

Humor and Peace in Kars

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Abstract This anthropological research performed with different groups living in Kars, Turkey which are known as Yerli, Azeri, Kurds, Terekeme, Molokan and Alevi. Turkey is a very sensitive region between the Middle East and Europe. The presence of ethnic groups not only provides cultural wealth but also causes tension from time to time. Kars is a city with a lot of ethnic diversity, but nevertheless it is a city where tensions are least experienced. In Kars, unlike other places, they seem to live in peace. Therefore this city was chosen for the study. The goal was to understand this silence. The research method used for the study was in-depth interview and in-depth interviews were done with 13 people between the ages of 50-80 from each group. However, sometimes during negotiations someone else like a friend or a relative became a better source. At the end of the study, it was observed that humor was a means to emphasize the differences of different groups. It was noticed that the mutual dislike and/or superior properties of the groups were highlighted through jokes and funny stories. Funny stories had been told during dinners at the houses, at the large dining tables, even at formal dining tables of local and administrative managers. Food is a part of the culture, and important in developing social bonds. It is thought that, the parser effects of humor are destroyed by taking the unifying power of food. It is thought that, the power of food soften the situation without creating conflict.

Keywords Humor, Culture, Kars, Ethnic Humor

1. Introduction

Humor is defined as a kind of literature, irony that reveals the amusing aspects of the truth, irony which aim to amuse, make laugh and joke with someone's behavior without hurting them [1]. Societies live their identity and values and keep them alive through cultural memory.

The individual and the community are sometimes nourished from the cultural memory in all areas and disciplines from humor to theater, sociology to ethnology, brand culture to advertising, written press to electronic culture environment, sometimes knowingly and

unknowingly [2].

The definition of the memory that provides the necessary cultural accumulation for future generations is also given in the dictionary: The power to consciously keep in mind the things that have been learned or experienced, and their relations concerned with the past [3]. Humor, which has functions such as protest, socialization, tension reduction, criticism and tolerance besides entertainment and entertaining, is an important component of human cultivation process.

Freud, an Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst, describes the joke as a social process that gives an idea of social life in the introductory part of his book on jokes [4].

According to Collinson, behind the smile is the other, and at the same time your own representation. The funny element, does not wipe out the suppressed emotion, but it reduces its weight [5].

Radcliffe-Brown says that societies are integrated systems, and these systems work like complex organisms. Radcliffe-Brown, in his study of joking relations among family, relatives and tribes in Africa, says that the relationship established with humor has reduced the hostility and that the humor is the politically correct way of communicating the message. The most important result of studying according to Radcliffe-Brown is; Mockery, mocking, etc. are a combination of friendship and enmity [6].

Bergson says that laughter always comes together with a group. When people in a community tell something to each other and laugh, you cannot laugh at what is told if you cannot feel yourself in that group. During a sermon where everyone torn away, they asked a man why he wasn't crying, and he said *I am foreigner here*. This man's thought about crying will be more accurate about laughing. Though it was assumed to be openhearted, laughter, real or imaginary, is an agreement with other laughs, almost a crime partnership [7].

People laugh at what is different from them. They do this to feed their self-confidence and implicit hidden threats of diversity. This type of humor is also the most effective and immoral weapon in the human memory, is associated with social competition and power [8].

It has been found that humor also expresses concerns and dissatisfaction with the accelerated changes that the eastern societies had to live. Humor is often a way of conveying a

message that cannot be expressed in another way in societies where taboos are permanent, prohibitions are abundant, censorship and self-censor are dominant [9].

Although there is a debate among scholars to what extent ethnic humor represents racism or hatred, it seems that there is a general agreement that ethnocentrism and prejudice are major sources of ethnic jokes [10]. Research also has shown that ethnocentrism and social identity are central to ethnic prejudice [11]. Therefore, it is crucial to include this variable in studying people's attitude toward ethnic jokes. In a study with 500 students from ten different high schools in Iran, the social indicators of ethnic humor were examined. In the article published at the end of this study, it was found that the ethnic jokes are not only funny and laughing, but also jokes have meaningful a relation with ethnocentrism felt against the outer groups, authority, alienation, socio-economic status [12].

Ethnocentrism is an important source of humor for food and eating habits. When humor and laughter, which are one of the most important features that distinguish human from other living things, are related to different cultures, they also focus on the whole culture, politics and ideology.

