their tensions as if the tensions belonged to all Dersimis, and trying to position themselves according to those tensions. In this respect, it was clear that the so called “gap in Dersim ethnicity” or “the identity crisis of Dersimis” were the results or the products of the gap between two groups, emerging from the different ways of looking at the Dersim ethnicity situationally. According to this, it can be said that being a member of a Dersimi organization, working for it, or belonging to the association circle were creating appropriate conditions for some Dersimi people, in which they were acting as if they have right to speak or act in the name of all Dersimis.

At this level, one of the important questions of anthropology “who is speaking for whom” needs to be answered in order to understand this Dersim identity making process more clearly. For me, although those groups were acting in the name of Dersimi population and seeing themselves as potential carriers of Dersim identity or ethnicity, they were not representing the majority of Dersim population at all, due to the fact that only a small portion of Dersimis were gathering around those groups, as I have mentioned before. In addition to this, since they were not in search of enlarging their groups among other Dersimis, they were also not showing any potential to direct or lead to the popular will of the mass Dersimi population paradoxically. Thus, it can be said that, the efforts of creating a gap on the basis of Kurdishness was reflecting the wills of some Dersimi groups, rather than reflecting the wills of Dersimi people in general.

However, one way or another, the debates around Kurdishness were creating an exemplary condition for Dersimi people in which they were having a chance to practice the margins of their ethnic borders in an ethno-political scale. In this respect, Dersimis around BDC were mostly taking a stand against accepting the

Kurdish identity, and choosing to follow the myth which had been produced on the basis of coming from the same country of origin. In this way, they were not only getting away from the “negative” implications of Kurdishness on the basis of supporting PKK, they were also opening new maneuver areas for themselves by giving priority to their homeland identities.

From this point of view, it can be asserted that, the attitudes of Dersimis towards other immigrant groups coming from Turkey, were highly relevant with the social and political atmosphere in the host country. For example, as it has been mentioned above, they were constructing good relations with the other Alevi communities, whereas they were mostly rejecting to create togetherness with Turkish, Kurdish and Islamic circles. According to this, it can be said that, the degree of acceptance of the neighboring immigrant groups in the host society in terms of adaptation was a significant criteria for Dersimi people, shaping their selective stance in their social relations since they were in search of highly expected self recognition in the host society.

In this context, although they were featuring the “positive” sides of their Alevi religious identity and mostly identifying themselves with their religious identity, they were also marking the “negative” sides of the other immigrant groups in order to distance themselves from those groups as far as they could. In this respect, it was so common for me to hear stories from Dersimis during my fieldwork about how Turkish Islamist groups were organizing themselves in Europe “dangerously”, or how Kurdish Nationalist groups were insisting on their “provocative” or “terrorist” activities in Germany. Thus, as they were marking or labeling the other groups in a negative way, they were also trying to fulfill their “singular”, “harmless” and “distinctive” immigrant group position in the host society in general.

From this point of view, the continuity in ethnic or local belonging to the homeland identity can be thought as a “strategy” for Dersimi people, in which

they were having chance to depict a profile of “good immigrant” as “a group of Dersimi people” in the host society. In this sense, according to me, they were mostly tending to preserve their cultural difference from other immigrant groups in order to maintain this position strategically, which was also shaping the boundaries of Dersim identity in general. Thus, it can be said that, there was a strong interconnectedness between maintenance of cultural difference and their diasporic existence, in which the former was becoming both the reason and the condition of the latter one.

### **6.3. CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that it is not easy to make a clear cut self definition for Dersimi people about their ethnic identities, since the distinctive Dersim culture is cross cutting so many different identities such as Zaza, Kurd and Turk at first glance. Showing a multi- layered characteristic, it is almost impossible for Dersimis to meet on a common ground to decide on their ethnic identity which is creating so many confusions or debates around Dersimi circles, as it has been presented above. According to this, it can be said that rather than having clear cut boundaries, Dersim identity shows a blurred and flexible characteristic when the ongoing debates about Dersim ethnic identity in Berlin specificity is considered.

