



YAŞAR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

MASTER THESIS

**SPATIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY:
ANATOLIAN TAHTACI COMMUNITIES**

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MSC IN INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

PRESENTATION DATE: 17.06.2020

BORNOVA / İZMİR
JUNE 2020

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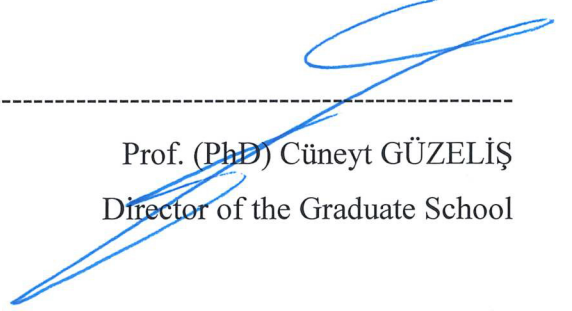
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ABSTRACT

SPATIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY: ANATOLIAN TAHTACI COMMUNITIES

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June 2020

This thesis scrutinizes the complicated relationship between identity, power and space by means of a critical analysis of the construction of identity and the problem of representation. Contemporary critical theory explains the notion of identity as a social construction, which is manipulated and reproduced according to changing power relations in the social structures. Representations of identity is regarded as quite problematic, especially in the context of collective identity, as it has an erratic structure. Within this theoretical framework, identity construction of Tahtacı community, which has been a minority group in Anatolia, is examined in discursive, institutional, and spatial terms. Contemporary representations of their identity are problematic since the main component of the identity, which is woodworking, is no longer relevant to the community. The main focus of this thesis is on how Tahtacı identity is represented in the absence of its primary category. The analysis on the mutual constructions of space and identity is provided in terms of Tahtacı societies of Western Anatolia, their institutional spaces and the representational tools implicit to these spaces. Providing a critical analysis of the spatial constructions of Tahtacı identity, this study seeks to establish their identity constructions within contemporary theoretical debates on the problem of collective identity representation.

Key Words: spatial representation, identity construction, Tahtacı communities

ÖZ

KİMLİĞİN MEKÂNSAL İNŞASI: ANADOLU TAHTACILARI

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Haziran 2020

Bu tez kimlik inşası ve temsil probleminin eleştirel analizi yoluyla kimlik, yetki ve mekân arasındaki çetrefilli ilişkiyi irdeler. Çağdaş eleştirel kuram kimlik kavramını toplumsal yapılarda değişen güç ilişkilerine bağlı olarak yönlendirilen ve yeniden üretilen sosyal bir inşa olarak açıklar. Kimliğin bir hayli değişken olan yapısından dolayı kimlik temsilleri özellikle kolektif kimlikler bağlamında sorunsallaşmaya açık bir konu olarak değerlendirilir. Bu teorik çerçevede içerisinde, Anadolu’da azınlık bir topluluk olarak süregelen Tahtacılar’ın kimlik inşası söylemsel, kurumsal ve mekânsal bağlamlarda incelenmiştir. Bu kimliğin güncel temsilleri sorunsallaşmaya açıktır çünkü kimliğin ana unsuru olan tahta işçiliği artık bu toplumla ilişkili değildir. Bu tezin odaklandığı konu Tahtacı kimliğinin birincil kategorisi olmaksızın ne şekillerde temsil edildiğidir. Kimlik ve mekânın müşterek inşalarının analizi Batı Anadolu Tahtacıları, onların kurumsal mekânları ve bu mekânlara içkin olan temsil araçları üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma Tahtacı kimliğinin mekânsal inşalarını eleştirel analiz yoluyla inceleyerek, bu inşaları kolektif kimliklerin temsil sorununa ilişkin güncel kuramsal tartışmalar içinde konumlandırmayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mekânsal temsil, kimlik inşası, Tahtacı topluluklar

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my innermost gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Gülsüm Baydar who has been a friendly, patient, inspiring, and eye-opening guide not only for this thesis but also for my entire life since the day we met. Thanks to the stimulating conversations and brainstorming that I had with her, horizons for me and this study were remarkably broadened. I am deeply grateful to Assoc.Prof. Tonguç Akış, Assoc.Prof. Zeynep Tuna Ultav and Assist.Prof. Bahar Emgin Şavk for their profound criticism and valuable remarks which considerably enhanced my work.

I owe many thanks to the administrators of Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation, Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery, Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House and, Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House for their kind, sincere and generous help by sharing their insights.

I am particularly thankful to my friends Melis Akyüz, Büşra Erden Sakaroğlu and, Büşra's family for supporting me during my field trips. They have been great hosts and companions. I also thank all my colleagues and friends, in particular Eda Paykoç, Fulya Özbey, Müge Sever, Nilay Altınay, Deniz Engin, Berfin Yıldız and Özgür Şen Bartan, who have always been very supportive and attentive during my times of struggle.

Finally, I would like to express my endless love to my parents Cumali and Muzaffer Güngör, who have always been encouraging, loving and caring in every possible way.

I would like to devote this study to my grandmothers Sultan Güngör and Aysel Duran, who inspired me to start and complete this work.

Selin Güngör

İzmir, 2020

TEXT OF OATH

I declare and honestly confirm that my study, titled “SPATIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY: ANATOLIAN TAHTACI COMMUNITIES” and presented as a Master’s Thesis, has been written without applying to any assistance inconsistent with scientific ethics and traditions. I declare, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that all content and ideas drawn directly or indirectly from external sources are indicated in the text and listed in the list of references.

Selin GÜNGÖR

Signature

.....*Selin GÜNGÖR*.....

July 7, 2020

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMBTM	Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum
GTCH	Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House
HBVAKV	Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı
NMCH	Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House
PDP	People's Democratic Party
RPP	Republican People's Party
TAKEG	Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery
TAF	Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term *Tahtacı*, which means woodcutter in Turkish, stands for one of the minority groups in Anatolia. They are Alevi nomad communities of the highlands, who have professionalized in the forestry business. Tahtacıs have been subject to a variety of studies in Turkey the foci of which ranged from religion (Çıblak, 2001; Selçuk, 2003; Tire, 2012; Kocadayı, 2013) to sociology (Engin, 1993; Bulut, 2014; Çil, 2016), folklore (Genç, 2017; Kuşci, 2018; Duman, 2019), and music (Kaplan, 1998; Seyhan, 2001; Tamay, 2009; Bayat, 2019). The aim of the majority of these studies is the documentation of the historical and traditional features of the culture while focusing on its folkloric aspects. There is only one study that problematizes the relationship between Tahtacı identity and space (Kolukırık, 2010), the scope of which is limited to urbanization and excludes the question of representation.

Having been a closed society for centuries and occupying a minority position in the religious realm, Tahtacıs have been marginalized economically, politically and culturally throughout their history. Since both The Ottoman Empire and The Republic of Turkey are dominated by a Sunni Islamic majority, their political approaches to Alevi minority groups have had profound effects on the construction of the latter's collective identity. Being excluded by dominant discourses and socio-political practices, minority groups have been obliged to construct their own identity categories by several different means. Tahtacıs, as well, produced a number of narratives on their historical identity and founded a variety of institutions for the perpetuation of the latter, although they no longer exist as nomadic communities of woodcutters.

This thesis firstly focuses on the turning points in the history of Tahtacı communities in order to understand the historical component of their identity formation. Secondly, the relationship between identity construction, language and space is analyzed by means of discourse analysis and Tahtacı institutions, with particular emphasis on Western Anatolia. Finally, the representational spaces of Tahtacıs are studied to

understand the mutual productions of space and identity. This is done by a critical analysis of interior architectural elements and practices realized in the institutional spaces. The thesis seeks to provide a critical approach into spatial constructions of Tahtacı identity and it attempts to situate the latter within contemporary theoretical debates on underrepresented groups.

1.1. Aim and Scope

The aim of this thesis is to surface the complicated relationship between identity, representation and space in the context of the Tahtacı communities in Turkey. In doing that, it adopts a contemporary critical perspective on identity formation based on social constructivist theories. The former relates identity formation to hegemonic power relationships and point to the fluidity of identity discourses based on changing power balances in the social structure. Tahtacı constitute a significant case in this respect as they are in a position to reconstruct their identity after the loss of their communal identification as nomad woodcutters. The scope of this thesis includes the discursive and the spatial representations of Tahtacı identity, based on erratic socio-cultural and socio-political structures.

Following the explanation of the historical background of the discriminated community, various discourses on Tahtacı identity, and foundation and working processes of Tahtacı institutions are analyzed to understand how they have been used as tools for re-constituting the collective identity. The materialization of discursive and institutional means is explained through the study of spatial representations, which are conducted via material tools and performative practices in the Tahtacı museums, cultural houses, and field offices of the federation. Discussions on Tahtacı identity and Tahtacı spatial representations that are conducted by those who do not describe their identity as Tahtacı are left beyond the scope of this study since these people are not included in the self-identification process. Here, the focus remains on the relationship between the agency of the self and the spatial representations that are used to approve it.

1.2. Method

The research method for this study includes a literature review and a critical interpretation of primary and secondary sources, interviews with representative

subjects, and site visits. Primary sources include personal communications with Tahtacı community members (Appendix 1; Appendix 2), documents, photographs, and objects located in the institutions, and newspaper reports. These sources were made available via site visits to the following institutional spaces (Appendix 3):

- Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery in Edremit, Balıkesir
- Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum in Urla, İzmir
- Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House in Narlıdere, İzmir
- Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House in Güzelbahçe, İzmir
- Bademler, İzmir and Konak, İzmir Offices of Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation

While historical and theoretical studies supply the material on Tahtacı history and identity, the interviews with Tahtacı community members in various documentary films support the personal interviews that are conducted for discourse analysis.

Following the Introduction, three main chapters constitute the main body of the thesis. The second chapter informs the theoretical basis of the following chapters, where identity construction and the problem of representation are addressed. In the following chapter, the construction process of Tahtacı identity by means of discursive and institutional means is explained. The fourth chapter focuses on the spatial constructions of Tahtacı identity in their institutional spaces, including museums, cultural houses, and field offices of the federation. These are analyzed as spaces that are designed both for the representation and the re-production of the identity. The Conclusion chapter summarizes the thesis, and by raising questions on the problem of representation in the architectural domain, it contributes to critical approaches in spatial studies.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF IDENTITY

Identity is a complicated notion, which has been largely problematized and discussed in critical psychological, sociological, and cultural theories (Hall, 1996; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Although analytical studies on identity emerged predominantly in the 1960s, the rise of identity theory dates to the 1980s. The revived interest in identity issues is associated with the increase in the cultural studies and critical works on ethnicity, class, and gender (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.3). Subsequently, identity has become subject to the works on such categories of socio-political practices and analyses, as well. From the mid-1990s onwards, three main approaches dominated the field and they are respectively identified as essentialist, social constructivist, and contemporary approaches (Hall, 1996; Cerulo, 1997).

Essentialism refers to the belief that all subjects have or ought to have certain essential, natural and invariable characteristics, which are acquired by birth (Hall, 1996; Mahalingam, 2003). Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall (1996) explains the conceptualization of this subject, which is based on the conviction of “essence is prior the existence” (Oxford dictionaries online, 2019), as the enlightenment subject and the subject’s identity is described as the essential inner core of the self. Considering identity as a fundamental condition of being, essentialist approaches enable the classification of subjects within specific categories such as race, religion, nation and gender, which are to be valued, recognized, and preserved. According to this viewpoint, all members of a specific category are accepted as carrying similar internalized characteristics and having similar social experiences (Cerulo, 1997; Phillips, 2010). Critical theorists Brubaker and Cooper explain this approach with the will to achieve bounded unities: “Strong notions of collective identity imply strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity. They imply high degrees of groupness, an "identity" or sameness among group members, a sharp distinctiveness from nonmembers, a clear boundary between inside and outside.” (2000, p.10).

While the essentialist perspective understands these characteristics as internalized, anti-essentialist critics argue that they are socially, historically and discursively constructed. The social constructivist perspective contends that “identity is formed in the interaction between self and society” (Hall, 1996, p.597). Brubaker and Cooper state that “It [identity] is used by actors [subjects] (...) to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others” (2000, p.4). In other words, identity is understood as a social and discursive category. Social constructivists claim that essentialist identity constructions are practices, which enable and naturalize the maintenance of existing social, economic, and political hegemonic structures and hinder social change (Mahalingam, 2003). Hence, identity is seen to be largely shaped according to dominant cultural factors and power relations in any given society. Sociologists Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2010) claim that this situation results in the dominant social values’ becoming an internalized part of the self. Therefore, essentialist practices naturalize constructed identity categories as a social reality and such categories “imprison individuals in spheres of prescribed action and expectation” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 388).

Although contemporary critics are also against the essentialist approach, they criticize social constructivists for not questioning the existing conditions of identity categorization. To expand the frame of identity theory, these critics examine why and how essentialist identities still continue to be effective today. They emphasize the problems related with the idea of the subject having a unified essential and stable identity (Hall, 1996). They argue that the post-modern subject has several fragmented and fluid identities, which can shift according to unstable circumstances. Hence, the notion of identity is always unsettled. As Stuart Hall explains “The identities (...) are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change. The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic.” (1996, p.598).

2.1. Identity as a Social Construction

Whether individual or collective, identity construction is a process that is conducted through language and controlled by dominant social, cultural, and political factors. Identity discourses are materialized in not only verbal and written spheres but also visual, aural and sensory realms since the latter also convey meaning. Especially in

the creation of collective identities such as gender, class, and national identity, these discourses constitute the main tools. To illustrate, in the identification process of female identity, femininity is not only described with words, but also with the language of color (pink), voice (high pitch) and behavior (compassionate). Similarly, national identities are formed by association with certain colors, flags, symbols, anthems, and narratives.

Political Theorist Benedict Anderson is one of the pioneers of national identity construction theory. He argues that nations are not pre-given categories but imagined communities. Anderson explains: “To understand them [nations] properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.” (1983, p.4). Accordingly, he focuses on how and why national narratives are created, changed and manipulated in “times during which cultural (language) and social factors (capitalism, print technology) convene in a particular historical moment” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 390).

According to Hall (1996), modern national imaginations are created by means of five elements: the narrative of nation; emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness; the invention of tradition; foundational myth; and the idea of original people or folk. He explains narratives (stories, anthems, images, symbols, rituals, historical events, etc.) as the signifiers of shared experiences and emotions that are mostly placed in the past. In this respect, the past of the communities, “which give meaning to the nation” (1996, p. 613), is directly connected with the notion of *antiquity*. It is explained as “quality of being ancient”, which refers to “having the qualities of long existence” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). According to Anderson, antiquity is a tool, which is used repeatedly by nationalists for the canonization of national identity (1983, p.5). In addition to the narratives on origins that are based on antiquity, with the emphasis on continuity, tradition and timelessness, narratives also become the signifiers of the future which is yet to arrive.

Identity construction processes are mobilized by both political powers and collective actions. Intentional collective actions are shaped according to dichotomous motivations such as love/hate, admiration/insult, or collaboration/contestation. Politician Rainer Hülse explains that “One only needs to look close enough at the

discourse on the ‘other’ in order to find traces of the ‘self’.” (1999, p.2). Hence, during the self-identification process, collectives firstly need to define *the other* through which they can mobilize such binary motivations. To illustrate, national histories are mostly based on epics about how a nation is braver, stronger and more majestic than others. A similar case is provided by the bases of gender identities. While women are historically essentialized with feminine characteristics, men are qualified as masculine (Baydar, 2005, p.31). Thus, masculine refers to such terms as hunter, ruler, soldier, dominant, powerful, and solid, while feminine is associated with others such as gatherer, submissive, sufferer, passive, soft, and unstable.

