

Communal Holiday Greeting Rituals in the Transformation from Being Expatriates to Being Summer Visitors at a Blacksea Town

Since the 19th century, literature on sociology has demonstrated the tradition of dicothomic categorization. This is evident in “community and fellowship,” in “organic and mechanic society,” in “small and big society tradition,” in “community and society,” in “conventional society and modern society.” Sociologists have mostly tried to analyze societies by means of this dicothomic structure. When the related literature on Turkish Sociology is analyzed, it is observed that social sciences research is brought to the agenda to determine the situation, that case studies are brought to the foreground, and that, in these studies, a dicothomic categorization of the distinction between the country and the city is carried out, one that used to focus on the villages in the past, then shifted to research on slum areas and the city. Evaluations of these studies suggest that sociological research on the country and the city conducted in Turkey is, quantitatively and qualitatively, of an advanced level and become enriched through work in progress. Nevertheless, research pertaining to the social structure in Turkey, based on this dicothomic categorization and the commentary on this research may fall short, as it may not necessarily be appropriate to approach an analysis of towns by means of the country and the city divide, and as towns depict a separate social reality, thereby deeming such studies significant. Yet studies on towns are few in number compared to those on villages and cities. It is of utmost significance to identify towns and their reality correctly, since towns possess a structure more complicated than those of villages, since they are transitive in nature, and since it is the towns to transfer the novelties and changes of the cities to villages and the traditionalism of the villages to the cities. In the light of these views and evaluations, I would like to put forward through my identity as a researcher whose recent studies have focused on towns and who has conducted and published studies on various towns and share with you a ritual which has been carried out at a Blacksea town for many years during religious holidays, that of the communal greeting. This town, the last fifty years of which I have observed and come to know and the last twenty-five years of which I have sociologically and anthropologically analyzed and published on, has been experiencing significant amounts of emigration for thirty-five years. Yet those who leave never sever their ties completely, thereby trying to integrate into the city and to preserve their townspeople identity at the same time. Despite currently living in cities, the new generation visits the town in specific periods of the year and stays with their elders, and as such, they experience a transformation but at the same time, strive to sustain their traditions. One such example is the communal greeting ritual. This greeting ritual, which we had identified through our research twenty-five years ago to be carried out among villages and across villages and towns, is conducted among people of the villages, towns and cities today, being transformed into a form of cooperation and solidarity network. This article focuses on the dynamics of this transformation, discussing what has been added to the functions of an old tradition, how and in what form.

Keywords: *village/town studies, Dörtdivan, migration, expatriates, communal holiday greetings*

Since the 19th century, literature on sociology has demonstrated the tradition of dichotomic categorization. Made evident by various sociologists' distinction of "community and fellowship," "organic and mechanic society types," "small and big society tradition," "community and society," and "conventional society and modern society," this dual structure (Redfield, 1947; Kongar, 1996:240) has frequently functioned as an axis through which sociologists would try to understand societies.

When the related literature on Turkish Sociology is analyzed, it is observed that social sciences research is brought to the agenda to determine the situation and that a dichotomic categorization of the distinction between the country and the city is carried out, resulting, indeed, in the production of very successful work. Nevertheless, research pertaining to the social structure in Turkey, based on this dichotomic categorization and the commentary on this research may fall short, as it may not necessarily be appropriate to approach an analysis of towns by means of the country and the city divide, and as towns depict a separate social reality, thereby deeming such studies significant. Yet studies conducted in Turkey on towns are few in number compared to those on villages and cities.

It is of utmost significance to identify towns and their reality correctly, since towns possess a structure more complicated than those of villages, since they are transitive in nature, and since it is the towns to transfer the novelties and changes of the cities to villages and the traditionalism of the villages to the cities.

In the light of these views and evaluations, in this article I would like to put forward through my identity as a researcher whose recent studies have focused on towns and who has conducted and published studies on various towns, and share with you a ritual which has been carried out at a Blacksea town, one that has been experiencing significant amounts of emigration, yet those who leave never sever their ties completely. This "communal holiday greeting ritual" has been taking place during the "Ramadan" and the "Feast of Sacrifice" holidays, both of which are religious holidays celebrated by a majority in Turkey, but in ways unique and attractive to this town.