Berger says that ethnic humor is important for understanding how the oppositions between within and outside the group are working [13]. The reason for the existence of ethnic jokes is that they separate the groups. It has the functions of showing the person outside the narrator worthless and strengthening the identity of the person within the group. Ethnic humor is based on oppositions and is therefore limited. These oppositions are used as tools to facilitate the function of disdain and humiliation. These also allow the user to feel smarter and superior. One of the limited issues of ethnic humor is flexibility of the language and is based on the misuse of the language. Another issue is stinginess. In the world, as is generally known, Scots and Jews are known for their stinginess, and there are many jokes and stories about them. Another issue is to make a fool of somebody. Unsatisfied group is charged with negative qualities such as stupidity, late understanding, folly, ignorance [2]. In many societies there are groups that are described as stupid. According to Raskin, the Polish in America, the Irish in Britain, the Belgians in the Netherlands, the Norwegians in Sweden, and the Ukrainians in Western Canada are considered fools [14]. In addition, being cunning and sharp is another topic. However, when compared to stinginess and stupidity, it is not a characteristic which is not wanted, though not very clear.

2. Material and Method

At the beginning it was targeted to investigate the unexpected silence of this city in which different ethnic groups are living. This article is the humor-related part of that anthropological study. The goal was to understand living habits of the ethnic groups, Yerli, Azeri, Kurdish, Terekeme,

Molokan and Turkmen communities in the research area. The study conducted between 2009 and 2013 examined the daily life cycles of these groups living in the region.

Any curious person may be able to make observations temporarily in different communities, but in the field work in anthropological research, they must live in their lives for months with the people at the site of the researcher. The researcher should live with them in their natural environment until they forget that the researcher is a stranger, so that she can observe their most natural and true state.

Participatory observation method was used in this study. In addition to this, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 people. The criteria used are the choices of the interviewees are these people's ages, their status in the community, hierarchy. It is important for the interviewee to know both the past and the current life. For this reason, the age range of 40-80 years is considered appropriate.

2.1. Participatory Observation

In this method, the objective is to be close enough to allow the understanding of the phenomenon researched. It is desirable that anthropologists remain like an outsider in terms of objectivity, but are asked to live like one of them to make the right perception during the study.

During and after the study, communication with the connected persons has not been interrupted and information about the developments in the area has been streamed. The interviews with people reproachful about the lack of interest of the state, unemployment and economic problems started with the topic of politics and then turned into the topic of the research.

As there was need to study without bothering the community, by getting closer but saving the distance, care was taken on clothes and makeup, and attention was shown not to wear flashy and colorful clothes, high heels. At the interviews held at the houses, it was tried to sit at the tables that are appropriate to their order, to eat the same bowl as they did, and to taste everything that was served with insistence.

2.2. In-depth Interview

The method used in the interviews is in-depth interview which enables the detailed information from each person to be collected. This method can sometimes lead to information other than expected, estimated. In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 people between the ages of 44 and 82 who could give detailed information, who knows past and today from each group. The ethnic distribution of the people of whom 6 were women and 7 were men is as follows; 4 Yerli, 1 Azeri, 3 Kurdish, 1 Molokan, 3 Terekeme and 1 Turkmen. There was no gender discrimination when making these choices. Attention was paid to choose from people who are outgoing, talkative, who has life experience and a colorful personality and who can share his life experiences with people. Some of the

interviews were done on head to head, some with together with the other people. In order not to spoil the nature, the environment has not been turned into a private conversation place. We went to the workplaces, houses of the interviewee. We did not have a private meeting place other than these because we wanted to do the interview in their natural habitat

From the first moment of the interviews, the information on the purpose of the interview, who the researcher is, what the researcher wanted to do was given. They were told that they would be interviewed and the results of the research would later be used for scientific research but their names would be kept hidden. Voice recording was reported to be made during the interview.

The most difficult part of an in-depth interview is to be able to keep what they share after they start to conversation. Emotional sharing can make the job harder when secrets that are out of topic and that are too private to be included in the study are began to be told. An important point is to be able to keep these secrets and not to cause insecurity by using the emotionality of the person.