Similar classifications appear in daily-life practices as well. For example, an employer who has a specific religion, nationality, gender, race, or class may not want to hire an employee belonging to another religion, nationality, gender, race, or class because the other is defined as unreliable. Hence, not only narratives that emphasize past experiences but also behavior patterns and rituals that inform everyday lives are produced in virtue of discourses on the other.

Hall (1996) explains national identity construction as a result of the will to have a homogeneous culture and corresponding cultural institutions. Individuals who participate in these cultural structures necessarily form a collective autonomy and a collective shelter. Collective identity that is based on the need for collective agency then becomes the product of so-called individual choice, which individuals internalize, assert, and mobilize when challenged.

Collective identities are performed and reproduced by individuals via the continuous repetition of socio-cultural norms and invented traditions (Hall, 1996; Thompson, 2016). For example, repeating clauses such as “Boys don’t cry” or “Turkish people are hospitable” or preserving traditions such as wedding or birth rituals results in the performance of these attributes and their incessant reproduction. Therefore, in addition to be a discursive practice, identity construction is also a regulative practice since the repetition of norms and traditions provides the regulation and conservation of social structures.

2.2. (Re) Presenting Identities

Collective identity, which is produced through language and re-produced by socio-cultural norms, is emphasized, especially in times when the agency of a particular

community is challenged. For instance, national identities are boosted in times of war, and gender identity or ethnic identity comes to the fore when related individuals are threatened by hegemonic power relations. In such situations, a certain community may seemingly reach a consensus on having a unified identity as a group. To illustrate, we come across claims like “(All) Turks are brave and strong.” or “(All) women are caring.”. Such essentialist generalizations imply that being born in the same country or the same sex means having other common characteristics as well.

Individuals who do not fit expected normative behavior patterns may create a threat against any well-defined collective identity. Hall states that when the construction of a particular identity and its experience oppose each other, the emergence of an identity crisis is inevitable. He further explains:

The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. Correspondingly, the identities which composed the social landscapes "out there", and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective "needs" of the culture, are breaking up. (1996, p. 598)

Sociologist Karen A. Cerulo (1997) and Cultural Critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) underline the dangers in addressing communities as over-generalized and stereotyped entities. What happens when a multitude of individual identities are represented under a collective name? Is it possible to represent a diverse group of people with a single color, characteristic, or language? In addressing these questions, contemporary critics problematize the concepts of representation and authenticity.

According to Spivak, speaking as a political subject against normative expectations is a problem because the dominant and hegemonic groups want to hear a unified voice that can comfortably be manipulated and controlled (Spivak & Gunew, 1990). Therefore, when people speak as the member of an identified community, such as gender, race, nationality, they often emphasize the dominant characteristics that are associated with that community and all other possible characteristics that fall outside the norm are suppressed. The formers are believed to be the authentic characteristics that define a given identity category.

Cultural Anthropologist Richard Handler states that *authenticity* is a cultural construct that refers to the untouched, unspoiled, and traditional culture of a given society (1986, p.2). Therefore, it is used as a representational tool to celebrate a particular community's identity as unified and distinguish it from other collective identities. Authenticity is often mobilized via the reproduction and materialization of foundational myths. Such examples range from the creation of humankind to the roots of nations. During the process of authenticating, wholeness and continuity of the related identity are emphasized and preserved via the exposition of authentic characteristics through language. Here, language refers to discursive practices such as customs and norms, performative practices such as religious rituals and traditions, and representative materials such as photographs, murals and collected objects. By removing authentic objects, customs and traditions, which are the remnants of the vanished culture, from their original context, they are placed into a timeless realm. Thus, the existence of a collective identity appears as dependent on the heritage of an authentic culture.

The process of collective identity construction results in the creation of a distance from the self and reduction of the latter to a representative of a generalized group identity. Thus, alternative voices in the society are silenced, and hegemonic power relations are reproduced. However, since the dominant social structures are de-centered, i.e., there is not one but varying centers of power, individuals can change their discourse and their identity performance according to differing situations. In conclusion, far from being a fixed qualification, identity always shifts, and the concept of identification turns out to be a complicated process.

Although the context of the identity always changes, representational tools, which are integral parts of the identity construction, remain active in the production of meaning. In the following chapter, I will explain how *Tahtacı* identity is constructed through language and how it changes in different narrative contexts. The theoretical framework that informs this study is based on the critique of essentialist identity categories. On the one hand, Tahtacı identity is seen as the product of social constructions. On the other hand, the complicated relationship between various modes of identity constructions and spatial formations is explored to understand the historically changing relationship between space, power, and identity.

CHAPTER 3

(RE)CONSTRUCTING TAHTACI IDENTITY

The beginning of the use of the term Tahtacı is contestable among historians. According to Faruk Sümer (as cited in Çıblak, 2003), the term was used for the first time in the 16th century in Ottoman land registry books as *Cemaat-i Tahtacıyan* (Tahtacı Society). Yet, another historian, Turhan Yörükan is skeptical about this claim since Sümer does not provide historical documents to support it (as cited in Engin, 1999, p.3). Even though there is a lack of clarity about the original use of the term, Tahtacıs are commonly known as nomad communities of highlands who engage in forestry work. Their conversion to sedentary life dates back to the mid-19th century following Ottoman diplomat Ahmed Vefik Pasha's policies towards the settlement of tribes (Engin, 1999; Duymaz, 2001; Anzac Hotels, n.d.). These policies were directly connected to issues of military service, taxation, and maintenance of public order (Şimşir, 2016, p.103). Nomad tribes were hard to control since their population size and residential information could not be registered while they were on the move. Willing to stop unrestrained activities of nomadic groups to achieve immediate public order, Ahmet Vefik Pasha's regime implemented the settlement project to a large extent in the 1860s (Eröz, 2011). Nevertheless, Tahtacıs have partially sustained their nomadic lifestyle by migrating seasonally and living in the mountains until the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

In the Republican period, Tahtacıs settled in villages near areas where they used to work, i.e., on the Taurus Mountains of Southern Anatolia and highlands of Western Anatolia that culminate in the Mount Ida. Alternatively, they formed and settled in quarters in the suburb of the neighboring cities of Adana, Gaziantep, Mersin, Antalya, Burdur, Isparta, Muğla, Denizli, Aydın, İzmir, Manisa, Balıkesir, and Çanakkale. According to Historian Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, there were 20.000 houses and 100.000 Tahtacıs living in Anatolia in 1929 (as cited in Kuşci, 2018, p.5). After their settlement, Tahtacıs continued working on the mountains seasonally, yet remained settled in the villages and the neighborhoods otherwise.

Forestry business was monopolized by the Government during the early Republican period. The Department of Forestry was founded in 1937 when woodworking was modernized and activities like tree cutting were made subject to legal codes. What most affected the Tahtacı communities was the code that stated that villagers of any specific area would have priority on wood production in their vicinity (Kanburoğlu, 2006, p.5). Although some Tahtacı continued to work in the business by cooperating with the Department, most of them were obliged to head for other business lines since woodworking required less Tahtacı labor force due to the restriction of tree cutting in distant regions. In the early years of the Republic, most of them living in rural areas began to engage with agriculture, cultivation of fruits, vegetables, olives and greenhouse cultivation.

After the 1970s, with the rise of rural depopulation in Turkey, Tahtacı began working in state institutions and organizations. In the 2000s, while most of them were living in city centers and continued working in agriculture or state offices, there were still families working in forests as seasonal workers when the Department called for extra qualified labor. While the information on the present Tahtacı population living in Turkey remains undocumented, it is estimated to be over 300.000 (Kuşci, 2018). Most of the Tahtacı population, who quit woodworking, moved into city or township centers because of industrialization and economic needs (Appendix 4). Thus, they have no direct connection with their profession anymore.

Apparently, today there is no specific answer to the question of who can be considered as Tahtacı. Yet, the term survives and has a social function that needs to be explored. Sociologists Bulut and Bal (2015), argue that the term Tahtacı presently connotes rather a living belief system than a professional category. In the absence of collective professional expertise, those who identify themselves as Tahtacı, resort to two means to assert their identity as part of a community: discursive constructs and institutional structures.

3.1. Discursive Constructs

At the discursive level, Tahtacı define themselves on the basis of their religious beliefs and ethnic origins, i.e., *Alevism* and *Turkic* roots.

Sociologist Gürkan Çil (2016) explains Tahtacı's *Alevism* as *Heterodox Islam*, which refers to the harmonization of a multiplicity of beliefs. In Anatolia, *Heterodox*

Islam includes such Pre-Islamic beliefs as Shamanism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. The nomadic lifestyle and Pre-Islamic beliefs of Tahtacıs result in an original interpretation of a multiplicity of religious rituals.

Tahtacıs, who have been underrepresented people in terms of having a heterodox belief system and a closed society based on nomadism, have often been marginalized at several levels both in the Ottoman and the Republican periods, where the majority of the population consists of Sunni Islamic subjects. As a contemporary member of the Tahtacı community, Serdar Tanal explains: “Our lives have been harrowing with massacres, mourning, and social exclusions. We just barely found ourselves.” (Yılmaz, 2015).

Even the myths of how Tahtacıs started to work in the woodworking field is constructed through their position as an Alevi community. According to various sources, a Heterodox Islamic tribe living in Adana, *Yanyatır Ocağı*¹, which was led by Dur Hasan *Dede*², had to take the hills after they feuded with the local Sunni government, supposedly in the 15th century (Genç, 2017; M. Ünsal, personal communication, October 30, 2019; Y. Bilginç, personal communication, November 16, 2019). After Dur Hasan Dede’s death, the feudal lord of Adana wanted to marry his widow. Since this marriage could not be accepted by the Alevi society, the tribe escaped into the Taurus Mountains to avoid the consequences of this incident. While the exact date remains unknown, it is claimed that Greeks were running sawmills in the mountains at that time, where the Alevi tribes learned woodworking (Y. Bilginç, personal communication, November 16, 2019). After their professionalization, they spread to the Eastern Mountains of Anatolia as nomadic tribes.

As their means of living, woodcutting has a crucial impact on the lives of Tahtacıs since they owed their marginalized social survival to their profession. Their marginalized position, which is conceived as slaughtered Alevis, seems to have been overcome due to this expertise. Official recognition of Tahtacıs is believed to date to the time of Mehmed the Conqueror (15th century) (Bozarslan, 2017; Öçkomaz, 2011). According to this viewpoint, the arrival of Tahtacıs to the Mount Ida was commanded by Mehmed the Conqueror because lumbers that were needed for the

¹ *Ocak* has two meanings: ancestry or family; association or meeting place of people who share similar thoughts and purposes (Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlükleri, 2019).

² Title of religious leaders in Alevism.

ships that would be used for the Conquest of İstanbul were going to be supplied from the Mount Ida forests. According to another viewpoint, as successful woodworkers, Tahtacıs moved to this area and produced ships that were used in not only the Conquest of İstanbul but also of Lesbos Island (Duymaz, 2001, p.89). In either case, their esteemed position as a community that supports their government was short-lived.

Recent documentaries on Tahtacıs offer historical accounts that relate their settlement in mountainous regions to their marginalized status. According to a documentary released by the Tahtacı Cultural Associations, in 1514, Selim I started an operation against Alevis living in Anatolia, who supported his father Bayezid II while they were in a throne struggle. As a result, Alevis chose to settle on the high hills where the state administration could not easily reach them (tahtacidernegi, 2010; Appendix 5). Tahtacı Ali Cılız explains this situation: “Selim I enacted a law that demanded the eradication of the Alevi population. Thus, Alevis moved to high hills and looked for a new source of income.” (Öçkomaz, 2011).

While two main claims on how Tahtacıs started to live in the mountains date to different periods, both are based on their marginalized position. Indeed, even explanations on the root of the term Tahtacı are dependent upon this position. While the Head of Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation (TAF), Yolcu Bilginç claims that the term Tahtacı began to be used by woodworker Alevi tribes as a cover name for their Alevism, it is explained with a different narrative by Tahtacı Ali Çalışkan in the *Ağaçeri* (Woodsman) documentary:

Tahtacı *Turkmens*³ started to live in the mountains when they escaped from Ottoman oppression. There was not much to do in the mountains, so they began to do woodworking illegally. (...) Sunnis were settled at that time. They set up bazaars where Tahtacıs also sold woodworks. This name was given to us by Sunni Muslims and other groups. (Yılmaz, 2015)

The seriousness of official oppression is reported by Zeynel Gül, who is the producer of *Son Tahtacılar* (Last Tahtacıs) documentary, as follows: “Ahmet Vefik Pasha inspected various tribes when he received the news about their seasonal migration. If he caught sight of any tents on the high hills, he set them on fire.” (2017).

³ The term Turkmen indicates Turkic origins.

As members of the Alevi community, Tahtacıs have historically been excluded from social security, social rights, and administrative power positions, as well. The Instructor of Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House (GTCH), Servet Özden states:

As Alevi communities, we are disregarded all the time. We are present when the situation comes to tax collections, employment, and military service, but we do not exist if we become martyrs. Sunni Islamist governors would not even attend to our funerals in order not to jeopardize their political positions. (personal communication, November 20, 2019)

Tahtacı Fevzi Bozca also stated that even in the Republican period, they were not able to receive the recognition that they had been looking for. He further explained that there still were people who treated them as if they were inferior in religious terms (Öçkomaz, 2011). Another Tahtacı, Ali Yılmaz illustrated the situation that Bozca emphasized:

If I apply for a job in a bank, nobody will hire me as an employee. When someone knows that you are Alevi, he approaches you as if you were inferior. If I make a job application at the same time with a Sunni friend, he will be accepted, I cannot win. Even if I were better, he would have the job. (Gül, 2017)

As a strategy to counteract their religious marginalization, Tahtacıs emphasize their Turkic origins, which is the dominant ethnicity in the Turkish Republic. This discourse emphasizes how Tahtacıs remained loyal to their origins and continued their traditions for centuries. This claim is supported by an anonymous member of the Tahtacı Cultural Associations, who stated that during Ottoman times, Tahtacıs were sent to conquered lands to populate the latter with ethnically Turkic subjects. Also, by adding that “Tahtacıs have been able to preserve their Turkic cultural origins for centuries.” (tahtacidernegi, 2010), she seems to assert a claim that this authentic culture of the community will survive also in the future. This assertion endows Tahtacı identity with the quality of timelessness.

Indeed, a considerable number of academic studies, which explains the significance of ethnic roots in Tahtacıs’ self-identification process, describe the ethnic origins of them as Turkic (Çıblak, 2003; Bulut&Bal, 2015; Çil, 2016; Kuşçi, 2018). According

to Bilginç, when one says Tahtacı, two attributes come to mind: Turkmen and Alevi (Tali, 2018). Besides, one of the founders of Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery (TAKEG), Mustafa Selim Kudar also describes his identity by stating, “I am a descent of the Tahtacı Turkmens who were born in the Mount Ida.” (2018, p.1). In claiming that, he refers to such sources as *Aleviler’in Etnik Kimliği Türk mi Kürt mü* (Şener, 2002) and *Aleviliğin Kökleri* (Çınar, 2008) which assert that all Alevis have Turkic and Anatolian origins (personal communication, October 20, 2018). Whereas in the former source, it is claimed that Alevism appeared as a result of Turkmen tribes’ interpretation of Islam, in the latter one, it is stated that Alevism has existed in Anatolia since the time of the Hittite Empire. According to this second assumption, the term Alevism is not derived from the name of Imam Ali, but from the *Luvi* community, which is considered as one of the ancient tribes of Anatolia⁴. Based on this account, the original people of Anatolia are defined as Alevis (Luvis). Hence, Alevism appears as related to the Pre-Islamic beliefs of Anatolian communities. This discourse is further claimed by Kudar, who states that Shamanism was the original belief of Tahtacı, adding that it is the most ancient belief system (personal communication, January 12, 2020).

