

Social-Cultural Effects of Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes: The Case of Hatay

Çakır Ceyhan Suvani¹, Barış Karadağ², and Nuran Elmacı³

Abstract

Eleven cities in Turkey were affected by two major earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023. Official authorities announced that 15 million people were affected by the earthquakes. With these earthquakes, which are together called “the disaster of the century”, not only were people’s homes and workplaces destroyed, but their cultural spheres were also turned upside down. Family structures, habits, values, social memories, social relations, customs, and beliefs, that is, the cultures to which they owe their sociality, were also severely damaged. Unfortunately, as in most other development projects in our country, “culture”, which is the basic value that distinguishes humans from other living creatures, is not taken into account in disaster management projects. Any project that, is planned without considering the sophisticated needs, expectations, and habits of neither individuals nor society, cannot achieve the intended purpose, and even brings a greater financial burden on the country’s economy. In this research, the cultural damage caused by recent earthquakes in Hatay is attempted to be detected, and solutions for repairing such damage, and rebuilding social harmony are proposed. For this purpose, an anthropological fieldwork was conducted in Hatay’s Antakya, Defne and Samandağ districts between May 31 and June 4, 2023, and a series of interviews and conversations were held with the earthquake victims.

Keywords: Disaster; culture; religion; ethnicity; social conflict

Introduction

Hatay is a province located in the eastern Mediterranean region. Its center is Antakya, which hosts various beliefs and identities that date back to its ancient past. According to 2021 data, the population of the province is 1,670,712 people. Hatay borders Osmaniye to the north, Adana to the northwest, Gaziantep to the northeast, Syria to the east and south, and the Mediterranean to the west. Hatay has surface area of 5,524 square kilometers. There are 305 people per km² in the province⁴. The district with the highest population density is Defne with 1,068 inhabitants. Defne and Antakya, the central district, are among the settlements most affected by the earthquake. For this reason, the research was conducted in these two districts and Samandağ, which is a neighboring district.

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr. Çakır Ceyhan Suvani, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Department of Anthropology, Türkiye.

E-mail: ceyhansuvani@gmail.com

² Barış Karadağ, MA, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Department of Anthropology, Türkiye.

³ Nuran Elmacı, Anthropologist, Retired Professor, Türkiye.

⁴ <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatay>



Map of Hatay Province (See <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antakya>)



Anthropological fieldwork was conducted between May 31 and June 4, 2023. This period is short for an anthropological fieldwork. As the duration of fieldwork extends, the reliability of the data increases in parallel with the duration. Therefore, this study should be considered as a preliminary research. The disadvantage of the short research period was overcome by trying to interview as many people as possible. Our interviews and conversations began early in the morning and continued until we returned to the hotel at night, often with the hotel staff and guests. No record was kept of the number of people interviewed. Most of the time, the conversations started with one or two people and were joined by others, which made it difficult to maintain a quantitative record. People's desire to talk about their experiences about the earthquake and its aftermath, share their pain with others, and commiserate was so high that this was an advantage for the research.

1. Why Hatay?

Hatay province hosts different beliefs, languages, and identities. Due to this feature, it can also be defined as the “city of civilizations”. Hatay has managed to have a rich culture and economic prosperity as a result of the harmonious coexistence of different identities and centuries of symbiotic relations. However, the earthquake-induced destruction will also affect Hatay's multi-identity harmony. The relationships to which they are accustomed, respect and tolerance between communities risk becoming problematic and tense with the destruction of their cultural world. Moreover, before the earthquake, the presence of Syrian refugees, which affected the demographic structure of not only Hatay but the entire earthquake region, had already caused

various tensions and conflicts. The risk of tension and conflict may now reach a more dangerous level.



Cultures are in a constant state of movement and change. However, the change must be within a certain balance without disrupting the interrelationship between cultural institutions. In extraordinary situations such as natural disasters, wars, etc., this balance is disrupted, which damages the state of society and thus social peace. To ensure and maintain social peace and reconciliation, cultural damage assessment should be carried out as well as building damage assessment after a disaster. In this study, the damage caused by the earthquake in Hatay in the cultural sphere was tried to be determined, and solutions were proposed for “repairing” the damage and rebuilding social harmony. Hatay was chosen as the priority province for the research due to its geopolitical importance and multi-identity structure. In this respect, the Hatay research can be considered as a preliminary study for similar research to be conducted in other earthquake-affected provinces in the future.