This town in question¹ is located in the West Blacksea region and within the Bolu province², having achieved district status in 1990 and consisting of 24 villages and 8 neighborhoods, excluding the center; it is Dörtdivan³. This town, the last fifty years of which I have observed and come to know, the last twenty-five years of which I have sociologically and anthropologically analyzed and published on (Uğuzman Er, 2000), and which I have revisited after twenty-five years to record the changes in a report, is linked, via two separate roads of 7 and 17 kilometers, to a highway that ties Ankara to İstanbul and it is a settlement based on agriculture and animal husbandry⁴ (Uğuzman, 2020).

In Dörtdivan, the history of which goes back to ancient years, land is a highly-deemed property. Mostly passed on from the previous generation, land is regarded as "ancestral keepsake" and is not to be sold unless there is any dire need. In this town that sustains its material and spiritual cultural assets along with its

historical qualities, this land-human relation is observed to lie at the root of many concepts relating to cultural values, norms, and beliefs. These attitudes and behaviors, which can be considered within the positive values attributed to the soil, continue to be effective today, as we have determined in both of our studies in the region.

Though they have been linked to the land through spiritual ties, the people of Dörtdivan have not achieved financial efficiency for many years. Due to reasons such as increasing population, increasing tendencies in education levels, and increasing public needs and expectations, people have been emigrating from the town to cities over the last thirty to thirty-five years. While the population of Dörtdivan was 14,436 in the 1990s, it receded to 6,396 by 2014, thereby attesting to the speed of emigration. According to the 2020 General Population, there has been no significant change in the total population of Dörtdivan since 2015.

In relation to the move from the district to large cities, it is observed that most of those who leave are the ones who have recently been married or the young families with children of school age. These families that emigrate settle in the same or close by neighborhoods where they go and frequently get together. Those who remain in the town, on the other hand, are mostly of older age, either who, due to their attachment to the town, never left or who lived for many years in larger cities and returned to town after retirement.

People who live in traditional extended families while residing in the town transform into nuclear families when they migrate to the city, yet those who leave never completely sever their ties with the town. Moreover, the young people from Dörtdivan currently residing in cities invite especially the parents of the husbands to their city houses during the winter and host them for about six months. They themselves come to town during special times such as religious nights and holidays and during summer months and stay with their elders there. These people, who used to be called “expatriates” for going to the city by themselves to work at certain periods in the year, are now referred to as “summer visitors” as they reside in the city with their families and visit their towns at regular intervals. While trying to incorporate into the city, these families also try to keep their townspeople identity and sustain many traditions inherited from their ancestors. One of such traditions is the communal holiday greeting ritual, the discussion topic of this article.

This ritual, detected twenty-five years ago to be carried out among villages and across villages and towns, is being continued in a specific fashion by those people who have, as discussed above, migrated to the cities but who undoubtedly visit their towns during the holidays.

In Dörtdivan, where piety predominates and has become more influential in the twenty-five year period between our two case studies, holidays are of utmost significance and celebrated with the most attention. Compared to the unchanging ways in which they are conducted in the nearby counties and districts, greeting rituals in the area are carried out communally and in ways authentic to the town.

In villages and neighborhoods, both on Ramadan and on Feast of Sacrifice holidays, it is claimed, on every possible occasion and by men of all age groups, to be obligatory to attend the communal worship at the mosque on the first day of

1 holidays and to bemeritorious. Following the worship, these men form a line,
 2 either inside the mosque or in the courtyard, starting from the oldest to the
 3 youngest, according to age. They are keen on the participation of the young and
 4 the children, and everyone greets one another. In this ritual, resentments and
 5 disappointments are terminated, and to state it as the locals would, “resentments
 6 are disappointed.” As such, an example is set for the younger generation.