Tahtacı’s association with Turkic roots appears to be closely related to their Alevism as opposed to the Sunni culture, which is associated with Arabic roots. In various independent interviews with Tahtacı, many of them claim that although part of the Turkish community has been assimilated by Arabic culture, Tahtacı remained loyal to their Turkic origins and preserved their Turkmen identity (tahtacidernegi, 2010; Öçkomaz, 2011). Bilginç explains this situation by reference to nomadism: “Not being settled in cities provided them [Tahtacı] to keep their original culture without being assimilated and degenerated.” (Tali, 2018). He further explains the relationship between Tahtacı’s belief system and Turkic roots by stating as follows:

We [Tahtacı] do not have any problems with governments, yet we wish to have administrators who care more about Alevism and Tahtacı Turkmen culture. As a matter of fact, we are in a situation in which Turkic culture is disregarded and Arabic culture is boosted under the name of Islam. This is the biggest threat to our community. Islam should not refer to Arabic roots. In

⁴ Luvis are claimed to be the first Anatolian tribe that used fire. According to Erdoğan Çınar, Luvi means *Wo/man of the light* in Luvi language (2000, p.51).

Anatolia, Islam covers all the religious philosophies, including Alevism, Bektashism and Mevlevi orders, which refer to Turkic roots. (personal communication, November 16, 2019)

The emphasis on Turkishness is related not only to Turkic roots but also to the political position of the individuals. The statements of the Tahtacı clearly illustrate that they see their socio-political position as the other of the Sunni majority. Accordingly, they have been politically positioned in opposition to the ruling governments. Nevertheless, the early Republican era can be regarded as exceptional in this context.

After the Republic was founded as a secular state in 1923, one of the most remarkable attempts in the secularist direction was the abolishment of the caliphate in 1924 by a decree of the Grand National Assembly. Besides, the Kemalist regime implemented laws that restricted religious institutions that had been dating from the Ottoman Empire. Secularist policies lead to negotiations with and support for Alevis, who in turn lent their support to the ruling powers and even gained representation in the National Assembly (Öçkomaz, 2011). Tahtacı Hüseyin Cılız proudly stated that “After Atatürk founded the Turkish Republic, he founded an assembly. 1/3 of the assembly consisted of Alevis.” (Öçkomaz, 2011).

To summarize, Tahtacı’s collective identity reproduces itself based on a belief system and a political position which was the outcome of their historically rooted minority position. Since today’s governmental politics are dominated by the Sunni Islamic majority, the term Tahtacı is now defined rather on the basis of historical roots in Alevism and Turkishness than on woodworking skills. Today, narratives on the roots, nomadic existence and political struggles are used as tools to produce a stable Tahtacı identity. In the absence of the monopoly on woodworking business and nomadism, this identity seems to have lost most of its material basis and needs to be supported by the broader identity categories, which refer to the antique and authentic qualities of the community’s culture.

3.2. Institutional Structures

Tahtacı, who settled in mountainous villages at the time of Ahmed Vefik Pasha and, in the outskirts of cities after the foundation of the Republic, were obliged to act according to Governmental regulations more than ever. They found new ways to

comply with their changing social position as they had more access to hegemonic structures. Those who continued to work in forestry began to work under The Department of Forestry. Others started to get higher education in scientific fields, work as employees or administrators in state institutions. Nevertheless, they could not create an environment where they voiced their collective presence until the 1990s. Only then, they founded institutions to overcome their underrepresented position. Their first attempt was to found museums to assert their cultural heritage by means of documented information. Then, Tahtacı associations were formed in the mid-2000s to attain socio-political power, which united under a federation in 2016. Finally, in the 2010s, they established cultural houses that are supported by local governments, by means of which they emphasized their Alevi and Turkic roots and reproduced these identity categories.

3.2.1. Museums

Museums are conventionally defined as spaces, where permanent exhibitions of “the tangible, cultural and natural heritage” of humankind are held (DeCarli & Christophe, 2012, p.17). Via realizing these exhibitions, museums are meant to work for the service of society and its cultural development. In addition to the permanent exhibits, museums can host temporary displays and activities related to their content. In hosting these functions, they engage in three main activities (DeCarli & Christophe, 2012): preservation that serves for the protection of the collections; research, which is needed for the reliability of the information; and communication that is necessary for content dissemination and society-related activities. There are two Tahtacı museums in Turkey, which engage in these activities by means of their collections, documentation, and publicity tools: Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery and Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum (BMBTM). While the former functions as a museum that includes both permanent and temporary collections, the latter hosts an example of a Tahtacı village house from the Early Republican period.

3.2.1.1. Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery

In 1991, Tahtacı Alibey Kudar and his family founded an ethnographic museum: Tahtakuşlar Ethnographic Gallery in Tahtakuşlar village, Edremit, Balıkesir (Figure 3.1). Known as the first private ethnographic museum in Turkey, it also contains an

art gallery, which was opened in 1992 as the first village art gallery in Turkey and a library of 12.000 books, which was included in 1994. During the same year, the gallery received a grant from UNESCO, which would be the precursor of other similar national and international awards, such as The Azerbaijan Dede Gorgut Foundation Golden Heart Award, Association of Turkish Travel Agencies Award and Edremit Rotary Club Award. In addition to three existing spaces in the museum, the administration plans to re-design the museum garden and hold artistic and cultural activities there (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.1 Kudar family photograph in TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2020)

Tahtakuşlar is one of the villages that was founded in the region of Mount Ida as a result of Ahmet Vefik Pasha's obligatory settlement project between 1862 and 1864. Called as *Kuşlar Bayırı* (The Ridge of Birds) in the 1860s, the village was named as *Tahtakuşlar* (Wooden Birds) in 1948 by the local population, referring to their woodcutting roots (Pala, 2016). From the 1860s to 1990s, the villagers dealt with forestry and agriculture. Since the forestry business came to a closure in 1994 when Mount Ida was recognized as a national park (Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar Genel Müdürlüğü, 2016), local inhabitants turned to the tourism sector to earn their living.

Alibey Kudar (born in 1932), a village resident, had been teaching in primary schools in neighboring towns until his retirement in 1980. He and his family then decided to found the museum to avert the cultural erosion in Turkey (Kudar, 2012). Mustafa

Selim Kudar, whose family runs the Gallery today, further stated that since the very beginning, their primary aim has been preserving cultural values of Tahtacı through this institution to hand them down to the forthcoming generations (personal communication, October 20, 2018).



Figure 3.2 TAKEG building and the gallery garden in 2016 (Kaya, 2016)

When the family opened the gallery in 1991, 90 percent of exhibited objects consisted of the family collection, and 10 percent were collected from local inhabitants. These were mostly related to the forestry business and nomadic lifestyle of Tahtacı. In time, the collection grew with other donated objects. Kudar stated that, during this process, they received a variety of ethnographic materials including natural objects such as apiaries, snakeskins, wooden objects and industrial products such as irons, oil lamps and radios (personal communication, January 12, 2020). He further claimed that this collection helped to create a unique space, which became a representative of Anatolian culture.

Kudar asserted that, after he started to search more into the motifs and symbols that belong to Tahtacı cultural objects, he found out that this culture was not only related to Anatolia but also to Shaman cultures all around the World. The claim here appears quite interesting in terms of its connection with identity narratives based on antiquity. Kudar emphasized their connections with antiquity by stating that Tahtacı were Turkmens, whose predecessors had been the original Shaman folk of Anatolia and they succeeded in preserving their cultural values throughout the centuries. In keeping with his claim, he enhanced his argument by stating that the Tahtacı

exhibitions. There, almost 1300 different artists' works from 17 countries have been exhibited.

The gallery, which did not officially have the status of a museum, functions as an independent museum outside ministerial and municipal hierarchies of control, despite the financial relief that could have been brought otherwise. Kudar stated that they want to keep their independent position since the gallery administration had problems with the former municipalities on issues such as the supply of a proper nameplate and pavement on the side road (personal communication, January 12, 2020).

While the gallery administration manages to stand clear of political relations and collaborations, it seems to have an impact on the recognition of Tahtacıs. The narrative that is generated by the museum, where Tahtacıs are defined as Shamanic Alevi Turkmens, attracted not only the visitors from abroad but also the locals (M.S. Kudar, personal communication, January 12, 2020). As Traveler Kemal Kaya explains in his *Tahtakuşlar* travel note: "Even though this village is known as an Alevi-Turkmen village, some of the villagers define themselves as Shamans" (2016).

3.2.1.2. Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum

Musa Baran Toy Museum is located in *Bademler* (Almonds) village, Urla, İzmir. The original population of Bademler, who had dealt with forestry work, consisted of nomadic subjects until the 1820s. They cut trees, sawed them, and produced wooden household items for neighboring villages. Their original settlement in Bademler consisted of 12 tents and three houses. The latter were modest two-story buildings, of which ground floors were used as barns (Figure 3.4). Village residents, who dealt with animal husbandry after their settlement, named the village as Bademler (Almonds), because of the almond trees in the vicinity. In the Republican Era, the villagers worked in agriculture and today, they have an agricultural cooperative as their primary source of income. They set up a bazaar once a week to sell fruits, vegetables, and wooden objects, which receives attention not only from the neighboring villages but also from other districts of İzmir. Another tourist attraction center is the Bademler Theatre building, which is actively working today. It is the first village theatre⁶ in Turkey (Kozanoğlu, 1995, p.20), where all the actors consist

⁶ The theatre building was opened in November 12, 1969.

of the village residents. Village weddings, henna nights and important gatherings also take place in this building (Kozanođlu, 1995). As the village hums with activities, visitors that come there also take an interest in the Musa Baran Toy Museum.



Figure 3.4 BMBTM along with simple two-story village houses (Çađlar, 2016)

Musa Baran, who was born in Bademler in 1924, graduated from the Archaeology Department of İstanbul University. After he retired from İzmir Archaeological Museum in 1975, he decided to found a toy museum by virtue of his interest in games and toys from Roman and Hellenistic times to date (Tali, 2018). His article *Children's Games* was published in the *Expedition Magazine* of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in 1974 and he also wrote a book on this topic, which was published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture in 1993.

Baran renovated his family house in 1981 and transformed it into a toy museum in 1983 (Amerika'nın Sesi, 2019). While the toy exhibition is located on the first floor of the original house, the single room on the ground floor is designed by Musa Baran as a sample of Tahtacı village house, which aims to expose how the local residents managed to preserve their authentic woodworking culture even after their settlement (Figure 3.5). Dating this village house to the Early Republican Era, Baran emphasized the perpetuation of the historical Tahtacı lifestyle.



Figure 3.5 The single-room Tahtacı village house next to the Toy Museum building (Çağlar, 2016)

3.2.2. Cultural Houses

The term cultural house refers to small-scaled cultural centers for the exhibition or promotion of arts and culture. The cultural houses' main purpose is the promotion of cultural values among the members of its community as non-profit institutions. In Turkey, the formation of these institutions dates to the Republican Period. Today's cultural houses are considered to be the successors of *Halkevleri*⁷ (government-supported public education centers), which were founded in 1932 (Seven, 2010).

There are two cultural houses of Tahtacı in Turkey: Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House⁸ (NMCH) and Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House. While the former functions more like a museum and a community center, the latter operates as a djemevi, and a public education center.

3.2.2.1. Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House

Tahtacı communities have two main *Ocaks* in Turkey: *Yanyatır Ocağı* in Narlıdere, İzmir and *Hacı Emirli Ocağı* in Reşadiye, Aydın. Their predecessors are respectively Ceyhan, Adana, where the religious leader Dur Hasan Dede's tomb is and İslahiye,

⁷ Halkevleri were founded with the support of the Republican People's Party to provide cultural, social and educational services for the public. Their original status survived until 1960s (Halkevleri, 2020).

⁸ The building is also known as Historical Djemevi which was built in 1874.

Gaziantep, where the religious leader İbrahim Emirli's grave is located. Although the reason for the migration of these communities from South-East Anatolia to Western Anatolia remains unclear, various accounts state that family feuds and political push factors, which are mostly due to religious discrimination against Alevis, caused an inevitable migration in the 18th century (Genç, 2017; Kuşci, 2018; M. Ünsal, personal communication, October 30, 2019; Y. Bilginç, personal communication, November 16, 2019). Yet, their settlement as villagers in Western Anatolia was realized in the 19th century, when Narlıdere became the new center of Yanyatır Ocağı (Genç, 2017).

Known as the earliest building that has remained standing in Narlıdere, Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House was built as a djemevi building in 1874 (Narlıdere Belediyesi Kültür Evi (Tarihî Cemevi), n.d.) by Yanyatır community's leader Hızır Dede, who is the successor of Dur Hasan Dede. Until the 1960s, the djemevi was actively used by local Tahtacı. Since then, with the growth of Narlıdere, from a village to a densely populated urban neighborhood, the building's capacity became inadequate and it was finally abandoned in the 2000s (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6 The abandoned historical djemevi in Narlıdere (Merih Ünsal Collection, n.d.)

After the abandonment of the building, local residents continued djem rituals in their houses, yards and open spaces. Yet, these dispersed gatherings could not meet the community's need for a collective shelter. Driven with the need for an institution, the

Alevi residents of Narlıdere got in contact with Narlıdere Municipality about their request of the restoration of the historical djemevi building (M. Ünsal, personal communication, October 30, 2019). However, the buildings' inadequate spatial capacity resulted in its final use as a cultural house and a local museum, while a new building was constructed as a djemevi. The Head of the Cultural House, Merih Ünsal underlined that separating different functions in two different buildings rather than building an additional djemevi would prevent a possible division within the Alevi society (personal communication, October 30, 2019). Otherwise, Tahtacı would most likely prefer to go to the historical djemevi while other Alevis would use the new building.

The support of the municipality, which is governed by the Republican People's Party (RPP), seems to result from their opposition to the ruling government. In 2006, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, which is also governed by the oppositional party, restored the historical building while Narlıdere Municipality took care of the interior design and decoration (Figure 3.7). Ünsal claims authorship of most of the interior design. She collected the exhibited objects personally by visiting the nearby Tahtacı villages. Part of the exhibited objects was donated by the locals. Most of the other expenses, including the production of furniture and wax sculptures, were covered by the municipalities. After the completion of restoration and design, the building was opened as Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House in May 2007.



Figure 3.7 Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House after the restoration realized by İzmir Metropolitan Municipality (Narlıdere Belediyesi, 2019)

While the frequency of visits and the profile of the visitors differ, most visit the Cultural House to be informed about woodworkers' perspective of Alevi culture. Ünsal states that this enterprise turned out to be very beneficial in terms of not only introducing the Tahtacı culture to a broader audience but also supporting the neighborhood economically (personal communication, October 30, 2019). However, the Cultural House's being the only place of attraction in the neighborhood limits the visitation rate as tour companies look for sites where the visitors can spend at least one day by walking, visiting tourist places and eateries. Hence, Narlıdere Municipality plans the renovation of the entire neighborhood, including The Cultural House, to attract more visitors.

Ünsal (personal communication, October 30, 2019) underlines that the building grounds belong to the Municipality, which also meets utility and cleaning expenses. Nevertheless, the Cultural House functions autonomously in terms of administrative issues under Ünsal's initiative and works as a community center. As a community center, they organize regular traditional events and periodic Alevi gatherings there. Yet, Ünsal states that most of the charity organizations are planned in the new djemevi building of Narlıdere to tighten the bonds between the Tahtacı Alevis and the Non-Tahtacı Alevis (personal communication, October 30, 2019).