2. “Cultural Damage” Ignored in Disaster Projects

On February 6, 2023, two major earthquakes struck, with Kahramanmaraş as the epicenter. The extent and destructiveness of the geography affected by the earthquakes was so great that it almost resembled the great destruction described in eschatological⁵ myths. The total population affected by the earthquake was estimated to be approximately 15 million⁶. The fact that the geographical region where the earthquake occurred is a very important agricultural and industrial region will have negative economic effects on the country in the medium and long term. In this regard, we have witnessed both state institutions and NGOs conducting a series of activities in the region. Inevitably, shelter and nutrition are given priority. This is what should happen in the short term. Within the scope of these activities, tent and container cities have been established in the earthquake zone and new cities are being added. However, disaster management should not be limited to these. Medium- and long- term plans should be developed after meeting vital needs. Engineering activities carried out without considering social and cultural factors can turn into unnecessary and useless expenditures that deepen social problems and do not even meet basic needs. Türkiye is full of earthquake/disaster dwellings built from this perspective, but most of them are no longer in use. Moreover, the problem of shelter and nutrition is prioritized among the basic needs of human beings, but human beings do not act only with their basic impulses as other living creatures. Our cultural needs, which accompany our basic needs and now direct our lives as secondary impulses, should also be taken into consideration in disaster management. Because humans are not only biological but also cultural beings.

In this earthquake, which has been called the “disaster of the century”, not only were people’s homes and workplaces destroyed, but the cultural worlds in which they lived were also turned upside down. Their family structures, habits, values, social memory, social relations, customs, and beliefs, in other words, their cultures to which they owe their sociality in general, were also severely damaged. Unfortunately, just like development projects in our country, disaster

⁵ The term eschatology is derived from the Greek words *escharos* (the end) and *eschara* (the last things) (Kayabaşı, 2016: 169). Eschatology is a branch of science that deals with narratives at the end of the world in general and the great mythological disasters and destruction that have befallen humanity. The most widely known eschatological myths are those about destruction, such as the flood, which are about the punishment for the sins committed by humans.

⁶ “...at least 15 million people in Turkey and more than 7 million in Syria were affected by the earthquake.” <https://turkiye.un.org/tr/218305-unfpa-y%C4%B1k%C4%B1c%C4%B1-depremlerin-ard%C4%B1ndan-t%C3%BCrkiye-ve-suriye%E2%80%99deki-kad%C4%B1nlara-ve-k%C4%B1z-%C3%A7ocuklar%C4%B1na>

projects do not take into account “culture”, which is the basic value that makes people human. Any project that does not take into account the sophisticated needs, expectations, and habits of neither the individual nor the society in which the individual is a member, does not achieve the targeted goal, and brings a great financial burden to the country's economy.

Anthropologist Edward Tylor defines the concept of culture as follows: “culture or civilization is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (cited in Astor-Aguilera, 2017: 107). As can be seen from the definition, culture has both material and immaterial aspects. In other words, in addition to the elements classified as tangible, internalized intangible elements such as behaviors, values, and attitudes also constitute culture. These two aspects of culture are not opposite to each other but, rather complement each other and interact within the holistic characteristic of culture.

Therefore, when the tangible part of the cultural system collapses or is damaged, the intangible part, such as habits, values, traditions, and social relations, is also damaged. When the cultural world as a whole collapses, people feel vulnerable and helpless. This leads to trauma, both individually and as a group, and increases the risk of conflict both within and between groups.

For a disaster project to be respectful of environmental, humanitarian, and cultural values, it needs an anthropological perspective. As in previous disaster projects, any project based solely on engineering principles and without considering the ideas and cultural needs of the people living in the region will have the potential to generate new individual and social problems and tensions.

3. Anthropology of Disaster

Disaster studies have been of interest to anthropology since the latter half of the 20th century. Following the eruption of Mount Lamington in Papua New Guinea in 1951, Cyril Belshaw's (1951) and Felix Keesing's (1952) studies on the social organization and post-disaster adaptation processes of the Orokaiva people living near the volcano were considered among the first studies in this field. These two studies provide only descriptive information rather than deep analysis. Both anthropologists drew attention to the role of culture, personality, and social organization in disaster adaptation. The metaphysical views of local actors who “perceive the cause of disasters as a supernatural punishment for human misbehavior” were also cited by Belshaw and Keesing (as cited in Faas & Barrios, 2015: 288).