According to me, rather than looking for a clear cut boundary definition about Dersim identity, it will be better to consider the margins of the debates, and consider what Dersim identity does not refer to in order to understand this identity making process of Dersimis, mostly based on rejections of neighboring identities highly situationally. In this respect, I can say that in the first place Dersim identity does not refer to Zaza identity since Zaza people differ from Dersimis religiously. Despite this, having a similar mother tongue and no equivalent term to refer to Kırmanci (a term stressing their cultural difference in Zazaki), they prefer to identify themselves as the “Zazas of Dersim” signifying their cultural difference from Zazas in reference to their hometown. Second, Dersim identity does not refer

to being “Kurdish” for most of the Dersimis because of the fact that they perceive Kurdish identity to cover Sunni Islam and have “negative” politic implications on the basis of supporting PKK, As a last point, in a similar way, they also hesitate to identify themselves as Turkish since they do not belong to Turkish ethnicity and it embraces so many “negative” implications in terms of “adaptation” in the host society.

In this sense, it is clear that, by rejecting those ethnicities mentioned above, Dersimis do not only make a simple rejection on ethnicity, but also attempt to avoid the possible “negative” implications of those ethnicities which might potentially lead them to be labeled the same way in the host society conditions. Thus, they prefer to make an emphasis on their distinctive religious identity, having a relatively “positive” and “liberal” image in the host society, in order to differ themselves from those groups in general.

In line with this, I will assert that, they build up their ethnic boundaries mostly on the basis of their attempts on self recognition in the host society and utilize ethnicity as a strategy in the way of making it. In this way, as much as they preserve their own distinctive stands in the host society; they also want to locate themselves into the universe of diasporic politics as being “good sample” of immigrants, which might potentially get the support of the public opinion from the host society and provide them a relatively advantageous position in the host land. To sum up, it can be asserted that it seems as the boundary- construction process of Dersimis will be mostly shaped around these circumstances in the future, which might get its energy from the tension between their efforts to distance themselves from other immigrant communities and their will to get self recognition in the host society.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The fieldwork for this study has focused on a group of Dersimi people gathered around BDC, who have been living in Berlin as immigrants for a few decades. The fieldwork findings lead me to consider the existence of those Dersimi people in terms of diaspora concept, which might help us to understand the social reality of those people in a deeper way. Since they come from a small city of Turkey, and tend to maintain their distinctive hometown culture at a transnational scale, the usage of the term seems to provide us the opportunity to make contrast between the periods of pre-migration and post migration of the immigrants, which have a significant constitutive role in the making of immigrant identity and their social relations in general.

In this respect, Dersimi people around BDC can be regarded as diaspora, as I described and discussed in the previous chapters. The previous chapters have also demonstrated that it is possible to call the situation of Dersimi people in Berlin around BDC circle in the light of Cohen's definition of diaspora, and its categorical features. From this categorical point of view, Dersimis adhere to the conditions of being a diaspora except having troubled relations with the host society. Despite this, they fulfill the other conditions, and represent an image of diaspora on the basis of coming from the same country of origin.

In addition to this, in fact Dersimi people in Berlin fit with most of the figures of the conditions of being diaspora, time will show us whether they might be considered as a diaspora like some other well rooted classical diasporas such as Armenians, Gypsies or Jews or etc in the future. In this respect, comparing to those groups, the shorter period of Dersimis' stay in the host society should be

kept in mind while the diasporic existence of Dersimis in Berlin considered. From this point of view, for me, Dersimis in Berlin show a relatively ineffective existence as a diaspora group when it is thought with their limited intervention to the diaspora politics in the host society.

In relation to this, the role of the leading group is significant in the making of Dersim diaspora in Berlin. As it has been presented in chapter 5, the establishment of a homeland association, BDC, was almost impossible without the mass efforts of the core/ leading group. However, throughout the years, they have created a negative atmosphere around the association which has resulted with the decreasing interests of Dersimis towards their diaspora organizations. From this point of view, if the decreasing interest of Dersimi people towards their homeland association persists, it might lead Dersim diaspora to disappear over time. In a similar way, the lack of future generations (being potential carriers of the culture) around BDC circle can also be thought as the sign of the similar tendency. Since young Dersimis do not show a specific interest to their homeland culture, they might be accepted in the host society conditions and assimilated, rather than becoming the inheritor of specific Dersim culture at abroad.

At this moment, it is a critical fact that, (old) Dersimis were very well aware of this possibility of assimilation for the next generations, and they were mostly giving the impression that they accepted this situation as an unavoidable process which the following generations will experience in the future. From this point of view, the fact that their children will not continue the life of their ascendants is not problematic for Dersimi people. Thus, they were mostly presenting their homeland cultures symbolically rather than constructing a systematic teaching mechanism like folklore or language courses, which might also possibly end the diasporic existence of Dersimis with the coming generations.