3.2.2.2. Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House

Similar to the Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House, Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House was also founded upon the request of Alevi residents in the neighborhood. Since the Alevi population living around the area increased due to migrations, they needed a djemevi in Güzelbahçe. Güzelbahçe Municipality bought the land and the ground-breaking ceremony was held on the 20th anniversary of the Sivas Massacre⁹ on July 2, 2013 (Güzelbahçe'ye Tahtacı Kültür Evi temeli, 2013). It is clearly seen that the political position of the municipality administration affected their approach to the Cultural House.

The building's construction was completed in November, 2013 (Bodur, 2013; Figure 3.8). In addition to the Güzelbahçe and İzmir Metropolitan Municipalities' support, local Alevis also made material donations such as door and window frames and tiles

⁹ Sivas Massacre or Madımak Incident refers to the Hotel Madımak's being set on fire by Radical Islamist on July 2, 1993. The incident resulted in the death of 33 Alevi intellectuals staying in this Hotel during the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC] Türkçe, 2019).

during the construction process (S. Özden, personal communication, November 20, 2019). After the construction was completed, the building was sublet to Haji Bektash Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation¹⁰ as the municipalities are legally restricted in opening djemevis. Since the latter conduct this process by subletting buildings to Alevi foundations, tenancy of the new Narlıdere Djemevi building belongs to the same foundation, as well.

Although the name of the building includes Tahtacı, it works as a djemevi and an Alevi cultural center on several counts since its administration belongs to an Alevi organization. As explained by the instructor of the Cultural House, Servet Özden, “Because *Yaka Mahallesi* is a Tahtacı neighborhood, it is also called as Tahtacı Cultural House. We serve both Tahtacıs and Alevis at the same time.” (personal communication, November 20, 2019). Here, the identity of Tahtacıs seems to be represented under the name of the religious category, Alevism.



Figure 3.8 GTCH building constructed under local and municipal support (Author’s Photo Archive, 2019)

Besides regular djemevi events, the Cultural House also holds educational activities, which are organized by Güzelbahçe Municipality. Each day of the week, at least one training takes place in there. According to Özden, approximately 20 people visit the building every day to join the trainings, the majority of whom are women. He

¹⁰ Haji Bektash Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation is an organization which was founded in 1994 to meet with Alevi and Bektashi communities’ social needs (HBVAKV, 2015).

underlines that the Turkish folk music choir consists of 35 women, 15 men; all of the sewing course students and most of the folk dancers are women. At the end of each course period, either public performances or exhibitions are held to show final works and products in public. For example, the Turkish folk music choir gives two concerts a year, in May and September; final products of the sewing course are regularly exhibited in the night bazaar of Güzelbahçe. Nevertheless, Özden (personal communication, November 20, 2019) states that holding year-end exhibitions or performances in more accessible places such as Güzelbahçe Cultural Center and Güzelbahçe bazaar and the building's remote location results in scarce visitation. He claims that having these events in the Cultural House instead of other places could be beneficial to attract more people and inform them about Alevi culture.

The Cultural House is open only on weekdays. One teacher's offer to hold primary school level courses on the weekends was rejected by the administration since these courses would have no connection with Alevi culture. Instead, the administration is planning to have regular Alevi events and breakfast services at the weekends to increase the visitation rate. Although the Cultural House could not reach the visitation frequency that they desire, Özden claims that many visitors, including both Alevis and Non-Alevis, started to get curious about and familiar with Alevism after their visit. Thus, the support of Cultural House in the recognition of Alevis in Güzelbahçe appears as very effective.

3.2.3. Associations & Federation

The 1993 Sivas massacre clearly indicated that the Alevi population was publicly threatened by hegemonic powers. This event became a turning point in the increasing numbers of Alevi institutions such as associations and foundations. As a result, Tahtacı also became more visible in terms of public recognition in the last two decades. Nevertheless, being loosely organized around djemevis under various foundations, Tahtacı had no autonomous agency prior to the foundation of the Association.

The need to found an association that belongs to the Tahtacı community was voiced for the first time in 2006 during a meeting for the renovation process of Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House (Y. Bilginç, personal communication, October 11, 2018). There, Tahtacı reached a consensus that there was a need for an association

of their own as their voices were muted in the current Alevi organizations. Even though the foundation of an association could create a division in a minority group, it was seen important for gaining political agency. In the following year, 63 Tahtacı “who wanted to claim their identity” (Y. Bilginç, personal communication, October 11, 2018) founded the Narlıdere Branch of The Cultural Association of Tahtacı. The Head of the Cultural Associations, Yolcu Bilginç explains the founding concerns of this institution as: documenting and conserving the Turkmen culture; creating an alternative to Kurdish dominance in the current Alevi organizations in Turkey; taking a political stance in terms of current governmental issues; and forming a united Tahtacı community. Accordingly, in order to be a full member of the association, applicants are required to be Tahtacı, who are defined by having Turkic origins and belonging to Alevism. All others can only be honorary members, who cannot participate in administrative matters and vote in the association’s elections. As Bilginç explains “Our [Tahtacı] main aim is to become a self-regulating society.” (personal communication, November 16, 2019).

In time, the associations grew to have 37 branches under one main headquarter. However, there was still no visible recognition of these branches until the mid-2010s. When their collective agency was challenged in this manner, they wanted to emphasize their identity by uniting all the branches under the name of Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation in 2016. Today, there are five headquarters of the Federation in İzmir, Denizli, Balıkesir, Antalya and Mersin. Although the headquarters are located in city centers, the Federation administration claims that they still remain as a rural organization and their vision is to work actively at the urban level as well.

According to Bilginç, there are political and practical advantages to be a federation rather than an association in terms of the capacity to take a political stance in current governmental issues (personal communication, November 16, 2019). For example, as an association, the Tahtacı community faced with difficulties in claiming ownership over chattel goods and real estate, and founding institutions such as djemevis. Yet, as a federation, they can have a representative even in the city council. Today, they are planning to have independent association branches and one federation to handle all institutional affairs. Bilginç further explains that political and practical issues such as business operations will be conducted through the federation, since the associations

failed to act as a politically united group. The Federation's administration banned the associations from engaging with political and profit-related issues. Thus, while the federation appears as a politically useful instrument, associations remain as cultural institutions.

The Federation's relationship with the central government turned out to be quite complex. As a community emphasizing the Turkic roots, their perception of Alevism is highly related to having Turkic origins. Hence, they are supported by Republicans as opposed to the Sunni Islamic front. Furthermore, Bilginç states that:

We understand The Republic as the up-to-date version of Alevism. We are trying to avoid engaging with the parties, which disregard Mustafa Kemal and have a strategy that challenges the founding principles of the Republic. If the Republican People's Party develops an attitude against Mustafa Kemal, we will make a significant effort to encourage them to return their politically correct position. (personal communication, November 16, 2019)

The political position of the Federation became most apparent when Bilginç announced his candidacy to be an RPP deputy in 2015. He declared his decision as follows:

We were used to working in associational and cultural affairs, and we did not pursue any political aims before. Yet, we want to represent our identity in politics from this day forth. (...) We want our folk dance and music to be recognized by state politics. (...) We are neo-nationalists. Tahtacı will always stand by the RPP. ("Tahtacılar'dan CHP'ye tam destek!", 2015)

After his declaration, Bilginç made statements against the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which is the most effective political institution of the Kurdish initiative in Turkey. By criticizing the Alevi foundations who support the PDP, he stated: "We, as Tahtacı Turkmens, did not and will not stand by any institution which does not respect Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. While their institutions' support is for Kurdishness rather than Turkishness, we support Atatürk and the Republic." ("Tahtacı Alevilerden çarpıcı HDP açıklaması", 2015).

Even though the Head of the Federation is a member of the RPP, he stated that local governments supported them when they explained that the Associations had no

political alliances¹¹. Bilginç explains previous collaborations with the government offices as follows:

We have been supported socially and financially by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism when the Minister was Ertuğrul Günay. Three-quarters of the expenses of the first Tahtacı Festival were supported by the government. 50 percent of the second festivals' costs were also paid by them. For the third one, the support rate was decreased to one third of the expenses. They stopped the financial support after the Minister was changed. Yet, municipalities continued to be helpful. (personal communication, November 16, 2019)

The Republican People's Party, which dominates the local governments in the Aegean region, has Tahtacı administrators in Aydın, İzmir and Edremit. The Federation and these administrators agree on political issues. Yet, in the regions that the RPP has no local governance, the Federation supports Tahtacı to be in the administration of other parties, which have power in these regions. This exceptional situation serves for the sake of their political agency. Furthermore, for the first time in 2014, the Federation accepted the invitation of the Prime Ministry, which supports the Sunni-Islamic front (El, 2014). These approaches indicate the seriousness of Tahtacı's desire to get governmental recognition.

The activities and political alliances of the Associations and the Federation resulted in the strengthening of the Alevi Turkic component of the Tahtacı identity and its recognition by the larger population. Bilginç explains that there arose a perception that all Alevis have Turkic origins and even Non-Tahtacı Alevis started to define themselves as Tahtacı as a result of the Federation's publicity work (personal communication, November 16, 2019). Those who took the term Tahtacı as an insult in the past, started to adopt it as a means of defining their collective identity. This sense of belonging is reproduced via the creation of a narrative of origins and the repetition of socio-cultural and socio-political norms in the institutional structures.

¹¹ Bilginç explains that during the second festival in Adana, the Association was supported by Nationalist Movement Party and during the fourth festival in Gaziantep, Justice and Development Party agreed to be in cooperation with them (personal communication, November 16, 2019).

CHAPTER 4

SPATIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TAHTACI IDENTITY

Identity construction and space have a complicated relationship in the context of the Tahtacı community due to the variety of representational tools and functions that are reproduced and reinterpreted to recover a vanishing identity. In Literary Theorist Roland Barthes' terms, their language of production is transformed into a representational discourse in the service of their identity's construction. Barthes exemplifies the distinction between the former and the latter, and how they function differently with reference to the woodcutter. Here a rather lengthy quotation is in order:

If I am a woodcutter and I am led to name the tree which I am felling, whatever the form of my sentence, I 'speak the tree', I do not speak about it. This means that my language is operational, transitively linked to its object; between the tree and myself, there is nothing but my labour, that is to say, an action. (...) But if I am not a woodcutter, I can no longer 'speak the tree', I can only speak about it, on it. My language is no longer the instrument of an 'acted-upon tree', it is the 'tree-celebrated' which becomes the instrument of my language. I no longer have anything more than an intransitive relationship with the tree; this tree is no longer the meaning of reality as a human action, it is an image-at-one's-disposal. (1991, p. 146)

On the basis of Barthes' theory, Tahtacı (woodcutter) institutional spaces appear as representational means that are used to construct cultural meanings. As Architectural Theorist Sophia Psarra states, "Architecture does not only express meaning. It also participates in the construction of meaning through the ordering of spaces and social relationships." (2009, p.2).

In the case of Tahtacıs, three main identity categories consistently manifest themselves in specific spaces: professional (woodcutting), religious (Alevism) and ethnic (Turkic origins). These categories are represented and re-enacted materially

through organized objects, photographs, illustrations, and *mise-en-scènes*¹² in the museums, cultural houses and federation offices. These are also practically reproduced via specific performances that are held through these institutions, not necessarily meant for that activity. Such communal practices, which are realized in spatial terms, serve the reinforcement of the Tahtacı identity and its transmission to future generations.

Woodcutting, which is a rural activity, is now only represented through materials in the institutional spaces located in the cities. On the other hand, Alevism and Turkic origins, which are related to both past and current identity constructions that comply with the growing emphasis on religious and ethnic identities in Turkey, are represented through a number of ceremonial practices as well as material means. The following sections focus on these spatial tools that are used by Tahtacı for the reconstruction of their identity.

4.1. Material Representations

Material representations, which often take the form of exhibitions, are one of the most obvious ways to mobilize identity discourses. Tahtacı museums, cultural houses and federation offices fulfill this function. Collected objects are either placed on their walls, in display units and glass cases or they are arranged in a choreographic order to create a *mise-en-scène*. In that process, diverse items that are disconnected from their original environment are collected, classified, and displayed in a new arrangement to produce a new meaning. Cultural Geographer James Clifford claims that collecting the objects is a strategy for the formation of cultural identity, rather than a need (1988, p.2018) since these objects become evidence of the collectives' existence and their identity's continuation when exhibited.

Photographs and illustrations, too, serve similar purposes. When displayed in public interiors, such visuals become the very mechanisms of communication to support the meaning that is attributed to the related collected objects. Tahtacı use each material instrument to reconstitute their identity culturally and politically by means of which they resist the inevitable disappearance of their community.

¹² *Mise-en-scène* ('putting on stage' in French) refers to the contents that are arranged to create a scenery.

4.1.1. Woodcutting

Needless to say, woodcutting has crucial importance on the identity construction of Tahtacı as they historically survived through their marginalized social status by means of their profession. Although woodworking is no longer a relevant means of living for Tahtacı and they are now predominantly identified on ethnic and religious bases, their original profession created a permanent imprint on the social structure of the community. Today, the profession and its effects on the structure, which are used as a tool of urban representations of the identity, serve to support Tahtacı' alignment with the oppositional front.

As stated in the previous chapter, Tahtacı tend to be on the same page with the main opposition party in terms of socio-cultural and socio-political stances. Defending the premises of secularism, the party positioned itself as modern in opposition to the present government's conservative policies. Contrary to the religious basis of the ideology of the current government, the party has founded its discourse on the so-called authentic and modern characteristics of contemporary Turkish subjects. Tahtacı also emphasize these characteristics via spatial representations based on their woodworking culture. Thus, these representations are overloaded with political identification, particularly related to those based on ethnicity, authenticity and gender.

One of the significant components of modern identity is defined as based on women's rights and gender equality. This is of particular significance due to the conservative gender policies of the present government. The relative equality of gender roles within the Tahtacı community is rooted in the collective workforce that is required in woodcutting. All family members, including men, women and children actively participate in the woodcutting process. The collective basis of this lifestyle did not change after Tahtacı were settled. As Cumali Güngör, whose family has been living and working in the Taurus Mountains since 1936 states:

Approximately 40 Tahtacı families bought an expansive land in 1936 and founded a settlement: Kızılkaya village. My father's family was one of them. After their settlement, villagers continued working in the forests by migrating seasonally. Although they started to work in agriculture at the same time,

they never stopped working in the woods. I started working at the age of eight by being responsible for draught animals. At the age of 14-15, girls and boys start working in the tree cutting process. Men and women work together in the forests or on agricultural land until their late years. (personal communication, February 16, 2020; see Figure 4.1)



Figure 4.1 Kızılkaya villagers working in the woods (Cumali GÜNGÖR Collection)

Gülsel Kasap, who is a Tahtacı of Soğukpınar village in Kemalpaşa, İzmir, also explains how she started to work in the woods in her childhood by stating “I was seven-eight years old. One day, my father said, ‘Let’s go to work together today’. We went. (...). He initiated me to do woodworking. When I became 11 years old, I was already used to working with chain-saw.” (NomadMind & Baserriko Arte Sarea, 2017).

As GÜNGÖR’s and Kasap’s explanations clarify, Tahtacı women are not limited to the realm of domesticity. Contributing to the family economy, they enjoy economic and social equality with men. In contrast to conservative households in Turkey where women conventionally take a secondary place and are excluded in such aspects of public life as religious ceremonies, Tahtacı communities include both genders in all social activities.

In Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House, women’s relatively independent status in the community is particularly apparent at the exhibition spaces on first-floor interiors, which has functioned as guest rooms for aspirants at the former djemevi until the 1960s. Museologist Marc Maure explains the production of meaning through exhibitions by stating:

The exhibition's presentation technique is based on the same principles as language. Relevant elements are chosen from a definite repertoire, organized into sequences with the help of given rules and codes, creating connotations by using metaphors and other rhetorical figures, etc. (1995, p.160)



Figure 4.2 Figures of a man and a woman cutting wood together in NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

The explanations of the interior designer of the Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House, Ünsal, exemplified Maures's statement when she said that they converted the former guest rooms into exhibition spaces because guest rooms would not be appropriate venues to represent their cultural values (personal communication, October 30, 2019).

Upon entering the main exhibition hall of The Cultural House, one is greeted by the figures of a man and a woman cutting wood together on a traditional bench (Figure 4.2). The walls that surround this scene support the narrative of woodworking by containing objects that illustrate Tahtacı's professional life in the past such as different kinds of cutting and logging tools, saws, and agricultural equipment. Each element in this mise-en-scène is part of an arranged environment that supplants its own temporality. Nevertheless, the portrayal of a woodcutting scene, as the collaborative effort of men and women, is a symbolic gesture that emphasizes their communal lifestyle that requires gender equality.



Figure 4.3 Photograph of a man and a woman working together in the mountains in NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

The mise-en-scène's impact is intensified with photographs and paintings that involve similar scenes of men and women working together in the mountains, which are exhibited in the main exhibition hall and the photography collection gallery of the cultural house (Figure 4.3; Figure 4.4). Via documenting and displaying these images that refer to past experiences, the maintenance of the culture, which is based on woodcutting, is ensured. As Roland Barthes states in *Camera Lucida*, "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially." (1981, p.4). He further explains: "Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object." (1981, p.13). Photographs and illustrations are clearly used as representational means of the woodcutting culture in the Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House. There, especially black and white ones emphasize the historicity of gender equality in the Tahtacı community.

The socio-political identification of Tahtacı community is manifested not only by the emphasis on gender equality but also on the authenticity of their professional culture. As James Clifford states, "The collection and preservation of an authentic domain of identity cannot be natural or innocent. It is tied up with nationalist politics." (1988, p. 218). Parallel to Clifford's statement, Cultural Anthropologist Richard Handler explains the emphasis on authenticity by ethnic groups' aspiration for political recognition (1986, p.3):

Now it [authenticity] is precisely anxiety about existence that characterizes nationalist ideologies, whose fundamental premise is always that 'a' nation, bounded and distinctive, exists. Such anxiety is particularly apparent where national or ethnic groups find themselves in a struggle for recognition, seeking either national sovereignty or equal rights within a larger polity.



Figure 4.4 Photograph of a man and a woman working together in the mountains in NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)



Figure 4.5 The sepulcher mise-en-scène in NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

The authenticity of the Tahtacı culture is claimed through collected objects and mise-en-scènes in the sepulcher room, the kitchen utensils' room and in the cloth and dowry room of the Cultural House. These become socio-historical proofs that are

needed for the assertion of their professional culture. The mise-en-scène in the sepulcher room contains the figure of a woman's body in a wooden coffin (Figure 4.5). This setting endows the objects with a unique value since Tahtacı burial customs required wooden coffins, which contained belongings of the deceased as well as the body. This ritual is one of the main characteristics that distinguish Tahtacı from other Alevi groups, and places the former to a more pristine position than the latter.



Figure 4.6 Exhibition of household objects in the Kitchen Utensils' Room of NMCH (Narlidere Kültürevi, 2020)

The use of wooden objects in daily life, which indicates the traditional woodcutting culture, is extensively exhibited by various means. Examples include a packsaddle that is used on draught animals to carry their load, a butter churn and household objects such as wooden forks and spoons. Tables and benches that were used in the forests, which are displayed in the kitchen utensils' room, are meant to provide clues about authentic Tahtacı woodworker lifestyle (Figure 4.6). In addition, wooden furniture in the cloth and dowry room, such as a crib and a wedding chest, show how woodworking skills were put in use after the nomadic lifestyle came to an end (Figure 4.7). The primary motivation for the construction of these settings is based on the need to preserve the memory of the authenticity of the professional identity.

The narrative on woodworking is supported not only with objects that are exhibited in the related spaces but also with the constructional elements of the building such as the wooden flooring material, door and window frames, sills, wall and ceiling

claddings, wood stairs and balustrades (Figure 4.8). It is clearly seen that architecture itself becomes a tool to represent identity. As Psarra states in *Architecture and Narrative*:

Narrative enters architecture in many ways, from the conceptual ‘messages’ it is made to stand for to the illustration of a design through models, drawings and other representational forms. This aspect of architectural expression, what the design speaks of, is relevant to narrative as representation. It concerns the semantic meanings of buildings and places, and the contribution of architecture to the expression of social and cultural messages. (2009, p.2)



Figure 4.7 Wooden objects that are exhibited in the Cloth and Dowry Room of NMCH (Author’s Photo Archive)

Musa Baran Toy Museum, which contains a display of the interior of a Tahtacı village house is another example to Psarra’s statement. There, the woodworkers’ lifestyle is manifested in the widespread use of wood both in architectural details of the house and the household objects. While the original use of this space remains unknown, it is designed as a single-room house that includes a living room and a kitchenette. Wood ceilings, door and window frames along with wooden furniture such as shelves and a wooden separator in the kitchenette seem to have been added to emphasize the significance of the woodworker culture (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.8 Use of wood in the interior details of NMCH (Author’s Photo Archive)

Upon entering the interior of the house, a woman figure in traditional attire next to a wooden wedding chest welcomes the visitors. The figures of women insistently appear in the photographs and illustrations that show village women working in the field or on the village streets. There is also the figure of a woman on a draught animal etched on metal. These displays emphasize women’s active position in the public sphere (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.9 Wooden interior details in Tahtacı Village House of BMBTM (Author’s Photo Archive, 2019)

Next to this figure and the images on the wall, a mise-en-scène of a meal is created with a floor table and seating elements which would have been traditionally situated

outdoors (Figure 4.11). Visitors of this interior almost feel like guests who are invited to a Tahtacı family dinner. Paradoxically, in this case, it is the hosts themselves and the household objects that are the guests in a mise-en-scène constructed by Musa Baran. This scene suggests that even when Tahtacı were settled, characteristics of the nomadic lifestyle remained as untouched and unspoiled. As Clifford (1988, p.228) states, “With the consolidation of twentieth-century anthropology, artifacts contextualized ethnographically were valued because they served as objective ‘witnesses’ to the total multidimensional life of a culture”.



Figure 4.10 Woman figures exhibited in BMBTM (Amerika'nın Sesi, 2019)



Figure 4.11 Floor table and seating units exhibited in BMBTM (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

The identification of Tahtacıs is supported by geographical narratives on the authenticity of woodworker culture in Tahtakuşlar Ethnographic Gallery. The Gallery has three main settings for objects that belong to woodworking. Placed along the central axis of the space, all refer to nomadic culture: a traditional woodworking bench, a model of Mount Ida region and a wooden tent (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12 Central settings that represent the nomadic culture of Tahtacıs in TAKEG (Yaka, n.d.)



Figure 4.13 TAKEG Museum Guide Mustafa Selim Kudar in front of the model of Mount Ida (Bor, 2018)

According to Clifford, in modern ethnographic museums, objects are exhibited “along with other objects of similar function or in proximity to objects from the same cultural group.” (1988, p.226). Indeed, a local narrative is constructed by the three main settings in the ethnographic gallery based on the specific arrangement of objects. First, the model of Mount Ida shows the topography of the area and the

villages that Tahtacı settled during the governance of Ahmed Vefik Pasha. When a tourist group takes a guided tour, this model is the starting point (Figure 4.13). By using this three-dimensional mapping, not only Tahtacı' connection with the natural environment is emphasized, but also how they supported the Ottoman Empire during the Conquest of Istanbul by the production of ships with wood supplied from the Mount Ida forests is highlighted.



Figure 4.14 The woodworking bench exhibited in TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2020)

The woodworking bench takes a central scene as a dominant object emphasizing the profession and it strengthens the narrative of production. The functioning of the bench is illustrated with a photograph of a man and two women at work in the forests (Figure 4.14). The wooden tent, as another indicator of Tahtacı nomadic lifestyle, contains seating units with a dining arrangement and it is supported with the photographs of Tahtacı tribes in front of a wooden tent and wooden household objects exhibited in display areas (Figure 4.15: Figure 4.16).

Woodcutting, which was once belonged to the rural realm, is now transported to the domain of institutional interiors. As Tahtacı settled and modernized in the urban sphere, the survival of their identity depended on representational tools located in urban contexts. By collecting and exhibiting the objects of so-called preserved culture and creating the mise-en-scènes that belong to it refer to the authentic roots. Thus, the woodworker identity is deconstructed and rebuilt by mobilizing the notion of authenticity which is highly valued in the urban context today.



Figure 4.15 Tahtacı wooden tent exhibited in TAKEG (Pala, 2016)



Figure 4.16 Wooden household objects exhibited in TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2020)

4.1.2. Alevism

Historically, Alevism is the earliest identity category that is associated with Tahtacı. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the narrative of their nomadic existence on the mountains is based on their history of being slaughtered Alevi. Hence, Alevism is clearly seen as the core of Tahtacı identity. Although they are considered to be a subgroup in Anatolian Alevi communities, how they adopted this belief is still under debate. In terms of Tahtacı Alevism, two main discourse dominate the narratives.

The first one is based on the mainstream assumption that Alevism was generated by

Imam Ali's followers. According to religious history, following the Islamic Prophet Mohammed's death, a feud emerged on who would be the successor caliph among Imam Abu Bakr Abdullah ibn Uthman and Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 2020). While those who supported the former were called *Sunnis*, Imam Ali supporters were named *Alevi*s. This assumption indicates that Alevism was adopted and reinterpreted by Turkic tribes in the 10th century. The second common belief is that Alevism appeared much earlier in Anatolia as an offshoot of Shamanism. In the following analysis, spatial representations of the roots of Tahtacı Alevism are scrutinized via collected objects and mise-en-scènes.



Figure 4.17 Semah mise-en-scène at the entrance hall of NMCH
(Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House has been used as a djemevi by Yanyatır Ocağı members for almost a century. Its strong relations with Alevism as associated with Imam Ali continued when the building was converted to a cultural house. Not only the objects and scenes that represent the past but also the present use of the space for Alevi rituals manifest and strengthen this relationship.

At the entrance hall of the building, two wax figures, one man and one woman, in traditional attire, which perform a *semah*¹³ ritual, and images of Atatürk and an Imam Ali welcome the visitors (Figure 4.17). According to interior designer Ünsal

¹³ Semah refers to an Alevi and Bektashi religious ritual that is conducted during Djem (Tamay, 2009). The community creates a circle and each person moves by turning around his/her own axis while their moves are accompanied with stringed instruments.

(personal communication, October 30, 2019), this welcoming area was used to be the main djem saloon, and these figures refer to its previous function since semah is an essential part of the djem ritual. Furthermore, the room next to this space, which was used by the Alevi mentors of the Djemevi, is designed as a djem saloon where visitors are shown a djem scene. While almost every photograph in this interior includes djem and semah scenes where men and women perform together in open spaces as they did during their nomadic phase, the main mise-en-scène dates from the time when the Djemevi was actively used (Figure 4.18; Figure 4.19). The depiction of historical figures, their representation in traditional clothes, the use of traditional floor seating elements, vintage curtains and objects that are used in the interior emphasize the value that is placed on history.



Figure 4.18 Photographs indicating semah scenes, Imam Ali illustrations and candlesticks in The Djem Saloon of NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

There are illustrations of Imam Ali and Haji Bektash Veli¹⁴ on the wall, and candlesticks are placed on the fireplace along with other objects that are used during the ritual. Wax figures that are seated on the floor create a circle, accordance with the djem tradition. In front of each figure, there are information boards that explain their mission during the ritual (Figure 4.20). According to Ünsal (personal communication, October 30, 2019), these figures are created based on photographs of Dedes, who lived and worked in Narlıdere. Although the true actors of this scene

¹⁴ Haji Bektash Veli was an Alevi philosopher, who lived between 1209 and 1271 in Anatolia.

do not exist today and their presence is limited to the consciousness of the visitors, this scene appears to be a powerful representation. Evidently, its effect is so strong that some visitors, who linked these figures to their grandfathers, tried to kiss their hands to show their respect and dedication to their past. Here, each figure and object functions as a means to affirm the authenticity and long existence of the collective identity.



Figure 4.19 Interior view of the Djem Saloon of NMCH
(Author's Photo Archive, 2019)



Figure 4.20 The djem scene in the Djem Saloon of NMCH
(Narlıdere Kültürevi, 2020)

There is only one room in the cultural house, which is not directly connected with Tahtacı Alevism but Alevism in general: *çilehane*¹⁵. Although Tahtacı did not perform their rituals in enclosed spaces and there was not a *çilehane* in the original design of the Djemevi, Ünsal states that this space was necessary since the ritualistic performance of suffering is part of the Alevi belief system (personal communication, October 30, 2019). Apparently, even though this performance was not included in Tahtacı religious rituals, it is highlighted to support their connection to Alevism. Having been a former djemevi in Narlıdere, the building meant to embrace all Alevis and all representations there are based on the historical connections to Imam Ali.



Figure 4.21 The mural that shows an Alevi Dervish and a student at the entrance hall of GTCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

A similar approach is seen in the Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House, as well, since it is currently used as a djemevi. In the main hall of this cultural house, belief-related values are emphasized through a mural, which shows an Alevi dervish and a student, welcomes the visitors (Figure 4.21). Özden finds this image remarkable as it depicts the dervish as younger than his student, and hence indicates a hierarchical system that is based on wisdom rather than age. Visual representations of Alevism are also seen in the djem saloon with images of Haji Bektash Veli, *Zulfiqar*¹⁶ and *The Twelve Imams*¹⁷, including Imam Ali (Figure 4.22). Other Imam

¹⁵ *Çilehane* refers to narrow, windowless room, in which dervishes undergo a period of suffering.

¹⁶ *Zulfiqar* is the name of Imam Ali's sword and commonly used as the symbol of his belief.

Ali images are located in the administrative office and the kitchen.

Whereas in the cultural houses representations are based on Imam Ali, in Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery the narrative of identity is based on the antiquity and authenticity of the community as it originated from an Anatolian belief system. The plan of the museum is organized along two main axes, along which glass showcases are located symmetrically.



Figure 4.22 Image of the Twelve Imams in the djem saloon of GTCH (Author's Collection, 2019)

Maure explains the significance of the use of glass cases in exhibitions as follows (1995, p. 165):

The glass case is the innermost recess within the exhibition's confines. The visitor can penetrate no further. He is stopped at the pane of glass which protects the unique and authentic object from wear, deterioration and eventual destruction. (...) The pane of glass creates distance, making it impossible to use one's sense of touch, that sense so vital for establishing close contact. (...) It makes the object remote, vulnerable, frightening, magical, valuable. The glass case is the museum in condensed form. It removes the object from its original context, isolates it from everyday life, protects it, accentuates it, places it in a timeless state and creates a special aura around it.

In the ethnographic gallery, the objects that are placed in the glass cases are mostly natural products or nature-based designs that are associated with the Shaman culture such as animal bones, skins and nests; plant-based accessories; amulets such as

¹⁷ The twelve imams are accepted as the successors of the Islamic prophet Muhammad in Alevism. They consist of Imam Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and the nine Imams from Imam Ali's bloodline.

charms, horseshoes and pig teeth; wool-based woven products like bags and accessories; wooden musical instruments; and traditional clothes, which have plant-based motives (Figure 4.23). These objects that are labeled as traditional Shaman objects become the signifiers of the continuity of the community as they have been preserved to date.