2.3. Working with own Society

As the author is the daughter of a Kars originated family, as she has a social surrounding consisting of relatives and people from Kars, the culture that she gained from her family since the day she was born, the things she learned from her relatives and townsmen and her observations fed the data collected from the area. It is known that the memory is linked to codes, symbols, meaning and identity. The features, memories that are not noticed during life are automatically turned into sources during the research.

Just as it is anywhere in the world, home-based field work also depends on the professional abilities of anthropologist. One has the advantage of being able to speak well and fulfill cultural traditions, as compared to a culturally distant place in familiar or semi-familiar ways, however, at the same time they are faced with a problem of considering that everything is too natural. This problem is sometimes called "home blindness" [15].

In this study, the author worked within a community she felt close to, a group she saw herself like one of them. As she thought she is close to local intimate knowledge, that is, the sensitivities, habits, lifestyles in the relationship, she "established the shop easily," as Altorki says [16]. Being there, spending time with them, analyzing their cultures and more importantly making them heard by writing were important for them.

A great effort has been made not to experience home blindness. Due to past cultural accumulations, it was avoided to see the different, unique details of the region as ordinary. For this reason, extra efforts were made to catch every detail according to an outsider. It is a fact that even if the same study is re-done from the beginning or if someone else work in the same place with the same people, different results will emerge due to the cultural dynamics.

2.4. Ethical Dimension

There is no definite guide on how to do field work. Anthropologist is one of the scientific tools of this scientific work, and the research process is formed according to the person. Information should be gathered by establishing an honest and respectful relationship between the researchers and the working groups. In this study, it was necessary to reveal the differences or similarities between the groups without hurting the groups. The study should have been carried out without approaching the dangerous line of grouping, and involved the responsibility of reflecting the cultural interaction of the ethnic groups with a sense of conflict, in the most objective way.

As in all scientific research, there are national and international ethical rules to be followed in anthropological research. This research is based on the *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (2009)*. The rules outlined here place an important responsibility on the researcher and say that privacy and anonymity are the rights of the participants. Based on the principles contained in this guideline, all the details about the study were reported to the interviewees and the data obtained by giving importance to the principle of respect for life without pressuring and damaging, the data was interpreted by scientific methods and the results were obtained without deviation.

Data, which is not obtained, were not produced, no changes were made in the records to make the study give different results, the things the interviewees said were deciphered as they were, their accuracy or fallacy were not evaluated, because we are obliged to keep the privacy, the attributes used in relation to ethnic identities are used exactly the same as those used by the users without changing their identity names.

As the usual condition of the ethics study suggests, the ideas, methods, data, writings, and forms of others have not been used without reference to their owners, while using a previously published work, references have been made in accordance with scientific publications.

As a result of the study, while transferring the findings related to the ethnic identities, cultures, lifestyles and other groups' views related to Yerli, Azeri, Terekeme, Kurds, Turkmen and Molokan and related to Kars, care was taken to emphasize the common points between the groups without causing discrimination, in accordance with the purpose of the study.

3. Results

The research was conducted in Kars, east of Turkey, which is snowy for almost eight months of the year. It is understandable how difficult it is to live there when you feel cold, have problems with transportation due to heavy snow, and cannot reach the hospital when needed. It is an eight-county city with a surface area of 9939 km², built on highlands. Those living in the easternmost of the country complain about the difficulty of their living conditions and

they think the central government has neglected people living in that region, and has delayed in service.

Identification of ethnic population in the world and in Turkey is difficult and therefore there is no official data obtained in recent years. For this reason, it is not possible to say anything about the population of different groups in Kars. When I evaluate the verbal communication with 13 people who participated in the study and the other people of Kars who I saw other than the 13 people above, the size order of the groups seems to be from the most crowded to the least is as follows; Yerli, Azeri, Kurds, Terekeme, Turkmen and very few Molokan.

The group known as Yerli is Sunni Muslim Turks. Another group is Azeri, Shiites from Azerbaijan and Iran. The dominant religious orientation in the Kurds is Sunni Islam. Terekeme are generally members of the Hanafî sect of the Islamic religion. In Kars, where the Molokan are predominantly Christian, there are few Zoroastrians, Jews, and Germans. It seems that cultural diversity can be likened to a cultural ebru (art of Ebru). There are no sharp boundaries between groups. Some have their husbands or wives from different groups, some have their bride or groom from different groups. Everyone has a kinship with other groups and almost everyone has an idea about the characteristics of each group.