In this context, it seems to me that time and the responses of the following generations towards their ancestral culture will determine the continuity of Dersim

diaspora in the future. According to this, there are three possibilities which might come true in relation to this situation. First, the following generations may be highly assimilated, and forget the culture of ascendants totally; second and surprisingly, they might give importance to the distinctive Dersim culture and work for the continuity of their ascribed cultural identity by marginalizing their homeland identity; and third, they might unify some sides of their Dersim culture and articulate them contextually with the Western values, and enrich social life in the host society this way. In my opinion, the attitudes of the older Dersimis and the responses of the future generations towards their homeland identity mostly foster this tendency, which might also lead Dersim diaspora to improve a kind of dual belonging to both homeland and hostland culture.

Furthermore, since they consider their homeland identity like a baseline on which they might build up their hostland identity, the formation of a possible Dersim diaspora will be mostly based on this idea of dual belonging. In this way, as much as they preserve their own culture symbolically, they might also have chance to attach themselves to the cultural practices of the host society. Their efforts to distinct themselves from other immigrant communities is one of the results of these efforts in which Dersimis might become “a good example” of adaptation in the host society on the basis of preserving their distinctive culture symbolically. From this point of view, the self identifications of Dersimis as a distinctive group seem to continue in the future due to the fact that it is an acceptable situation in the host society conditions.

In this respect, social and political atmosphere in the host country is an important moment for Dersimis, which may support or weaken their wills to construct a visible diaspora in time. For example, although German government supports the association by providing them the association building and some other governmental aids; they can also use the same power to close the association, if they do not support the activities of the association. Thus, the continuity of

Dersim diaspora highly depends on the permission of the government of host society government and its immigration policies in general.

In addition to this, xenophobia, discrimination and racism in the host society are important factors which might influence the shaping of Dersim diaspora in the future. Although Dersimis mostly perceive their existence as being a part of a cultural diversity in Berlin by attaching themselves to the multiculturalism discourses; they are still well aware of the fact that they experience some discrimination and racism practices in their social relations with Germans deep down. According to this, the volume of the hospitality or hostility which they might be exposed in the host society will play a crucial role in the making of Dersim diaspora.

As much as the social and political conditions in the host society, the relations of Dersimis with the country of origin might also play a crucial role in the formation of Dersim diaspora in Berlin. As I have explained before, Dersimis have very close interactions with their homelands on the basis of their family relations and informal networks. They also tend to keep their relations fresh with their regular and frequent visits, although their visits to their homeland mostly possible in their vocation times. Despite this, they were mostly relating themselves to the problems or the issues of Dersim, and showing their interests in their homeland by gathering around homeland association in general.

In this context, it was very common for me to witness that an event happening in Dersim was echoing around BDC circle with a great impact several times, and Dersimis around BDC were mostly getting involved with the issues about Dersim and Dersim identity in a deeper way. To illustrate, they were following the decreasing conflict situation in Dersim in the recent years, and making their re-migration plans with the retirement by keeping the current developments in Dersim always in mind. In this way, they were mostly giving the impression that they might contribute to the renovation of their hometowns in the near future, if

the conflict situation ends in Dersim permanently. Therefore, it can be said that, homeland interests of Dersimis were not only sourcing from the cultural stocks of diaspora people inherited from their pre-migration lives, but their current interactions with the homeland was also shaping it in a way. Thus, as long as the interests of Dersim diaspora in their homelands continue, it seems that it will influence the way the diaspora might evolve in the future.

In this context, Dersim diaspora has also potential to get involved in the current politics on the basis of Dersim locality in a transnational scale, since Dersimi people have improved a visible homeland consciousness throughout the years abroad. In relation to their homeland affiliations, they mostly consider themselves to be one of the sides of the debates around Dersim cultural identity, and in a way attempt to intervene them. At this stage, the efforts of the Federation are worth stressing, due to the fact that they reflect the wills of a group of Dersimi people who are in search of being effective agents in transnational politics. Their campaigns to ask the bills of 1938 events from Turkish government or their will to create a distinctive cultural Dersim identity in Europe and such can be evaluated as the traces of their efforts to become important actors on the basis of Dersim locality implicitly.

Correspondingly, the core group of BDC shares almost the similar will with the Federation, revealing itself with their similar activities and ally position of them with the Federation in the public space. Despite this, since both groups are not capable of getting the mass support of Dersimi people, their attempts are mostly confined to reflecting their own group will rather than reflecting the common voice of the Dersimi people in general. If the leading groups around the diaspora organizations achieve to unite their own group wills with the expectations of the mass Dersimi populations; they can take a visible support of Dersimis behind, which might lead to the construction of a distinctive Dersimi community in Berlin, giving priority to their homeland identity in their social and political life.