Figure 4.23 Natural objects exhibited in glass cases in TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2020)



Figure 4.24 Traditional Tahtacı clothes exhibited in TAKEG (Pala, 2016)

Shaman motifs are particularly emphasized as the source of inspiration for traditional wedding clothes. According to the Museum Director, Mustafa Selim Kudar, birds were highly valued in Shamanic cultures, and they used bird motifs to symbolize their identity (personal communication, January 12, 2020). In Tahtacı culture, the symbolic bird appears as the goose, which is one of the best-known migratory birds of Anatolia. Kudar further explains that the Tahtacı bridal dress refers to the goose's

physical characteristics, e.g., its lower part consists of the three-pair skirt that looks like two wings and one train and Tahtacı brides' crown, which is called Kepez, is made of goose feather (Figure 4.24). Goose's symbolic value is also explained by Dede Taki Özcan as follows:

There is a goosefoot symbol in Tahtacı culture, and it is shown with three lines intersecting a vertex. (...) According to one account, this symbol is given to Tahtacıs by Mehmed the Conqueror in order for them to be recognized during the ship production process for the Conquest of Istanbul. According to another narrative, it refers to the holy trinity of Alevism: The God, Prophet Muhammed and Imam Ali. A third explanation connects it to the flying goose symbol on Uighur Turks' headgears. (Öçkomaz, 2011)

The goosefoot symbol¹⁸ is exhibited on a gravestone in the museum gallery, which dates back to the ancient period of Mount Ida, according to Kudar (Figure 4.25). He also states that this stone is the proof that Tahtacıs inhabited on this geography since Pre-Ottoman times (personal communication, January 12, 2020). Indeed, the meaning of Mount Ida in Turkish is the Goose Mountains (Kaz Dağları) and it is believed to be associated with Tahtacıs' presence in the area (Çanakkale İli Portalı, 2019; Oğuş, n.d.).



Figure 4.25 The goosefoot symbol exhibited on a gravestone in the TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2020)

¹⁸ The goosefoot symbol also appears on the logo of Tahtacı Association and Tahtacı Federation along with a fire symbol, which refers to the authentic nature-based characteristics of the community (Figure 4.26).

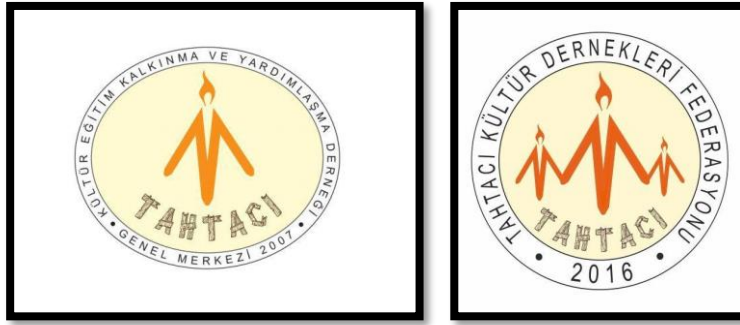


Figure 4.26 The goosefoot symbol on the logos of the Association and TAF (Tahtacı Kültür Dernekleri Federasyonu (TADEFE), 2011; 2016)

In one section of the ethnographic gallery, Native American tribal objects and images are collected and exhibited. Kudar explained this as follows (personal communication, January 12, 2020):

When one goes deep in the research, the roots seem to be based on Shamanism. In the end, we found out that Native American culture is very similar to ours. In fact, more than similar, it is the same. Thus, we started to collect their objects. I contacted 7 Native American chiefs through the internet so far. We became friends on Facebook. Through this platform, we have the chance to communicate and establish a cultural exchange. We started to design together and produce necklaces, for example. A trend called *Shaman jewels in Anatolia* may be started on our account (Figure 4.27). In addition, through my contacts with local textile producers, Shaman motives began to re-appear on fabrics, rugs and carpets.



Figure 4.27 Accessories and charms of Tahtacı - Native American co-design that are on sale in TAKEG (Author's Collection, 2020)

According to Kudar, this section shows the similarity between Tahtacı culture and Native American culture (personal communication, January 12, 2020). Similar to the Tahtacı exhibition spaces, here, visitors observe charms made of animal bones and natural products such as calabash, feather and shells, animal skins, engraved wood products and wool woven fabrics. Representations of connection with nature are strengthened through photographs and objects that show natives in mountains and tents. Similar to representations of the goose as the symbolic animal of the Tahtacı culture, Native Americans' symbolic bird, the hawk, is mounted in this space (Figure 2.28). By emphasizing the similarities between the two cultures, the museum suggests that all Shamanic cultures have the same antique and authentic origin, which spread throughout the World.



Figure 4.28 Interior view of Native American section in TAKEG (Author's Personal Collection, 2018)

The museum shop, which is placed next to the exhibition area, contains Shaman charms and accessories. Natural products such as olive oil, thyme, sage and rosemary are also on sale at the information desk at the entrance of the gallery (Figure 4.29). These products are meant to show that Tahtacı preserved their strong connection with nature. Tahtacı's links to nature is also seen in Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum. Most of the toys that are exhibited there were collected from Bademler and made by natural materials such as stone, mud, wood, and animal bones (Figure 4.30). The interesting aspect of the museum is that it designates original populations by means of games and toys. While Baran claimed that children have no notion of

national, geographical, and temporal boundaries in play, he found out many common characteristics between the games of Tahtacis and ancient games. Once again, Tahtacis appear connected with the antique population of Anatolia. Today, Tahtacis promote their cultural values based on nature by producing and displaying natural products and convert them into objects of desire.



Figure 4.29 Natural products exhibited on the information desk of TAKEG (Author’s Photo Archive, 2018)



Figure 4.30 Nature-based toys that are exhibited at BMBTM (Author’s Photo Archive, 2019)

4.1.3. Turkic Origins

With the prominence given to Turkish identity in the early Republican Era, emphasis on the Turkic roots began to dominate the discourse of Tahtacı. The narrative on Tahtacı's Turkic origins is complementary with their Alevism. As stated above, Tahtacı Alevism refers to the Pre-Islamic beliefs of Central Asia and Anatolia. Considering Turks as the original people of these geographies, Turkic is authenticated and valued as opposed to ethnicities associated with Sunni Islamic beliefs of Arabic and Kurdish cultures. Indeed, Tahtacı, who are interviewed in the documentaries and the officials of Tahtacı institutions, identify themselves as Turkmens.

In the representational spaces, material representations of Turkic origins mostly consist of images that refer to historical roots and are related to the Tahtacı's political position after the foundation of the Turkish Republic. For example, maps that show the migratory routes of Tahtacı and other Alevi groups, which originate from Central Asia are placed both at the ground and the first-floor interiors of Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House (Figure 4.31). These are concrete examples of how mapping is used to establish an identity category as antique. As Benedict Anderson explains:

‘[H]istorical maps’, [are] designed to demonstrate, in the new cartographic discourse, the antiquity of specific, tightly bounded territorial units. Through chronologically arranged sequences of such maps, a sort of political biographical narrative of the realm came into being, sometimes with vast historical depth. (1983, p.174)

In the entrance hall and the administrative office of the Cultural House, images of Atatürk are exhibited along with the Turkish flag (Figure 4.17). Associated also with The Republican People's Party, the predominance of such images is not surprising since Narlıdere is where RPP received the highest vote rate in Turkey at the 2019 local elections.



Figure 4.31 The map which shows the migratory routes of Tahtacı in NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

The photography gallery, which is called “The Nostalgia Room” by the interior designer of the space, Ünsal (personal communication, October 30, 2019), contains photographs that are collected from local families’ albums. Ünsal collected them under two specific categories: Tahtacı’s daily life and Narlıdere’s socio-political history after their settlement. She chose to exhibit the photographs of ordinary people, people who gained a respectable place in the society such as Dedes of Narlıdere and people who had a serious impact on Narlıdere history such as the first Mayor. Most of the photographs feature historically important moments of the neighborhood, such as opening ceremonies of the fountain and the first bridge.

Figures of women have an important place in these representations also, which needs to be interpreted in the context of the gender policies of RPP, which elevated the status of modern Turkish women. Photographs in the gallery feature images of Tahtacı women who adorn an eclectic combination of traditional and modern outfits. One black and white photograph shows three young women who wear midi skirts combined with their traditional scarfs and another one shows a group of fourteen women in a mixture of traditional and modern outfits (Figure 4.32), which refer to both authentic and contemporary values of the culture.



Figure 4.32 Photograph of local Tahtacı women in the Nostalgia Room of NMCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

Emphasis on Turkishness is unmistakably accentuated on the front façade of the Tahtakuşlar Ethnographic Gallery, as well. The political position of the gallery administration is perceived even before the interior space by means of a Turkish flag, and relief of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk inscribed with a citation on national culture. These are complemented by the gallery's logo, which consists of the figure of two birds on a goosefoot symbol, and an award plate received from the Azerbaijan Dede Gorgut¹⁹ Foundation (Figure 4.33). Hence, it is seen that not only Tahtacıs but also other Turkic cultures are celebrated in this space.



Figure 4.33 The front facade of TAKEG (Author's Photo Archive, 2018)

The entrance hall, too, is dominated by images of Atatürk, the Turkish flag and the gallery logo along with a glass case, which contains objects related to Turkic cultures. This shows the importance that the gallery administration places on Turkic roots. The documents related to the Azerbaijan Dede Gorgut Foundation award and different kinds of headgears made in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are exhibited in this showcase (Figure 4.34). Kudar (personal

¹⁹ Dede Gorgut refers to a Turkic mythical character, who appears in the epics of Oghuz Turks. In these stories, nomadic Turkic communities' Pre-Islamic beliefs and social values are exalted. These stories are considered to be an important part of the cultural heritage of Turkic countries including Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

communication, January 12, 2020) states that consolidation of their relations with other Turkic cultures is so crucial for the Tahtacıs that they even named their art gallery after an Azerbaijani artist, Selim Turan. They host temporary exhibitions that belong especially to Turkic countries in this art gallery.



Figure 4.34 Exhibition on Turkic cultures in TAKEG
(Author's Photo Archive, 2020)

According to Kudar, the goosefoot symbol of Tahtacıs is akin to other symbols that Turkic cultures use on their clothes, accessories, and household fabrics such as pillowcases and carpets. He emphasizes that especially the motifs on the carpets embody specific meanings that constitute a narrative on one's original tribe identity:

Carpets are our inscriptions. (...) The carpet appears as the most prominent household object that is to be observed in a house. Symbols and motifs show the roots of the owner. Like structuring a book from paragraphs, a paragraph from sentences, a sentence from words and a word from letters, symbols come together to create the motifs and the motifs compose the carpets. (Bor, 2018)

Kudar exemplifies his explanation in a television program with reference to the motifs of a carpet that is exhibited in the gallery (Bor, 2018; Figure 3.35):

The hexagon refers to the matriarchal society and the symbols that are located in it are sacred symbols that refer to God and the flag. For example, the cross symbol in a tetragon shows that the society believes in rebirth on this planet,

which is made of air, water, earth and fire. The plus symbol, which refers to static energy, and the cross symbol, which refers to dynamic energy, come together and create the Turkic signet. The goosefoot motifs designate the Tahtacı Turkmen tribes.



Figure 4.35 TAKEG Head Mustafa Selim Kudar explaining the symbols on the carpet exhibited in TAKEG (Bor, 2018)

Not only the emphasis on the roots but also the current Turkish identity serves to strengthen the current nationalist discourse. To illustrate, the library is named after Admiral Emin Gökhan, who is an influential member of the military who was born in the neighborhood. Militaristic associations of nationalism are also manifested in the library via the map of *Piri Reis*, who was one of the most significant admirals of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by images of Turkish soldiers, agminal plaques, and flags of Turkic countries that are exhibited in a glass case (Figure 4.36). This militaristic narrative continues in the history corner of the gallery, where there are photographs of significant members of the army and a map and hero medals that celebrate the Victory of Gallipoli (Figure 3.37).

The notes in the visitor's book of the ethnographic gallery clearly indicate the appeal of the emphasis on Turkic origins. Some examples from 2019 include statements like: "Thank you for preserving the Turkish culture"; "Congratulations for featuring the values which sunk into oblivion and placing them into the service of the nation."; "Thank you for exhibiting an ethnographic continuity from the people of Central Asia to Native Americans."; "Thank you for this display which shows that Turkmen and Shaman traditions are inseparable."; "I am grateful to these friends whose work

becomes a milestone for Turkish culture. I hope this museum will be a significant source for Turkology studies”; and “This is a unique museum through which you can feel the Turkic roots of Tahtacı down to the last detail.”.



Figure 4.36 Map of Piri Reis and the glass showcase in Admiral Emin Gökşan Library of TAKEG (Author’s Photo Archive, 2020)



Figure 4.37 History Corner in TAKEG (Author’s Photo Archive, 2020)

Similar to the images in Tahtakuşlar Ethnographic Gallery, the Tahtacı Federation branches in Bademler and Konak include various images related to the foundation of the nation such as photographs from the National Independence War, portraits of Atatürk, framed texts of Atatürk’s address to the Turkish youth and Turkish flags.

Both those and images of Atatürk accompanied by an Alevi Dede and women in modern outfits in the Bademler office manifest the alliance between the nationalist ideologies of the federation and the Republican People's Party (Figure 4.38; Figure 4.39).



Figure 4.38 Interior view of TAF Bademler Office
(Author's Photo Archive, 2018)



Figure 4.39 Photographs of Atatürk in TAF Bademler Office
(Author's Photo Archive, 2018)

Historical images such as images of Atatürk and army members; symbolic images on logos, flags and household products; and maps that indicate ethnicity and nationhood are the most common material representational tools of the Tahtacı Turkic identity at the institutional level. While household symbolic images are used to sustain cultural continuity, historical images and maps secure the future of the community's political agency.

4.2. Performative Practices

According to contemporary critical theory, identity categories are produced and sustained through normative performances, which in turn regulate power relations in the society. In other words, these categories' materialization "takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices." (Butler, 2011, p.1). Needless to say, performative practices are indissociable from spatial experiences. Critical Sociologist Henri Lefebvre's theory on spatial constructions explains them as being based on the mutual production of social practices and social spaces²⁰ (1993). Indeed, Tahtacı institutional spaces are considered as social spaces, which produce and are produced by everyday performative practices. These spaces include spatial practices that are related to Alevism and the community's Turkic origins, by means of which these identity categories are reproduced.

4.1.1. Alevism

The significance of religious spaces such as temples, churches, mosques and, synagogues depends largely on the social performances of a community who are identified with them. These spaces are considered to be highly representational since they pullulate with information about the related community's socio-cultural practices and embody a number of significant codes and symbols related to these practices.

Djem, which means gathering in Turkish, is the main religious ritual of Alevism. It is not only a worshiping ritual but also a means to regulate social order. Conducted by a Dede, it is performed to celebrate traditions and special occasions, and it also works as a people's court. It is an educational instrument, as well, since religious doctrines are recited by Dede during the djem. This ritual requires the presence of twelve attendants, including a Dede, who represent the Twelve Imams. For the fulfillment of attendants' missions, the gathering requires a circular spatial arrangement.