7 Men who return home after the worship first greet the household members,
 8 and in the meanwhile, the young kiss the elders’ hands; after a while spent at home
 9 and having breakfast, the men return to the mosques for the noon worship.

10 Following the communal noon worship, the halva and the pastry, previously
 11 prepared at individual homes and sent to the mosque, are consumed collectively
 12 during the prayers articulated by the hodja. Afterwards, and again altogether, the
 13 men visit the cemetery and fulfill their religious and conventional duties such as
 14 praying for their deceased or fixing their graves, and they return to their villages
 15 when they are done. In the meantime, it is crucial not to neglect the deceased who
 16 do not have anyone to pray after them and to also pray for them and water their
 17 graves.

18 Following the return from the cemetery, everyone goes to his own home and
 19 start waiting for the young men who would pay them visits. It is an old tradition in
 20 Dörtdivan that the young men collectively visit their elders during the night hours
 21 on the first day of the holiday. In both of our case studies, it has become evident
 22 that this age-based ordering of the visits is meticulously observed, that the visits
 23 start with the oldest of the village, and that great attention is paid to not skipping
 24 houses.

25 As for women, holiday visits are again carried out in groups of a few people
 26 and amongst themselves. In our previous study, it was recorded that brides from
 27 the same village would, in the company of their mothers-in-law, go to their
 28 villages of origin to visit their own families at a convenient time during the
 29 holiday. Today, it is observed that this habit has died out, and that, due to the
 30 increased status of women over the years, married couples visit the family of the
 31 wife as nuclear families, composed of the spouses and their children. In the
 32 meantime, the children of the village, again altogether, visit the neighboring
 33 households and greet those who answer the door, with bags in hand to collect the
 34 candy they would be served. As determined by our first case study, on the second
 35 day of the holiday start the mutual visitations and greetings of those who consider
 36 themselves close and related, in an order that remains unchanged over the years
 37 among the villages. To illustrate, the men in the position of family heads in the
 38 village of Yukarıdüğer come to the village of Aşağıdüğer on the second day of the
 39 holiday, meet those in the status of hosts at the mosque, and following the noon
 40 worship together, they are divided into groups of equal numbers to be invited to
 41 homes.⁵

42 Townspeople of Yukarıdüğer arriving as guests and divided into groups of
 43 ten or fifteen per household greet the household members and are treated to
 44 holiday meals prepared by women, such as soup, rice, meat dishes, stuffed vine
 45 leaves, compote and desserts.⁶ Afterwards, they return to their own village
 46 altogether.

1 On the third day of the holiday, this time the men of Aşağıdöğüş go to
 2 Yukarıdöğüş at the same time and in the same fashion, and just like on the
 3 previous day, this time, they are hosted by the townspeople.

4 Keeping to the same greeting ritual discussed above, all other neighborhoods
 5 and villages that regard themselves related visit one another.

6 It is important to note that the villages visited on the first day of the holiday
 7 for the purpose of greeting are older settlements with more crowded communities,
 8 and most of the source people share the opinion that this ritual remains from
 9 earlier years when all male villagers would meet at Kadılar to worship collectively
 10 and greet one another.

11 According to our study conducted in 2015, these holiday greeting rituals are
 12 continued increasingly in our present day, without fading away or changing. In our
 13 observations recorded in the Kadılar neighborhood during the Feast of Sacrifice
 14 holiday of the said year, it was discovered that the worship was carried out by a
 15 crowded community,⁷ followed by the sermon of the hodja which centered on the
 16 themes of cooperation, solidarity, unity and togetherness, justice, good deeds,
 17 attending to the old and ill relatives, and the importance of sustaining old traditions
 18 of holiday greeting. Afterwards, it was seen that the hosting neighborhoods' males
 19 speedily went outside to form a line in front of the mosque,⁸ and those in the
 20 position of visitors formed a line inside the mosque. Meanwhile, it was observed
 21 that the older men would take it slow and take place towards the end of the line
 22 and that every two people leaving the mosque were picked up by one person ahead
 23 of the line outside to be taken home in joy.⁹

24 It was also reported to us that this 'ownership' was not at all related to who it
 25 was that would be hosted or whether the two parties knew each other from before,
 26 and that, on the contrary, if they did not know one another, that would result in a
 27 new acquaintance which was regarded as the source of further pleasure, especially
 28 by hosting someone who currently lives in the big cities and is visiting the district
 29 for the purpose of the holidays.