In this context, the social and political changes in the country of origin might play a crucial role that might determine Dersim diaspora's participation into the transnational politics. According to me, as much as the influence on diaspora from the homeland; they have also potential to influence the homeland back with their highly motivated political orientation and matured homeland consciousness.

To illustrate, it is a well known fact that the democratization of Turkey in the name of "açılım" (opening) policies has recently started to give opportunity to the suppressed groups in Turkey to voice their rights in the public space. Like the other minority groups, Dersimis in Turkey have also begun to defend their cultural rights and improve consciousness about their cultural identity and past which might be named as "a revival of consciousness" (Beşikçi, 2010, 6), pointed out by İsmail Beşikçi before. In this sense, in my opinion, the participation of Dersim diaspora to this revival process is possible, if the diaspora organizations manage to attach themselves into this existing situation in Turkey in a supportive way. Furthermore, the diaspora might play a driving force role with their highly developed ethnic and religious consciousness, and contribute to the democratization of Turkey in a positive way, if this possibility comes true in the future.

At this level, it can be concluded that the social and political conditions in both country of origin and the country of settlement play a significant role in the making of Dersim identity in a transnational context. It is not possible to ignore neither the former variable nor the latter one in the understanding of this transnational existence due to the continuous relationship of Dersimi immigrants with their homeland in the host country conditions. In this context, the concept of diaspora presents us the opportunity to comprehend such relationality in a wider perspective, in which the construction of Dersim identity in a transnational scale and the organization of it mostly rely on.

In addition to this, the results of this study (mostly limited with the Berlin case) have also indicated that it is possible to use diaspora concept as an analytical tool in the way of exploring so many other Dersimi communities in Europe which are also dispersed from their country of origin in a similar way. In this sense, it should be kept in mind from the Berlin case that, Dersimis mostly tend to utilize their diasporic presence in the host society in order to stabilize their image of “good immigrant” profile, rather than being a problem in the way of integration to the country of settlement. According to this, for me, this tendency also confirms the fact that being a diaspora does not necessarily mean to be an obstacle in the way of integration. From this point of view, I have mostly presented a positive outlook about Dersim diaspora in Berlin, being aware of necessity to make further studies in order to understand different tendencies of Dersim diasporas in a wider perspective. In this way, the motivation behind the self identifications of Dersimis on the basis of their homeland identity might be understood in a better way.

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## **APPENDIX:**

### **THE GENERAL PROFILES OF THE INTERVIEWEES**

**Case no: F01:** Immigrant. A. was born in a village of Dersim (old Peri, new Akpazar-Mazgirt) in 1967. It was also the same year her father had gone to Germany as a guest worker. She lived with her grandparents until she was 14 years old in Peri. In 1980, her father took her to Germany when she was a student in middle school. After coming to Berlin, she went to language course for one year, and then continued to Hauptchule (middle school) in Berlin. She took courses to be a nurse and now she is working as a nurse in a hospital. After coming to Germany, she married with an Alevi man from Çorum when she was 18 years old. Now she is widow and living with her two children.

**Case no: M01:** Immigrant. N. was born in a village of Dersim (Güzelpınar-Nazimiye) in 1964. He went to primary school, middle and high school in Nazimiye. After graduating from high school, he worked in General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works (DSİ) as a worker for one year. Then he worked as a farmer for two years in his town in 1982-1983. In 1988, he migrated to Istanbul in search of work and stayed in Alibeyköy, İstanbul for almost one year. His sister in Germany invited him to go to Germany and he went to Germany in 1990. He engaged in the same year with a Frankfurt borned, Erzincan- Tercan originated, and Zazaki talking woman. After the engagement, he came back to Istanbul to complete his documents to migrate to Germany and then he migrated the next year. After the migration to Germany, he worked in so many cleaning companies as a worker. And still he works in the same job. He has two children.

**Case no: F02:** Immigrant. F. was born in a village of Dersim (Nazimiye- Ballica) in 1966. She lived in Ballica until she was five years old. She went to primary, middle and high school in Nazimiye. After the high school, she migrated to İzmir

with her family in search of work in 1985. Living almost ten years in İzmir, she migrated to Berlin in 1995 in order to look after her uncle who was ill those times. She was also hoping to continue university in Germany with her migration. But she began to work rather than continuing her education. She worked several jobs such as cleaning worker, nurse assistant in different periods of her stay in Berlin. Lastly, she has been working in a state office in an advisor position for the unemployed people. She is single and living alone.