Nomadic Tahtacı Alevis did not perform the djem ritual in interior spaces but in open

²⁰ Architectural Theorist Sophia Psarra clarifies Lefebvre's theory: "Social space is defined as a triad: 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'representational spaces'. Spatial practice is the 'perceived' space of daily reality encompassing the idea of (...) 'social performance' of a society. Representations of space are about 'conceptualized space' (...) and are related to knowledge, codes, signs and spatial production. Finally, representational spaces are about 'space as directly lived through its associative images and symbols'." (2009, p. 220).

air by positioning their bodies to create a circular order (Figure 4.40). After their settlement, they began to conduct the ritual in dervish lodges. If such accommodation was not available in the immediate neighborhood, they used yards or a member's house, which would serve the purpose. When particular spaces came to be built specific to the realization of Alevi customs and conventions, they started to be called Djemevis (Çil, 2016). In Turkey, Djemevis have been constructed and conducted substantially by the Haji Bektash Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation after the latter's establishment in 1994²¹.



Figure 4.40 Nomad Tahtacıs realizing ritualistic performance in Elmalı, Antalya (Arın, 1979)

As the former djemevi of Yanyatır Ocağı, Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House has direct connections with Alevi practices. Although it is not used for djem rituals today, some Alevi traditions and events are organized there. The tradition of *baş bağlama*, which is a Tahtacı marriage custom, is carried out by local families at the entrance hall of the cultural house. A few days after a wedding, women gather to watch a prominent woman in the community dressing the bride in traditional clothes to celebrate her transition to adulthood (Çil, 2016; Genç, 2017; Kuşci, 2018; Figure 4.41). Similar to *baş bağlama*, *çocuk kırklama* is also performed exclusively by women. It is a birth custom during which a 40-days old baby is given a ritualistic bath by the mother and other community women (Genç, 2017; Kuşci, 2018). In both traditions, while only women are allowed to gather in the interior spaces, men,

²¹ Today 34 Djemevis are actively working in Turkey, 11 under construction process and 15 lots are bought by the foundation (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı [HBVAKV], 2020).

women and children participate in the feast in the garden. The Day of *Aşure*²² was also organized in the garden of the cultural house for 12 years (Figure 4.42). This event is called as Collective *Aşure* because the traditional dessert was cooked with ingredients donated by neighboring Tahtacıs (M.Ünsal, personal communication, October 30, 2019). Via performing these traditions through the Cultural House, authentic Tahtacı Alevi culture is emphasized as being untouched and it is reproduced to ensure the identity's maintenance.



Figure 4.41 Baş Bağlama tradition in NMCH (Merih Ünsal Collection, n.d.)

Whereas Alevi traditions take place occasionally in the Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House, they are performed on a regular basis in Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Cultural House. The latter presently functions as a djemevi, which consists of spaces that any djemevi should have: a djem saloon, a morgue, a kitchen and a feast area. This space is actively used not only by the local residents but also by other Alevi communities in İzmir.

Every year, during the Month of Muharram, Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House organizes a dinner feast each day and on the Day of *Aşure*. After each feast, the community participates in the djem ritual in the djem saloon. While

²² *Aşure* (Ashura) is the dessert that cooked by Alevi on the 10th day of Month of Muharram, during which they have religious fasting. It is also known as Noah's pudding.

Haji Bektash Veli Anatolian Cultural Foundation holds the djems on specific days, a feast or a djem can also be organized on personal request. Alevi funerals, too, take place in this building. Relatives of the deceased are responsible for the bathing of the body, but the Foundation helps if they cannot find a bather. This process is realized in the morgue. After this, the funeral is conducted by a Dede. Özden underlines that all of these rituals are held in Turkish as opposed to Sunni majorities' rituals, which are performed in Arabic (personal communication, November 20, 2019).



Figure 4.42 Day of Aşure in the garden of NMCH (Merih Ünsal Collection, n.d.)

Although the building mainly functions as a djemevi, the head instructor of the education center, Servet Özden criticizes the design of the building as not being useful for Alevi rituals (personal communication, November 20, 2019). Apparently, a circular staircase, which is located at the center of the space, causes serious problems. He states that because of the staircase, the djem saloon has a reverse U shape that does not allow the participants to see each other and the twelve main attendants (Figure 4.43). Apparently, rooms, too, are not appropriate for semah courses, which require wide open areas (Figure 4.44). Finally, having the morgue and the kitchen next to each other on the basement floor creates functional problems in terms of hygiene. All these problems seem to appear as a result of the Municipality designers' lack of sufficient information about Alevi rituals.

The rest of the spaces of the Cultural House consist of a welcoming area, a classroom and an administrative office to serve the municipality's public education program, which is mostly associated with Alevi culture. Courses taught in the cultural house

include sewing, folk dancing, folk music and others, which are related to Tahtacı Alevi rituals such as *semah*, *bağlama*²³, *mengi*²⁴ and *nefes*²⁵. The Turkish folk music choir and theatre courses' contents refer to Alevism as well by using Alevi myths in their curriculum. According to Özden (personal communication, November 20, 2019), although fewer in numbers, Non-Alevis show interest in these courses as well. By means of these practices, Alevis provided the endurance of their culture and officially establish the latter by informing others about it.



Figure 4.43 Interior view of the Djem Saloon in GTCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)



Figure 4.44 Interior view of the classroom in GTCH (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

²³ A stringed instrument used during djem rituals.

²⁴ A Tahtacı ritualistic dance that is performed as a part of their wedding tradition.

²⁵ Alevi-Bektashi poetry.

The Konak office of the Tahtacı Federation, too, is an education-based institution. There, a mixed group of Alevi and Non-Alevi people learn to play the *saz*, which is the main musical instrument that is used during the religious rituals (Figure 4.45). Models of these instruments, which refer to the Alevi Turkic roots of Tahtacı musical traditions, are exhibited in this space, as well (Figure 4.46). As the final products of these courses, the federation administration holds public concerts of Alevi music and semah shows. The publicity of these performative practices helps to establish the continuity of the culture.



Figure 4.45 Classroom in the TAF Konak Office (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)



Figure 4.46 Interior view of TAF Konak Office (Author's Photo Archive, 2019)

In addition to the educational activities, The Cultural Association of Tahtacı organized social events such as annual *Tahtacı Festivals*²⁶ (between 2008 and 2012) and Month of Muharram events, which were intended for the perpetuation of the cultural unity of the community. According to Bilginç, because of intensifying terrorist actions and political uncertainties in Turkey, the association decided to give a break to Tahtacı Festivals in 2013. In that year, they arranged a *Tahtacı Semahları* event in Edremit, Balıkesir, instead, and documented these rituals via video recording. The Federation also organized Youth Camps in Edremit, Balıkesir. The objectives of these camps are explained as having a united community of young Tahtacı via introducing them to each other and informing them about Tahtacı history, which is mostly associated with Alevi rituals such as djem and semah. As the publicity posters of these events indicates, performance of Alevi rituals forms a significant aspect of their program (Figure 4.48).

Alevi identity is emphasized and re-produced in the federation offices and cultural houses by means of the repetition of cultural practices such as religious rituals and traditions, which are promoted through educational activities and social gatherings. The main function that distinguishes these practices from the material representations of Alevism is that the latter can also be experienced by Non-Alevis. By means of these practices, the Alevi identity of Tahtacı is communicated not only amongst the community members but also to the public at large.

4.1.2. Turkic Origins

Even though the performative practices of Tahtacı are tightly integrated with the discourse on their Turkic origins, they mostly relate to the political position of the community. Besides referring to geographical, historical and traditional roots, the current Turkic identity of the community is also presented through political performances, which are realized in their institutional settings and supported by the Republican People's Party. Thus, Turkishness, which appears as the primary tool of their agency in social life, results in strong collaborations with the RPP.

²⁶ The first *Tahtacı* festival was organized at Narlıdere in 2008; the second one took place at Durhasandede village, Adana, in 2009, where the tomb of *Yanyatır Ocağı* leader Dur Hasan Dede is located. In 2010, the third festival was held in *Hacı Emirli Ocağı*, Kızılcapınar village, Germencikli, Aydın; and the fourth one was realized in 2011 at the previous quarter of *Hacı Emirli Ocağı*, Kabaklar village, İslahiye, Gaziantep. The last festival was carried out at Bornova, İzmir in 2012 (Genç, 2017).

Both in Narlıdere and Güzelbahçe cultural houses' foundation, the support of RPP cannot be overlooked. This association is highlighted in numerous national and local news channels. For example, according to *Hürriyet*, one of the most popular newspapers in Turkey, the opening ceremony of the Narlıdere Cultural House was realized by Narlıdere Municipality and İzmir Metropolitan Municipality administrations, which are directed by the RPP. There, the municipality administrators made a public call to Tahtacı regarding the general election of 2007 ("Narlıdere'ye Kültür Evi", 2007). İzmir Metropolitan Municipality also publicized how Mayors Aziz Kocaoğlu and Abdül Batur voiced their support to Turkic Alevi communities in their speeches. Apparently, the Cultural House was loaded with political meanings even before its opening.



Figure 4.47 Güzelbahçe Mayor Mustafa İnce speaking in the opening ceremony of GTCH (Bodur, 2013)

A similar situation emerged at the groundbreaking and opening ceremonies of the Güzelbahçe Cultural House. For example, Güzelbahçe Mayor Mustafa İnce emphasized that they did not discriminate against any minority groups in Turkey. He further stated that: "Protecting the indivisible integrity of Turkey, Atatürk's principles and reforms, and the Republic, we will not let reactionist mindsets create atrocities such as the Madımak incident." ("Güzelbahçe'ye Tahtacı Kültür Evi temeli", 2013; Figure 4.47). It is clearly seen that Tahtacı culture is considered to be in line with Kemalist and Republican nationalist policies. İnce emphasized this connection again when he explained the educational activities at the Cultural House as connected to nationalist approaches, stating: "It is essential for us to preserve

Atatürk's reforms, secularism and the Republic, and not deviate from these principles in the courses.” (“Güzelbahçe’de kurs sezonu açıldı”, 2019). Furthermore, the content of such courses of Turkish folk music, saz and theatre are restructured based on nationalist narratives.

The spatial practices of The Cultural Associations of Tahtacı are also associated with the nationalist political approaches. In 2012, 1300 members visited *Anıtkabir*²⁷, which is defined by Bilginç as “our [Tahtacı] most essential tomb” (personal communication, November 16, 2019). There, Tahtacı both show their respect for Atatürk and the nation by visiting the mausoleum and promote their identity via performing semah in front of it. Anıtkabir visits of the association members are directly related to their emphasis on Alevi-Turkic origins, which is defined as an alternative to Kurdish dominance in the current Alevi organizations in Turkey (Figure 4.49).



Figure 4.48 Poster of the first Tahtacı Festival and the second Tahtacı Youth Camp and Tahtacı Semahları events (Yolcu Bilginç Collection, n.d.)

The administration of TAF currently plans to organize a new Tahtacı festival at a location where Tahtacı families still do woodworking. This organization is also supported by The Ministry of Culture, İzmir Regional Directorate of Forestry, İzmir Metropolitan Municipality and İzmir Governorate. Thus, existence of Tahtacı identity is secured not only in the present day but also in the future with the continuing and promised alliance between Tahtacı and the governments of the

²⁷ Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Republican front.

Besides all the practical performances, the most crucial action of the associations and the federation is stated as “documenting the culture” by Yolcu Bilginç (personal communication, November 16, 2019). He further explains that in addition to their own works, they are in cooperation with other institutions such as İstanbul Bilgi University, which contributed to a comprehensive research on Tahtacı and Al Jazeera Television, which held interviews with the members of the Tahtacı community.

To sum up, the political alliance between Tahtacı and the Republican People’s Party is quite apparent in the Federation activities. This is exemplified through several means, including visits to Atatürk’s mausoleum, the party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s office and local RPP offices since 2006. In addition, almost in every Tahtacı meetings and festivals, which start with the Turkish National Anthem, the RPP officials show up and give opening speeches dominated by an emphasis on Turkishness. All these practices result in Tahtacı culture’s becoming associated with the contemporary nationalist discourse. Materialization of this relation is best exemplified in the opening ceremony of Tahtacı Youth Camp (Figure 4.48), where Edremit Mayor Selman Hasan Arslan addressed Tahtacı by stating: “When I look at you, I see Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his shining Republic.” (Üçyıldız, 2019).



Figure 4.49 Tahtacı performing semah in front of Anıtkabir in 2012 (Türkmen Aleviler, 2019)



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Contemporary critical theories on identity are based on the close relationship between identity and power. Those who adopt a social constructivist perspective consider identity as a social construct, which is instrumental for complying with or resisting the changing balances of power in the dominant social, cultural and political structures. According to their argument, identity construction process is materialized by various means of representation. Such representations need to be scrutinized especially in the case of collective identities. There, the problem is based on generalizing individual identities under specific categories by assigning them dominant characteristics whereby complex identities are reduced to singular categories and alternative characteristics are suppressed. Such categorical constructions result in unstable representations, which vary based on changing power relationships.

The contemporary Tahtacı community, which is actively in pursuit of asserting their identity, presents an interesting case in terms of the production and representation of identity categories. Tahtacıs have been a consistently marginalized group since the Ottoman times due to their nomadic lifestyle on one hand and Alevi beliefs on the other. It seems paradoxical that such an active pursuit emerges at a time when the professional identification, i.e., Tahtacı, which originated the community, ceased to exist because of the changing socio-economic conditions after the foundation of the Republic. Although there has been a significant lack of documented information about Tahtacıs until the Republican Era, their oral histories indicate three dominant identity categories, which they have historically associated themselves with: professional, religious, and ethnic. Indeed, representations of Tahtacı identity consistently include spaces and images of woodworking, Alevism, and Turkic ethnicity with varying degrees of emphasis.

In the absence of the validity of their professional identity, Tahtacıs resorted to the support of their Alevi identity, which was not discriminated against during the early

Republican Era. This condition changed due to the socio-cultural policies of the Sunni-Islamic front since the 1990s. Since then, Tahtacı began to emphasize their Turkic origins, which aligned their socio-political position with the main oppositional party. After this strategic move, Tahtacı identity started to be reconstructed by various means of representation weaving different threads from their professional, religious and ethnic origins.

In this thesis, I examined representations of Tahtacı identity by means of discourses, images, spatial tools and spatial practices that belong to their institutional structures, including museums, cultural houses and federation offices. These include material expressions such as structural elements, interiors and objects and, spatial practices such as ritualistic, educational, and political performances regarding the three identity categories that Tahtacı have adopted.

Tahtacı identity's spatial representations differ from discursive and literary ones in terms of their communicative power. The values that are attributed to this identity are exposed repeatedly through framing the cultural objects, images and sculptural figures in specific spatial settings. The spatial component of identity construction reflects strongly in the institutional spaces where the relationship between Tahtacı identity and the socio-political political powers are pronounced most clearly. The communication of communal values is further intensified by performative practices, which make them accessible to visitors' experience.

Woodworking is the most prominent historical category, which is no longer relevant today. Thus, it is not represented via practices, but materially only. Anderson explains the status of vanished identity categories of contemporary communities by stating: “[N]ew' invariably has the meaning of 'successor' to, or 'inheritor' of, something vanished. 'New' and 'old' are aligned diachronically, and the former appears always to invoke an ambiguous blessing from the dead.” (1983, p.187). In Tahtacı institutional spaces, woodworking is represented to exalt the authentic culture of the community. Thus, the majority of the representational tools include *mise-en-scènes*, household objects and structural elements that are authenticated by referring to the community's past experiences. Since the practice of this profession and its nomadic connections are predominantly non-existent today, they are reduced to representations in museum interiors as witnesses of a past identity which is sought to be preserved today.

While woodworking is represented by objects in the museum interiors, material representations of Alevism are mostly placed in cultural houses, which were founded as a result of the need of a religious minority group for a collective shelter. Religious images and symbols and objects that are used during ritualistic events constitute the majority of the representative tools of Alevism while re-productions of Alevi rituals are spatially performed by means of gatherings, re-enactments and educational practices.