At the beginning of the work, our prediction was as follows; as there are so many different groups living together in Kars, there are problems, they are different, they do not like the food of other groups, they live differently and they are rejecting each other's existence. However, all the people interviewed from each group tell that they are in harmony with their neighbors, they live without discrimination, they are relatives with each other, they cry for the death of the other's, and they dance in their weddings. During the study it was thought that what they say may all true when we see their lifestyles, family relations, clothing styles, nutritional habits, feasts.

Almost all of the stories told during conversations made on the tables, especially at dinner, are based on ethnic humor. These stories, which have been really lived or have been told as a story, highlight the unique features of the groups. The stories are generally based on the purity or ingenuity of the man. The purity that is spoken sometimes is a form of emphasis on untrainedness and sometimes folly. Cunning is an adjective used for groups whose superiority wants to be emphasized. Commercial competition stories do not offend the lower groups, because they believe that earning with cunning is not a situation to be proud of. They take the title of honesty and listen to the stories about their purity (like foolishness) with great pride. According to Nesin, there is laughter in humor, non-laughing story is not humor [15]. Indeed, the person even if the story is about him laughs joining group although he has listened to the same story more than once. But when it's his turn, he defends himself in a sense with a story that makes fun of the opposite group. Two joke examples based on purity of Kurds and commercial

success of Azeri are as follows;

One of the Kurdish people was selling turd (cow dung) in the bazaar. Azeri man was constantly asking,

- How much is this shit?
- Fifty liras.

Azeri man takes and goes many times, but does not pay. The son of the same man came and asked;

- How much is this turd?
- Fifty liras, but I don't sell it to you.
- Why?
- Your father previously ate my shit, but did not pay for it.

Azeri people gather in the days of mourning and they cry. One of the Kurds sees them as they cry and scream. He approaches to one of them and asks;

Why are they crying?

They are crying for Hasan, Hüseyin.

Who are Hasan, Hüseyin?

Hasan, Hüseyin are sons of Hazrat Ali, he became martyr, they cry for that.

Boo, have they heard it yet?

Yücebaş from Turkish humor researchers said that humor is the best defense tool [17]. The suggestion of Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, "Kill your opponent's seriousness with jokes and kill his jokes with your seriousness" reveals the power of humor and its importance in communication [18].

3.1. Common Language of Humor

Language, culture and thought are interrelated. The changes in the culture make changes in the language and thought. Sociolinguists who are dealing with the use of language, that is to say what people actually say, focus on systematically changing characteristics according to their social position and situation among the speakers of the same language [19].

What Ali, whom I interviewed, was emphasized how common language, which is indispensable for cultural exchanges, is important however sometimes it cannot be enough for humor.

Jokes are the common property of the society but you are from İstanbul. If I tell you a Kars joke, it may sound like another language to you, you may not laugh, but if I tell it to someone who were born and grown here, she would definitely laugh (Ali, 67 years old, married, Turkmen (Alevi), tradesman, 10th February 2012)

For this reason, there is an introduction for the ones told to guest groups. First they give information; "we say that *Terekeme' ribs are thick*, that is..." or "Here, Azeri deal with trade, so..." etc. There is no need to make these explanations to the local people. So while they are telling jokes to the people they see as foreigner, they need to give preliminary description even though they speak the same language. Also they tell the meanings of local words that is in the story.

3.2. Using Humor for Peace

What is funny is what comes out of consciousness. When the ridiculous realizes that he is ridiculous, he tries to fix himself for the moment. Bergson associates this with the phrase that Santuel puts it into theater curtain, and says, "comedy improves morals with laughter" [9]. This is exactly like a summary of the situation in Kars. Humor feeds tolerance, tolerance feeds humor [19]. It is not possible to achieve peace without tolerance. Just as everybody needs someone else to realize themselves, these groups continue to live in awareness of others to define and have their own cultures. It seems that there is a way to organize and protect their morals and live in tranquility, which is possible with laughter. It is not possible to be away from contradictions of life. Here is a sarcastic story about the terraces that are not very relevant to religion;

When Terekeme first came to Kars, they didn't have a relation with Islam. They go to Akyaka's villages to find a place to live for themselves. Early in the morning, they heard a melody. They did not know ezan which is a call for prayer. He asks to neighbor;

- What is this?
- They pray five times a day, ezan calls us to pray.