Another disaster anthropologist was Anthony F.C. Wallace. His interest in the impact of stress and sociocultural changes on mental health and personality led him to study disasters and to formulate a general disaster model. The model he developed is based on a systematic comparison of various case studies to formulate disaster processes. In his psycho-cultural model, which he calls “disaster syndrome”, Wallace claims that disaster victims experience isolation, euphoria, altruism, criticism, and normality processes (cited in Faas & Barrios 2015: 288).

One of the important studies in disaster anthropology is Raymond Firth's (1959) “Social Change in Tikopia”. In his study of Tikopian responses to two hurricanes and the ensuing famine, Firth described in detail how Tikopians' ritual and everyday social relations changed after the disaster (cited in Faas & Barrios 2015: 288).



The first detailed anthropological research on the earthquake disaster conducted by Anthony Oliver-Smith. In fact, this research was conducted as a result of a coincidental necessity. Oliver-Smith was conducting his dissertation on the political economy of markets in Yungay when a 7.9-magnitude earthquake hit the Pacific coast of Peru on May 31, 1970. When Yungay was devastated by the earthquake, Oliver-Smith turned her attention to the ways in which the survivors of the earthquake and the Ancash avalanche it triggered coped with the loss of their relatives, namely, the processes of mourning and normalization (cited in Faas & Barrios, 2015: 287-288).

Unlike other disaster anthropology studies, Tripathi examined the relationship between “national character of Japan” and disaster in his research, which was conducted after the great earthquake that occurred in Japan on March 11, 2011. While disaster studies mostly discuss destroyed physical structures and disrupted adaptation processes, Tripathi, on the contrary, talks about a strong and solidaristic Japanese culture built on disasters. Approaching the subject through the “Cultural Personality Theory”, of which Margret Mead and Ruth Benedict were among the pioneers, Tripathi claims that people in Japan, where severe earthquakes are experienced, actually have a disaster culture. According to Tripathi, who asserts that the foundation of Japanese culture is a life that is compatible with earthquakes and other disasters; “this basic culture results in formation of basic personality” (Tripathi, 2013: 62). “Unity, community feeling or feeling of ‘we’, honesty, cooperation, strong determination and hard work, love for nation, are the traits of Japanese people that make Japanese culture as integrated whole (Tripathi, 2013: 58).

While important studies have been conducted in disaster anthropology in the West, there have been no serious studies in this field in Turkey, except for a few articles. The few studies, on the other hand, mostly talk about how disaster management should and/or should not be and the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that includes anthropology in disaster studies, without conducting fieldwork and only translating from foreign sources. For instance, Varol and Gültekin (2016), in their article titled “Disaster Anthropology” categorized disaster management into five phases: “1-Mitigation 2-Preparedness 3-Rescue and first aid 4-Recovery and 5-Reconstruction” (Varol & Gültekin, 2016: 1432).

Varol and Gültekin emphasize that “sociological, anthropological, psychological, and cultural approaches should not be ignored in relief efforts at both international and national levels” and that “anthropologists who examine issues such as “the internal social and economic structure and dynamics of societies, the external social and environmental relations of societies, the adaptation of societies to nature” can carry out studies to reduce the damage of disasters and contribute to disaster risk management studies” (Varol & Gültekin, 2016: 1432-1435).

Disaster sociology and disaster psychology studies in Turkey are relatively older, and more publications have been conducted in these fields. However, just like in the anthropology of disasters, these studies are, mostly desk studies, in which recommendations are made based on translations from foreign sources, and analyses are made based on information gathered from the press.

In his article titled “Earthquake Sociology- Social and Cultural Dimensions of the February 6 Disaster”, Erdoğan (2023) argues that “while the majority of Turkish society tried to organize to help the earthquake victims, there were also individuals and institutions that tried to turn

the disaster to their own advantage” and claims that opportunism at the level of “immorality” developed in a segment of society:

Unfortunately, from the abnormal increase in house rents after these two earthquakes to the sale of extinguishing materials at exorbitant prices during the previous large-scale forest fires, it has been identified that crisis opportunists in every field and business line have been trying to make huge economic gains from the victimization of others for many years. The widespread prevalence of this perverse situation, which arises from structural tensions and the lack of social norms and cannot be legitimized by any moral measure, stems from a wild free market culture that has become widespread in the last 30-40 years all over the world and in Turkey and has almost been internalized into society (Erdoğan, 2023: 722).