30 Those who are left at the mosque after the crowds leave following these
 31 coincidental pairings and those above the middle-age or of old age who do not
 32 wish to visit houses at a longer distance would have their lunch at tables set at the
 33 prayer room inside the mosque.¹⁰ Meals shared at these tables are prepared by
 34 women of the houses close to the mosque and carried by the young men of the
 35 neighborhood and served.¹¹ These meals are identical to those served at homes to
 36 guests.

37 Sociological research carried out in Turkey emphasizes the symbolic
 38 significance of kinship during religious rituals and holidays which strengthen the
 39 function of psychological support (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1981:30). For the district under
 40 scrutiny in this study, it can be claimed that such ceremonies and holiday greeting
 41 rituals are expanded by means of being carried out among villages deemed related,
 42 and as such, the image of being from Dörtdivan is being kept alive.

43 Many people of the district with whom we conducted interviews stated that
 44 despite having migrated from the district many years ago, they regard this ritual,
 45 carried out by villagers, townspeople and, at present, urban dwellers from the same
 46 hometown, significant and valuable in keeping family, neighbor, and relative

networks alive, and that, that is the reason why they try to inject the young generation with these ideas.

In addition to keeping the image of being from Dörtdivan alive, keeping the spirit of unity and solidarity among townspeople alive, and socializing children and the young religiously and traditionally, the said ritual has achieved a new function of “increasing the number of city dwellers one knows” which is needed by those who still reside in this town from which many people still choose to emigrate. As such, there is rather a “network” created so that, when there is a problem to be solved at the city or a need that can be fetched from the city, there is somebody to be consulted who could be of help.

It should also be noted that, following these communal holiday greeting rituals, all townspeople feel the satisfaction of not only having fulfilled the necessities of their religious beliefs but also of having fulfilled their duties to their deceased, as well as their living, to their elders, as well as their young, and to their kin and friends living in the country as well as in the city.

I would like to conclude by sharing a ritual carried out by children on the first day of the Feast of Sacrifice holiday which I had observed during the first study I conducted in 1990, hoping that you will find it interesting.

On this special day, after the sacrificing and distributing of the animals, the children of the village came together in groups of fifteen or twenty to go around door to door asking for their share of the sacrifice while singing a folk song known by all of them. Afterwards, the children, with the meat in hand, visit a family known in the district to be poor and ask them to cook the meat for the children, but taking very little to themselves, they leave the meat with the poor family. Although it was, at the time, already known that the poor should, as part of the religion, be given some amount of meat from the sacrificial animals, this ritual is believed to have aimed at having the poorest family receive the meat the soonest and at having the smell of cooked meat come from the poorest household first. That this was performed by the young children was also regarded noteworthy. Carried out especially on special occasions such as the holidays, this ritual which aims at having the children experience, at early ages, the spirit of benevolence and the satisfaction of helping people without hurting them or their pride is, unfortunately, no longer alive, and remain only as a fond memory among the old.

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1 **APPENDIX**

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3 **Photo 1. Turkey’s status within the region**



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6 **Photo 2. The location of Bolu in Turkey**



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- 1 Photo 3. The location of Dörtdivan in Bolu Photo 4. An overview of Dörtdivan



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4 Photo 5. The Köroğlu statue at the Marketplace Dörtdivan square



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6 Photo 6. A view from Dörtdivan



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1 Photo 7. Holiday guests



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4 Photo 8. Holiday meals



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7 Photo 9. Worship with visitors from Neighboring villages



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1 Photo 10. Those waiting to pick up the guests



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4 Photo 11. Pairings of joy



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Photo 12. Communal lunch at the mosque



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1 Photo 13: The young serving lunch at the mosque



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4 Photo 14: The service of the young



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