He doesn't understand anything;

- Does it have any harm to cattle, sheep?
- No
- So let it call.

In Kars it is understood that the traditional structure is tried to be protected, traditional life is tried to be sustained, however, that modernity, which comes into social life, inevitably converting the cultural heritage. According to Pottier who researches on the protection of the local culture, preserving local identity and resisting cultural erosion, despite the pressure created by globalization, is important to have an identity in a changing world [20].

Yılmaz, whose mother is Molokan, whose father is Azeri, that I spoke in Kars, explains that there is no possibility of a clash when looking at the structure of Kars, because according to him here the bloods are intermingled.

When young people fall in love here, they are not prevented. They give groom, they receive bride mutually. The kinship here is very important. Here, the blood of the different groups is intermingled. This place is a complete passage way when we look at history. There had been 26 wars I have known throughout history. Here you can find a Kurd man whom grandson is a Yerli or an Azeri or a Terekeme. Even if he is a nationalist in the mind, there is his grandson from other ethnic group. Throughout history, somebody came from Tsarist Russia, somebody came from Iran. Intentionally, unintentionally or forcefully blood have been mixed together (Yılmaz, 58 years old, Teacher, Molokan, 24th December 2012).

Humor is an important tool in which differences are emphasized in relationships. According to Collinson the reflection of the other and at the same time your own

reflection is hidden under the laughter. Funny elements do not wipe the suppressed emotions, but reduces its weight [5]. Here, too, groups are reducing tension of sense of difference and conflict fear by humor. Collinson says they feel relieved by this way. To emphasize the treason of Yerli the following story is told;

A Yerli man and a Kurd man are in the court, judge decides the death as a punishment. Then asks to Kurd

- What is your last request?
- I want to see my mother.

He say, let him see his mother. Then, he asks to Yerli;

- What is your last request?

Yerli betraying to Kurd man and as a last request says;

- I want the Kurd not to see his mother.

4. Discussion

Çatalhöyük is the known first residential unit of human beings. The courtyards formed among the residential groups in Çatalhöyük. These common courtyards are considered as places where they do small-scale farming and share the products with their neighbors, and domesticate their animals and plants [21]. The courtyard system used in Çatalhöyük, which is emphasized as important for common life is used also in Kars. In Kars, the mentioned ethnic groups usually live in houses built in these courtyards together with other groups. The name of these courtyards is "Hayat" (life in Eng.). Usually domed with a door of entrance, when entered, more or less 3-4 house doors that are not visible from the main street are opened to the same garden. Within these gardens, people from different groups live together, raise their children and share their lives. They share their life cycles like birth and death. Actually the given name of these courtyard, "Hayat" (life in Eng.), is very significant. In retrospect, that is experiencing life itself in gardens. In fact, the fact that this garden is called "life" is very meaningful at this point. As you can see, there is real life itself is lived in those gardens.

Humorous stories that emphasize the differences between groups in Kars are generally told during meals. In the tea times, in homes, in restaurants, and in the most serious protocol meals of senior local officials, the conversation has turned to the humorous stories. These were lived stories or narratives that include cunning, foolishness, or religious issues. They include mutually interactions between groups. The subjects were not about the food, or even when they have elements that are not suitable to be told in the table (like dirt, sexuality), that jokes were told during meals.

Food is a part of the culture, integrates the society, is continuous, variable and it can also be said that sharing food is important in developing social bonds, strengthening group solidarity, and protecting the family cohesion. It is thought that, the parser effects of humor are destroyed by taking the unifying power of food. It is thought that, the power of food

soften the situation without creating conflict.

The humor issue, that emerge within this study is not expected to contribute to humor in Turkey. It is a finding that emerged during a cultural study to understand the source of peace in the region.

5. Conclusion

In this study the humor of different cultures, Yerli, Azeri, Kurd, Terekeme, Turkmen and Molokan living in Kars and in its surroundings has been viewed. Before starting study, it was aimed to determine the possible differences and the competition between the groups. But in the end, it can be said that these people lives by ignoring their cultural differences. Climatic conditions and geographic conditions are very heavy. They are under the influence of past occupation experiences. Therefore they want to live problem-free and with cooperation due to inter-group kinship, which they describe as blood mixing. They are contented with emphasizing their differences with humor. They highlight their differences with humor and preserve peace with this method.

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