Similarly, Altun's (2018) desk study titled “Economic and Social Impacts of Disasters: An Evaluation through the Case of Turkey” also includes the economic, physical, social, and psychological consequences of disasters after defining the concepts related to disasters and listing disaster types.

During our research, we came across only one fieldwork-related article. On November 07, 2020, after the earthquake in Izmir on October 30, 2020, Çalışkan and Kaya (2021) wrote an article based on one-day interviews with earthquake survivors. In their research, the authors focused on social solidarity practices after the earthquake in Izmir. Çalışkan and Kaya (2021: 1052) stated that they “conducted a qualitative research with the participation of 336 earthquake survivors in the tent cities established in the city center of Izmir” and that they “tried to understand the aspects of social solidarity and organizational structure of the services provided by the institutions or organizations working in the tent cities” by taking into account the narratives and experiences of the earthquake survivors (Çalışkan & Kaya, 2021: 1052).

Nakajima (2012), in his article titled “Earthquake and Post-Earthquake Psychology” draws attention to the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the earthquake. In his article, Nakajima believes that “earthquake victims should be provided with psychological treatments known to be useful in reducing anxiety, fear, and PTSD symptoms” (Nakajima, 2012: 150).

Unlike the limited number of studies by Turkish anthropologists and sociologists in the field of anthropology of disasters, which are mostly based on the translation of foreign sources, studies by foreign anthropologists based on fieldwork draw attention to and contribute to the discussion of the tensions between Culture and -nature and political power and-society that arise under disaster conditions. Moreover, “as in other fields of anthropology, in disaster anthropology, there is a general belief that policies and practices inevitably take into account local culture and dynamics” (Faas & Barrios, 2015: 290-292).

4. Methodology

This article is based on interviews and field observations between May 31 and June 4, 2023, approximately four months after the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes that occurred on February 6, 2023. Taking into account the sensitivities of the people affected by the earthquake, the interviews were conducted in the form of spontaneous conversations that did not disturb the spontaneity of the environment, instead of techniques such as interviews and questionnaires with pre-prepared questions that would tire, stress, and/or direct them. Anthropological fieldwork is “not a one-sided and one-voiced activity, but a multi-voiced and dialogic activity



that includes the voices of community members other than the anthropologist, those he/she influences, and those who influence him/her. The knowledge that is the product of a dialogical approach, that is, of interaction, falls into neither objectivity nor subjectivity. It is an intersubjective field of knowledge where different subjectivities are shared and interact” (Atay, 2017: 199).

In addition to spontaneous conversations, discussions were also held with people of different identities and opinion leaders (religious leaders, heads of foundations, etc.) through references or contacts established through old relationships⁷. Based on the information obtained through a dialogical approach, a descriptive analysis was conducted and a series of recommendations based on this analysis were presented.

In addition to religious and ethnic identities such as Nusayri, Christian (member of the Greek Orthodox community), Armenian (residents of Vakıflı village in Samandağ), Sunni Turkish, Sunni Arab, people from various occupational groups such as teachers, clergymen, health workers, head of foundations, shopkeepers (owners and/or employees of businesses such as butchers, bakeries, restaurants, grocery stores, etc.) were also interviewed.

Most of the districts of Antakya and Defne, where the research was conducted, were destroyed by the earthquake. While destruction was observed in the regions of Samandağ close to Antakya and Defne districts, there was not much destruction in the settlements in the center and west of Samandağ.

5. Interviews and Observations:

In the districts of Antakya and Defne, where the destruction hit hard and most of the population had to move⁸ to other provinces, the debris removal and normalization work is far below expectations. Especially in the center of Antakya, not a single piece of debris has been removed from Kurtuluş and Saray streets, which are home to historical buildings and streets that are the symbols of the city. Some historical buildings that have not been demolished but are no longer in use have signs posted on them by the Ministry of Culture saying “registered cultural property, no unauthorized intervention”. Some of the earthquake survivors we interviewed said that debris removal could not be carried out due to the magnitude of the destruction and the fact that most buildings were registered. On the other hand, some of the people interviewed claimed that there were too many valuables, gold and money left under the rubble of the demolished buildings and therefore things were being taken slowly. In fact, they also attribute the excessive number of security elements such as soldiers, police and guards brought from outside in Antakya District to this. Whatever the reason, this situation is the biggest obstacle to the return of people and the normalization of the city. Even if people return under the current conditions, asbestos and wastewater leaking from the rubble will create a serious hygiene and health problem⁹. The collection area for the removed rubble also poses a problem. The rubble removed so far has been dumped on the

⁷ The first author of this article lived in Antakya between 2009 and 2012.