Material expressions of Turkic origins are supplied by historical documents such as photographs, illustrations, and maps that are located in the interiors of Tahtacı institutional spaces. Whereas Turkic roots are emphasized in gallery exhibitions based on the antiquity of the community, their parallelism with the nationalist politics of the Republic, which defends the Turkishness against Sunni Islamic movements, take the forefront in the field offices of the Tahtacı Federation. Indeed, institutional events including opening ceremonies, festivals and gatherings comprise the basis for the establishment of the alliance between Tahtacıs and the oppositional front.

In conclusion, Tahtacı identity representations, which consist of both historical and contemporary elements, reflect the complicated layering of the identity categories and shows that the relationship between identity and representation is situated on a slippery slope. The characteristics of spatial constructions of Tahtacı identity vary according to the historically unstable status of dominant identity categories. Thus, representational spaces are designed, manipulated, and reproduced according to the current validity of the identity category in question. This study may provide a critical basis for future works on spatial constructions of identity regarding underrepresented groups in the context of contemporary Turkey.

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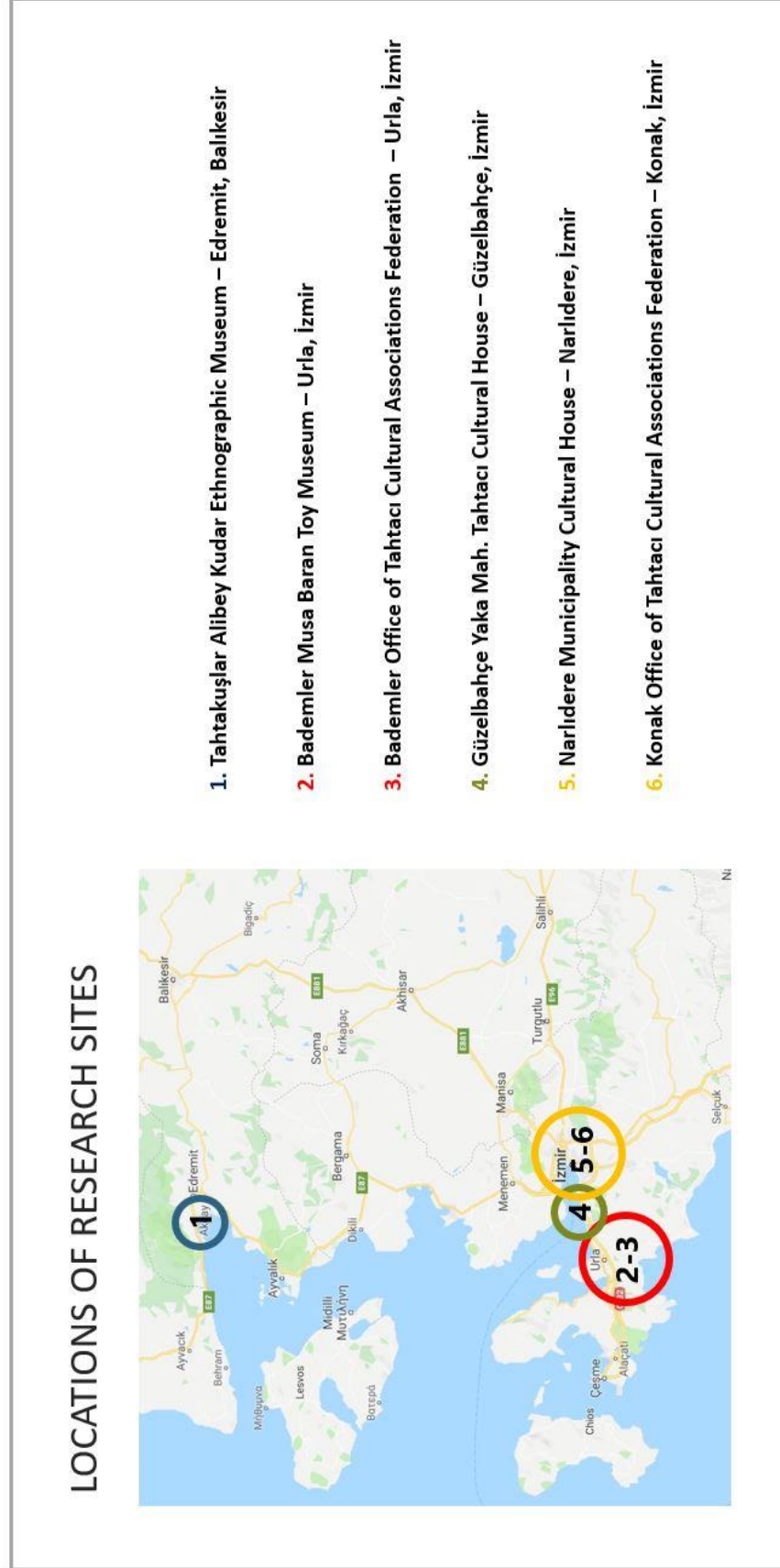
APPENDIX 1 – Personal Communication List

INTERVIEW SUBJECT	TAHTACI REPRESENTATIVE	COMMUNICATION TYPE	DATE(S)
Tahtacı Cultural Associations Federation	Yolcu Bilginç	Visit / Personal Communication	16.11.2019
Tahtakuşlar Alibey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery	Mustafa Selim Kudar	Visit / Personal Communication	20.10.2018 12.01.2020
Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum	Yolcu Bilginç	Visit / Personal Communication	16.11.2019
Güzelbahçe Yaka Mah. Tahtacı Cultural House	Servet Özden	Visit / Personal Communication	20.11.2019
Narlıdere Municipality Tahtacı Cultural House	Merih Ünsal	Visit / Personal Communication	30.10.2019
Tahtacı Lifestyle	Cumali Güngör	Personal Communication	16.02.2020

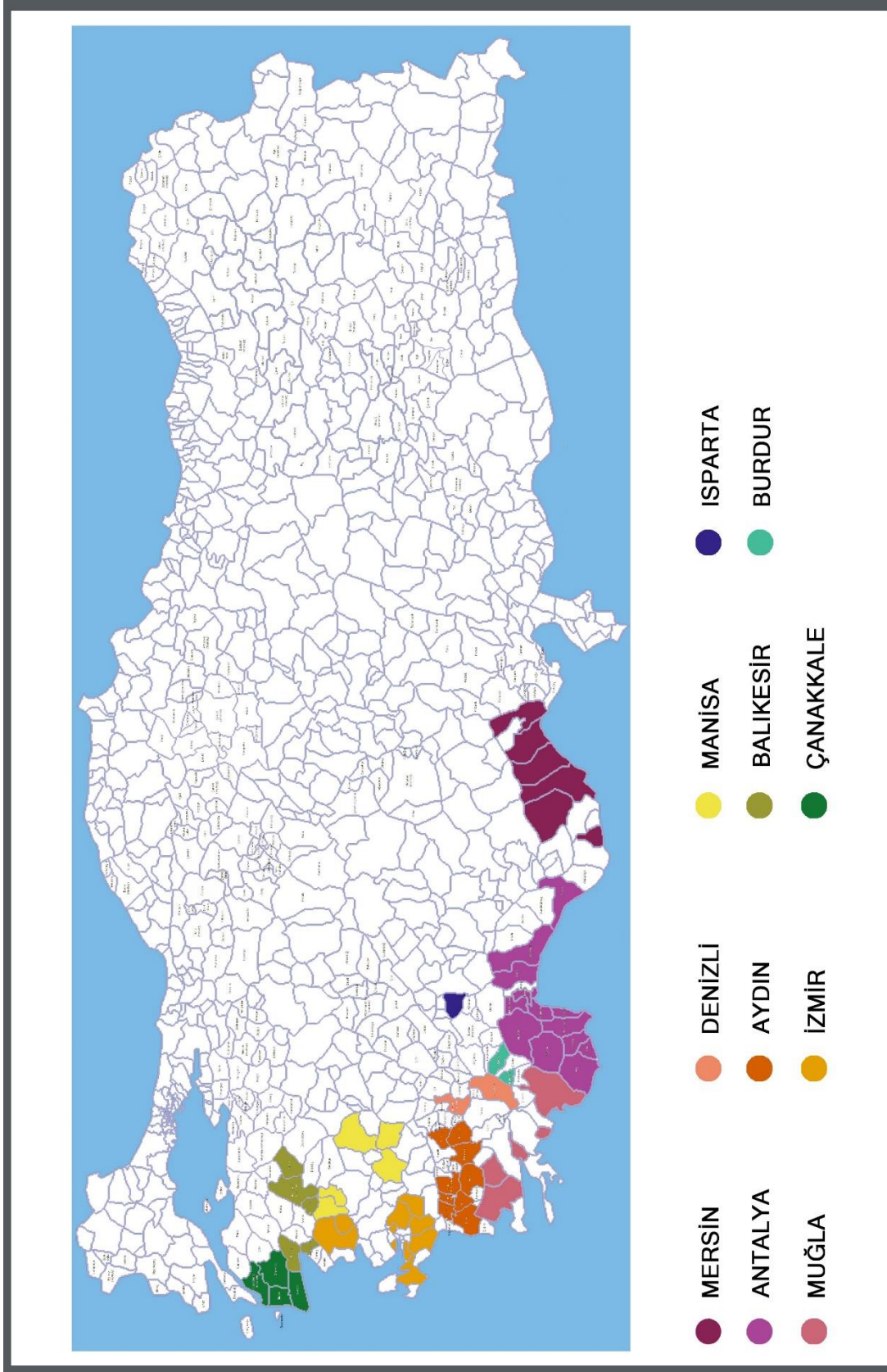
APPENDIX 2 – Interview Questions on Institutional Structures

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. Can you explain the foundation process of the institution?
2. What are the purposes and functions of the institution?
3. What kind of organizations are held by/at the institution?
4. Do women actively participate in institutional organizations?
5. Are there any visitor profiles specific to the institution?
6. What is the visitation frequency?
7. Has the institution worked in collaboration with other organizations?
8. Who are the designers of the institution building / interiors?
9. Can you explain the design process of the building(s)?
10. What is the effect of the institution on the visibility of Tahtacis?

APPENDIX 3 – Location Map of Research Sites



APPENDIX 4 – 2020 Map of Tahtacı Settlement (Prepared by the Author)



**APPENDIX 5 – Map of Tahtacı Migratory Routes (Prepared by
Narlidere Municipality Cultural House)**



APPENDIX 6 – Table of Tahtacı Representational Spaces (Prepared by The Author)

IDENTITY CATEGORY	MEANS OF REPRESENTATION	TAHTACI INSTITUTIONAL SPACES					
		MUSEUMS (DISPLAYS):		CULTURAL HOUSES (DISPLAYS & ACTIONS)		FEDERATION OFFICES (ACTIONS)	
		Tahtakuslar Ailbey Kudar Ethnographic Gallery	Bademler Musa Baran Toy Museum	Narlıdere Municipality Cultural House	Güzelbahçe Yaka Mahallesi Tahtacı Cultural House	Bademler Office of TCAF	Konak Office of TCAF
WOODWORKING (PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY)	MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS	<p><i>Woodworking & Shamanism & Authenticity</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -A model of Mount Ida; a traditional woodworking bench; a wooden tent (Main Exhibition Hall)</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Traditional woodworking bench Household objects (Main Exhibition Hall)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -A man and two women at work in forests; Tahtacıs working in open areas; Tahtacı tribes in front of a wooden tent (Display Areas)</p> <p>Wooden Spatial Elements: -Wooden furniture</p>	<p><i>Woodworking & Women's Position</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -A women figure that welcomes the visitors -Family dinner</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Household objects -The figure of a woman on a draught animal etched on metal</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Tahtacı women</p> <p>Wooden Spatial Elements: -Wooden ceiling; door and window frames; wooden furniture</p>	<p><i>Woodworking & Women's Position & Authenticity</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -The sculptural figures of a man and a woman cutting wood together (Main Exhibition Hall) -A woman's body in a wooden coffin (The Sepulcher Room)</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Logging equipments (Main Exhibition Hall) -Wooden household objects (Kitchen Utensil's Room) -Wooden Furniture (The Cloth and Dowry Room)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Men and women working together in the mountains (Main Exhibition Hall)</p> <p>Wooden Spatial Elements: -Wooden flooring material; door and window frames and sills; wall and ceiling claddings; wooden stairs and the balustrades</p>	X	X	X
	PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES	X	X	X	X	X	X
ALEVISM (RELIGIOUS CATEGORY)	MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS	<p><i>Alevism & Shamanism & Antiquity</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Nature-based designs such as charms, accessories, animal bones, musical instruments, traditional clothes (Display Areas) -Grave stone (Display Area) -Native American objects (The Native American Display Area) -Natural products (The Museum Shop; The Information Desk)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Native American maps and photographs (The Native American Display Area)</p>	X	<p><i>Alevism & Historical Djemevi & Imam Ali</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -One man and one woman figures perform a semah ritual (The Entrance Hall) -Djem Scene (The Djem Saloon) -Suffering (The Çilehane)</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Objects that are used during the Djem ritual (The Djem Saloon)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Imam Ali; Haji Bektash Veli (The Djem Saloon; The Library; The Entrance Hall) -Narlıdere Dedes (The Photography Collection Gallery)</p>	<p><i>Alevism & Present Djemevi & Imam Ali</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Objects that are used during the Djem ritual (The Djem Saloon)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -A mural that shows an Alevi dervish and a student (The Entrance Hall) -Images of Haji Bektash Veli, Zulfikar and The Twelve Imams including Imam Ali (The Djem Saloon) -Imam Ali picture (The Administrative Office; The Kitchen)</p>	X	X
	PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES	X	X	<p>-Ritualistic events such as Day of Aşure (The Garden) -Alevi Traditions such as baş bağlama and çocuk kırklama (The Entrance Hall; The Garden)</p>	<p>-Ritualistic events such as funerals (The Mourge; The Kitchen; The Garden; Djem Saloon); djem and semah (The Djem Saloon; The Garden) -Gatherings (The Djem Saloon; The Garden) -Courses and final performances (The Classroom; The Garden)</p>	<p>-Ritualistic events such as Day of Aşure and Month of Muharram -Tahtacı Festivals -Tahtacı Semahları events -Tahtacı Youth Camps</p>	<p>-Courses and final performances -Tahtacı Festivals -Tahtacı Semahları events -Tahtacı Youth Camps</p>
TURKIC ORIGINS (ETHNIC CATEGORY)	MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS	<p><i>Authenticity & Political Positioning</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -Relief of Atatürk; Turkish Flag; Award Plates (The Front Facade) -Turkic countries' objects (Display Areas) -Households fabrics; clothes (Display Areas) -Agminal plaques; flags of Turkic countries (The Library) -Hero medals that celebrate the Victory of Gallipoli (The History Corner) -The visitor's book (The Exhibition Hall)</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Gallery logo (The front Facade; The Exhibition Hall) -Map of Piri Reis; images of Turkish soldiers (The Library) -Photographs of significant members of the army (The History Corner)</p>	X	<p><i>Authenticity & Political Positioning</i></p> <p>Mise-en-scène: -</p> <p>Displayed Objects: -</p> <p>Photographs & Illustrations: -Migratory roots maps (The Entrance Hall; The Main Exhibition Hall) -Images of Atatürk; Turkish Flag (The Entrance hall) -Historical photographs (The Photography Collection Gallery)</p>	X		
	PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES	X	X	Opening ceremony	Opening ceremony	<p>-Visit of Anıtkabir -Visit of RPP Offices -Visit of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's Office</p>	