**Case no: M02:** Citizen. C. was born in Duisburg in 1983. He lived in Duisburg until he was seven years old. Then as a family they migrated to Wuppertal. He was living in Wuppertal since last year. He got a job education on being latheman and he was working a latheman when the interview was made. He was also musician and making folk and protest music in some activities or events for different associations. He was engaged with a Dersimi girl who was the daughter of a well known family around the association circle.

**Case no: F03:** Immigrant. K. was born in a village of Gümüşhane (Kelkit-Akdağ). Although she was not from Dersim, her husband was from Dersim and she was joining to the activities around the association most of the time. Her mother tongue was Zazaki and she was also Alevi like other Dersimi people. She came to Germany when she was 13years old. She graduated from primary school in Turkey and then did not continue to go to school. After she came to Berlin, she took job education about looking after old people. She was not working since she was in holiday with the excuse of having baby when the interview was done. She had four children.

**Case no: M03:** Immigrant. U. was born in one of the villages of Dersim so close to today's city center (Mameki- Vankök) in 1959. He stayed in Dersim city center until 1975. Then he lived in some cities of Turkey such as Urfa, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep and Elazığ because of his political activities. He was imprisoned when

he was 17 years old because of his political activities between 1977 and 1983. He escaped to abroad due to political reasons after he was released from the prison.

**Case no: F04:** Immigrant. S. was born in one of the villages of Dersim (Hozat) in 1964. She graduated from primary school in there. She moved to Berlin in 1979 where her parents had come in 1960s. She experienced two marriages and worked in so many jobs as worker. She began to make paintings since two-three years before in an amateur way. She still draws paintings about Dersim. In her paintings, she was mostly inspired from her past memories in Dersim with a great longing.

**Case no: M04:** Immigrant. Ö. was born in one of the villages of Dersim (Ovacık-Akyay) in 1977. He lived in Ovacık until he graduated from high school in Ovacık. Also, in his childhood, he also lived in Elazığ for two years. In 1996, he migrated two İstanbul to continue his education with a family migration. After than, he studied on Economics in Kütahya in Dumlupınar University. He got his master degree from Istanbul Commerce University. After he graduated, he migrated to Malta in order not to go to military service in Turkey in 2005. In 2007, he came to Berlin and made a marriage with his cousin. He was learning German and looking for the ways to do phd after fulfilling language proficiency.

**Case no: F05:** Immigrant. S. was born in one of the villages of Dersim (Pülümür) in 1967. She finished primary school in Pülümür. She did not continue to her education later on and married in Turkey. She migrated to Istanbul in 1989 with her family. In Istanbul, she worked in garment industry in Istanbul until 1992. In the same year, as a family they went to Germany as tourists. After the migration, they became refugees for a while. Afterwards, they got residence permit and lived in Berlin. She worked in restaurants, wedding rooms as a worker. She had a child.

**Case no: M05:** Immigrant. K. was born in one of the villages of Dersim (Nazimiye- Büyükköy) in 1953. He lived in Dersim and went to school there. He married in 1978. He migrated to Germany in 1979. The next year, he began to

work as a waiter. After almost 9 years, he has started to work in the senate of a syndicate as a worker. He had three children.

**Case no: F06:** Immigrant. S. was born in Kocakoç- Mirzali (old Pah) village of Dersim in 1966. Her parents came to Germany as guest workers in 1968. In fact she had nine siblings; she lived alone with her grandparents in Dersim until she was 13-14 years old. She went just primary school in Dersim. It was 1978 when she came to Duisburg and began to know other family members of her. She married with a relative of her (cousin) when she was 21 years old and than moved to Berlin with her husband. After she came to Germany, she worked in a small factory producing sausage and in a wool shop as a seller. Afterwards, she opened her own patisserie and worked there two years. Due to some illnesses of her, she did not continue to work and she was unemployed when the interview was done.