⁸ The concept of migration is not specifically used here. This is because almost everyone interviewed said that those who leave will definitely return.

⁹ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/hatayda-asbest-canlari-kimin-icin-caliyor-deprem-oldurmedi-kanser-oldurecek-haber-164> 26 42

beach in Samandağ. The toxic wastes from the rubble hills here will not only affect human health but also the flora and fauna on land and in the sea.

The Uzun Çarşı (Long Bazaar), one of the symbolic shopping places of Antakya, was also negatively affected by the earthquake. At the time of our research, some shops in a section of the bazaar had already opened. However, the shopkeepers who could not do business said that “they returned and opened their shops because they loved their city, but they were in a difficult situation because they could not do business”. These people actually want to contribute to the normalization of their city by opening their shops, even if they are damaged.

In response to the question “did you receive enough help after the earthquake?”, most earthquake survivors said that no one came for the first few days, but then a lot of help was provided. There were even some who stated the following about the excessive amount of aid that still continues: “There are so many supplies and food. Most people's tents, containers, or houses, if they are still intact, are as full as the markets.”

However, not everyone had the same chance to receive aid. Among these, there were some who could not stand in line to receive aid due to their social status (especially respected/recognized families of Alawites), who were uncomfortable with the way aid was distributed even though they needed it, or who said that they did not patronize it. An Alawite earthquake survivor interviewed said that she stood in line to receive aid, but this situation was very difficult for her, and she left the line crying. An Alawite cleric (Sheikh/Shaykh) also stated that it was not for them to receive aid in this way and that although aid materials were distributed to those in need in the tomb where he was in charge, he did not benefit from the aid. “We are certain families, we have always helped people, and we are not used to such things, so it is very difficult for us to receive aid,” he said.

One earthquake survivor stated that no one had come to help for the first three days, but very strong solidarity and cooperation emerged among themselves, and people shared what they had with each other. However, after the aid arrived, people became selfish, and even those who did not need it stocked up on supplies. This, left some people in need in a difficult situation.

5.1. Disintegrating Families

The most devastating social impact of the earthquake was felt in family ties. Hatay is not merely a city where religious communities and ethnic identities live together. At the same time, the extended family and clan groups that make up these identities are among the main characteristics of the province. Family members recognize each other by nicknames or surnames. In Hatay, family identity plays an important role in social relations, from trade to marriage and settlement areas' determination. Unfortunately, many families have disintegrated because of the earthquake. Some have lost their spouses and children, while others have sent their families out of the province because there is no place to stay or it is not safe.

An earthquake survivor who worked as a butcher in Uzun Çarşı (Long Bazaar) reported that their house had collapsed, that neighbors pulled him out of the rubble after 12-13 hours, and that they had reached the lifeless bodies of his wife and three children three days later. He said that he went to Ankara after burying them, but he could not bear it. He returned home, not knowing what to do. He said that his only solution was to remarry and start a family, but he realized that this was now very difficult.



While the Armenian community in Vakıflı in Samandağ survived the first earthquake undamaged, the second one affected them as well. They suffered two losses in total, but many buildings, especially their church, were unusable. The population of the village is 120, but most of them left the province after the earthquake. Families are scattered. Cem Çapar, the president of the foundation to which the village belongs, said that his wife and children had to leave for Istanbul after the earthquake. He added:

“I didn't leave because I couldn't leave this place, work is always here. And we can't do anything outside Antakya. I will bring my wife and children, but the conditions are not yet suitable. There is no house to stay in, and even if a house is built, there is no school for our children. The jobs we used to do for a living have broken down. They cannot come back until these things are fixed”.

5.2. The Disappearance of the Ancient Community

Before the earthquake, a small Jewish community was living on Kurtuluş Street in the center of Antakya. They lost two members in the earthquake, and all survivors migrated to Israel and Istanbul. We use the term emigration to refer to the Jewish community because, according to Cem Çapar, they do not plan to return. Perhaps they could send Jewish families living in Istanbul, who are not in good economic condition, to Antakya to take care of their ancestral lands and graves. The earthquake have completely wiped out the existence of a community in Antakya. However, the choir that became famous as the Chorus of Civilizations and introduced Hatay to the world included Jewish singers and music composed of Hebrew. Now, like the Choir of Civilizations, Antakya has lost one of its voices and colors.

5.3. Hatay Cuisine Despite the Earthquake's Devastation

Hatay cuisine comes to mind along with different and ancient beliefs, multi-identity, impressive architecture, and nature. Hatay cuisine has managed to become a global brand in Turkey and the world. In a previous interview, an Armenian restaurant owner from Vakıflı said, “I have been to Armenia, but their food culture is not like ours. Our food culture is superior to theirs. Because the cuisine of Antakya¹⁰ is very rich”.

Similarly, the most common complaint of those who traveled to cities such as Ankara, Mersin, and Istanbul was the food. They stated that they were not full in the cities they visited because the food was very tasteless. Some even said that the reason they returned was because of the food problem. A shopkeeper who went to Ankara explained the richness of their culinary culture through the following experiences: “We ordered meatballs. What bad meatballs they were, tasteless and unsalted. There were different, red pieces inside. I couldn't eat it. But Antakya food is both delicious and plentiful.”

5.4. New Mythos

Hatay is perhaps Turkey's most colorful city in terms of religious diversity. Muslims, Alawites, Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Armenians, and Jews live in the province. In the aftermath of the earthquake, it has been observed that these communities have clung even more tightly

¹⁰ The name Antakya, meaning the central district of Hatay, is used by most locals to refer to the central district as well as Defne and Samandağ.

to their identities and religions, developed new discourses and myths, and become even more attached to their religions and communities.

“Religions generally expect a high level of loyalty from their adherents” (Seul, 1999, p. 559). Fawcett (2000, 5-8), who sees religions and sects as a sources of symbols for ethnic groups, also states that religions both spread and strengthen the consciousness of ethnic identity. People believe that their identities are sacred. This leads them to become more attached to their identities and feel self-confident. This is why people tend to cling to and protect their identities during disasters, conflicts, and so on. Religion offers suitable grounds for social solidarity and, thus for all kinds of identity construction, not only through its teachings and indoctrination but, also through rituals that it mandates for its members. “Daily and weekly prayers or periodic rituals and celebrations strengthen the belonging and unity of the group” (Fawcett, 2000, 6; Seul, 1999, 560) and increase members’ self-confidence.

During the interviews conducted in Hatay, it was observed that two religious tendencies developed in the aftermath of the earthquake. The first is the tendency of those who accept the earthquake as an instrument of divine punishment by saying “what sins did we commit that caused this earthquake to happen to us?”. This approach posits the tendency to attribute the cause of an earthquake to the sins committed by humans despite, the fact that they are aware of all scientific explanations¹¹ for the occurrence of an earthquake. However, this approach also means that people should turn away from their sins and embrace religion more. The Sheikh in charge of the Sheikh Yusuf Al Hakim Tomb in the Defne District attributed the cause of the earthquake to human sin. According to the Sheikh, the previous devastating earthquake was caused by divine punishment for the ancient people of Antioch who were complicit in the sin of cutting the throat of Habib al-Najjar¹². Thousands of people died then too, the Sheikh says, and asks, “what sin was committed that caused the earthquake now?”¹³ The sheikh said that the shrine was a place of refuge for earthquake victims and that in the first days of the earthquake, people gathered at the shrine and stayed in tents set up in its garden, where they were provided with aid and food.

Those with the second tendency believe that holy places around Samandağ and the graves of the saints there in particular protect them from earthquakes. It was mentioned earlier that Samandağ was not as affected by the earthquake as the Antakya and Defne districts. It is reported that the spiritual protection of the Shirine of Hızır in Samandağ has reduced the

¹¹ After every earthquake, dozens of earthquake scientists commenting on the concepts of “earthquake”, “fault line”, “aftershock”, etc., are watched with interest by earthquake victims.

¹² Habib-i Neccar was a carpenter from Antioch who lived during the time of Jesus. According to the narrative, John (Barnabas) and Jonah (Paul), two apostles of Jesus, come to Antioch to preach, and only Habib-i Neccar helps them. However, the pagan people kill Habib-i Neccar along with the two apostles. A mosque was built on the site of the Roman temple where the Apostles and Habib-i Neccar were killed during the reign of Caliph Omar, and the building, which was converted into a church during the Byzantine period, was later converted back into a mosque. The mosque, named after Habib-i Neccar, is considered a sacred place for Christians as well as Muslims because it houses the graves of the apostles (see https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habib-i_Neccar_Camii). Unfortunately, the Habib-i Neccar Mosque was also destroyed by the earthquake.