**Case no: M06:** Immigrant. İ. was born in Kocakoç- Mirzali (old Pah) village of Dersim. He went to primary school in there. In fact his parents were worker in Germant, his uncle took care of him in those years in Turkey. He went to primary school in Dersim, middle school in Ankara, and high school in Elazığ. The moving of his uncle was the reason why he changed so many school and cities in his life in Turkey. He did not graduate from high school and in the second year of it he left the school. He migrated to Berlin in 1979 to unite with his family. He married with a Dersimi woman in 1986. She worked in a car factory as a worker for 25 years and retired from his job since 2002 because of his illness.

**Case no: F07:** Immigrant. N. was born in one of the villages of Dersim Pülümür in 1978. Her parents were guest worker and then took her in 1990s. After she came to Berlin, she worked in several jobs as a worker. She was single and working in a restaurant when the interview was made.

**Case no: M07:** Immigrant. Y. was born in Çığda village of Dersim in 1965. He went to military service in 1985. In 1987, he married with his cousin who was living in Germany. In fact they got married; he continued to live in Dersim until

1991. He worked as taxi and minibus driver in Dersim. He had five children from his marriage. All the children of him were born in Berlin. He was working in a project of Berlin Dersim Community and earning his life in this way, when the interview was done.

**Case no: M08:** Immigrant. Z. was born in Dersim in 1953. He went to primary, middle and high school in Dersim, in the city center. He worked as a teacher in Dersim for six months. Then he went to Germany as a student. He could not effort to be student in Berlin due to economic reasons. He was engaged with a Dersimi woman when he was in Dersim whose parents were guest worker. After moving to Berlin, they got married. He began to work in a cleaning company as a worker between 1981 and 1985. In 1985, he opened a Turkish coffee house with the name of Club 62(the postal code of Dersim) and worked there until 1990. When the interview was made, he was working in a hospital as a worker. He had five children.

**Case no: M09:** Immigrant. K. was born in one of the villages of Kütahya (Simav-Kırkkavak) in 1947. He was a son of expelled Dersimi family after 1927-38 events. As a family, they returned to Dersim(city center) back in the same year he was born. He finished primary school and then worked as a tailor between 1956 and 1972 in Dersim. He was owning his own shop there. He married with a Dersimi woman in 1964. The brother of her husband was a guest worker and took her to Berlin in 1972. Next year, he was asked to migrate to Berlin. In 1973, he came to Berlin with a tourist visa first time and turned back later on. Then he made work application to Germany and when his application was accepted, he migrated to Berlin in 1973. He worked as a butcher for five years after he came to Berlin. Afterwards, he worked as a gardener in a gas company for two years, and then started to work in a hospital as a worker until 2008. When the interview was done, he was retired from his job in hospital. He had three children.

**Case no: M10:** Immigrant. K. was born in a village of Dersim (old Veneriç, new Suvat) in 1958. He finished primary school in Dersim, afterwards, they migrated to Adana as a family for a few years. He finished middle school in Adana and then remigrated to Dersim. He finished high school in Dersim. He started to study in Chemistry department in Erzurum Atatürk University. He went to Germany as a student in 1976 with the help of his brother whom came before. He worked in a ship company and visited so many countries such as Morocco and Algeria. Then he worked in several jobs as a worker. In 1986, he began to work as building contractor and make money by organizing Dersimi nights through Europe. He married with his cousin and had 2 children.

**Case no: M11:** Illegal immigrant without any paper. C. was born in a village of Dersim (Nazimiye-Dağlıbahçe) in 1971. He stayed in Dersim until he was 18 years old. He went to primary, middle and high school in Dersim. He migrated to Istanbul with his family. He worked in the family's own electronic shop and coffee in those years. In 2002, he went to Europe and stayed in Basel for one year, Amsterdam for two years, and then came to Berlin in 2005. He was also musician in Istanbul making folk music. He was still playing in some organizations and making money in this way. Also his family in Berlin was supporting him economically in Berlin. He was single.

**Case no: M12:** Citizen. E. was born in Berlin. He was a son of a guest worker family. His father came to Berlin in 1968 and his mother came in 1971. His uncles and his cousins were also living in Berlin. He studied industry engineering and began to work as a job consultant in a project in 2008. he was still working in this project when the interview was done. He was married

**Case no: M 13:** Refugee. C. was born in a village of Dersim(Ovacık) in 1951. After graduating from high school he became a teacher in Dersim. He worked as a teacher for seven years. He went to Germany with a tourist visa in 1979 due to the fact that he experienced some political problems in Dersim. Then he made

application for asylum in Germany and got it in a few years. He worked in so many Turkish- Leftist immigrant associations. When the interview was made, he was working in a project in Berlin Dersim Community. He was married with the children.