¹³ The metaphysical interpretation of the Sheikh in charge at the Shrine of Sheikh Yusuf al-Hakim, who attributes the earthquake to “human sin”, parallels the thinking of the Orokaivas in Papua New Guinea, who “perceive the eruption of Mount Lamington as a supernatural punishment for human misdeeds”. The similar explanations of people from two different faiths and cultures, thousands of kilometers apart and historically out of contact, reveal that traditional people who are helpless in the face of disasters hold on to life by eliminating the uncertainty caused by unexplained events through religion.



destructiveness of the earthquake, and that interest, in the tomb has increased among Samandağ residents and Alawites¹⁴ in the vicinity¹⁵.

5.5. Will Hatay Be Like It Was Before?

At the time of this research, 4 months had passed since the earthquake. During this time, people have met their daily needs, such as food, shelter, health, education, etc. either by going out of the province or in the places where they stayed. They have no serious concerns about their needs. However, the most important concern of the earthquake survivors interviewed in Hatay is whether their city can be culturally restored. During the conversations, some people expressed their concerns in the following way: “Okay, we will have our houses, and our workplaces will be open, but will it be the same as it was before?” After an Alawite teacher said “we will not leave our city, we will restore it to its former state”, I¹⁶ said “yes, I believe that it will definitely be restored to its former state”, and the same person expressed his concern by asking “will Hatay really be the same as it was before?” contrary to the determination and conviction in her previous words.

The common concern of Hatay residents of all identities is, “will Hatay be the same as before?” There is no clear information about what planning was done after the earthquake, how construction will take place, how houses will be delivered, and where they will be housed. This uncertainty increases people's anxiety even more. In other words, people do not have a problem of trust in the government regarding the construction and distribution of houses. They are just looking for an answer to the question of where and according to what:

“Why don't they ask us, why is our opinion not taken. Our community is certain, our families are certain, and we have built our lives accordingly. We even built our houses accordingly. Now, what will we do if someone tells me that you live on this side of town and your brother lives on the other side?”

Cem Çapar, the head of the Armenian community's foundation, said: “Actually, I understand the state. The state wants to establish its own Hatay. But here, Muslims, Christians, and Alawites each had their own Hatay. Hatay was one and the same, but within this unity, each community had a separate Hatay. People want their own Hatay where they live together,” he said, drawing attention to the uncertainty.

¹⁴ After the earthquake, there was a significant increase in the number of visitors to the shrine of Hızır, as reported by those in charge of the shrine and visitors.

¹⁵ The increase in interest in holy places that were not destroyed in the earthquake is not unique to Hatay. Davis (2010: 5-16) gives an example of what happened in Cyprus in the 4th century as an example of the effect of sacred places that were destroyed or, conversely, did not collapse in earthquakes on belief. From written sources and archeological remains, we learn that there were severe earthquakes in Cyprus between 332 and 370 AD. These earthquakes have led to a serious crisis and transformation of faith in Cyprus. The widespread belief on the island was that Greek Paganism, and the impact of the earthquakes on Paganism was negative. As a result of the earthquakes, the temple of Zeus in Salamis was severely damaged, and the Temple of Apollo in Kourion was completely destroyed. According to Davis (2010), the destruction of the great temples struck at the heart of traditional pagan beliefs and practices and made ancient believers question why their gods allowed this destruction to happen. This disappointment and doubt increased interest in Christianity, which had just come to Cyprus. This was because the newly spreading Christianity did not have many churches on the island, and thus Christianity was able to avoid the negative psychological impact of the image of destroyed temples on the people. Moreover, Christian clergymen's declarations that the destruction caused by earthquakes was “not random, but rather God's way of separating those who worshiped correctly from those who did not” caused further blood loss to paganism (Davis, 2010: 11).

¹⁶ First author of the article.

5.6. Concern over “Suri” Settlers

The following words by a Nusayri interviewee were the clearest expression of this concern: “We are afraid that the unity that makes us who we are will be disrupted!” Underlying this fear is not only the void that will be created in Hatay's cultural world due to the destruction, dispersed families, and disappearing communities but, also the rumor that outsiders, especially Syrians, will settle in their living spaces. This rumor is again on the agenda of people from all walks of life. This concern emerges at different levels and forms according to religious and ethnic identities. The discomfort of the Turks interviewed in the center of Antakya was not about where foreigners/Syrians would be resettled but, about the fact that aid was given to them first. A Turkish earthquake survivor interviewed said:

“While we were waiting for help in the rain and cold, while our relatives were under the sinkhole, Syrians were immediately helped. They were first placed in containers and tent cities. Even in hospitals, they are taken care of before us. OK, they are our brothers and sisters in religion, but the state discriminated between brothers and sisters. This is very difficult for us.”

Nusayris are the ones that are most concerned about Syrians. Some Nusayri interviewees believed that the slow debris removal pace was a way of harassing Antakya residents and forcing them to migrate. They believe Syrians will settle where they leave. In reality, being an Arab is a very important criterion for Alawite identity. Every Nusayri, in addition to their faith, also embraces their Arab identity. However, despite their Arab identity, which they attach importance to, Alawites seem irreconcilable toward their fellow Syrian refugees for sectarian and political reasons. For this reason, they use the term “Suri” for Syrians to distinguish them from their Arab identity. They did not want to see “Suri” in their living spaces in the new Hatay. As an expression of this, the slogan “Me Rihna, Nihna Hon!” (We have not left, we are here!) in Arabic written in Latin letters is frequently seen on the walls of Defne and Samandağ districts where Nusayris live in large numbers. It has also been reported that a number of protests were organized in which the aforementioned slogan was chanted¹⁷. Of course, the above-mentioned uncertainty has a lot to do with this tension.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hygienic conditions, social areas, and shelter facilities are not adequate in the earthquake zone. Therefore, people have difficulty meeting their basic needs. Wastewater and asbestos leaking from rubble piles threaten people's health. In addition, the high dust emission from rubble will have a negative impact on the comfort and hygiene of the area. In central Antakya, there are many windy days due to the corridor formed by the Asi River. This will seriously affect people's health by spreading asbestos dust into the environment.

In order to eliminate these health and hygiene problems, debris must be quickly removed. However, collecting debris also poses a problem. The rubble removed thus far has been dumped on the beach in Samandağ. The toxic waste from the rubble hills will not only affect human health but, also the flora and fauna on land and in the sea.

¹⁷ “On the 40th day of the Maraş earthquakes, women in Hatay Samandağ organized a march with Myrtle tree branches and the banner ‘Our sadness is our rebellion’. The women said, ‘We are not leaving, we are here, and we do not forgive our rights-!’” (<https://gazetekarinca.com/samandagli-kadinlar-gitmedik-buradayiz/>)



Religious and cultural sensitivities should be considered when distributing aid. Families who do not receive aid due to their status should be provided with aid in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, the services of voluntary organizations and NGOs are organized by AFAD¹⁸ and are mostly limited to container and tent cities. However, a significant number of earthquake victims live near their homes, in their gardens, or with their relatives in tents, etc., which they set up with their own means and, are therefore deprived of these services. Most of the people we asked whether they had been contacted by the NGOs whose names are well-known and which we know are active in the earthquake region, answered “no” or “we have not seen them”.

Health services and public transportation have not yet reached adequate levels. People cannot go to health institutions, which are already limited due, to the inadequacy of public transportation, and those who do go complain that they cannot get proper service due to overcrowding.

Local actors should be consulted on post-earthquake housing and site selection. Hatay's own residents should decide how the new building should be built. Attention should be paid to religious, ethnic, and family sensitivities, and housing should be planned in accordance with these sensitivities in order to preserve their identities and maintain their old harmony. Imposed projects should be avoided and projects produced through joint decision-making mechanisms should be shared with people transparently. People want to be informed about the process and demand that their opinions be taken into consideration and included in the project.

In the earthquake zone, especially in areas where Alawites/Nusayris live densely, social tension is increasing due to reasons such as uncertainty, lack of information about the future, and rumors that foreigners (Syrians) will be settled in their living spaces. In order to eliminate all these perceptions that cause tension, teams of NGOs, social scientists, psychologists, and opinion leaders of the religious and ethnic groups living there should be formed, and if necessary, people from every household should be reached, and worried people should be enlightened.

In conclusion, based on the data we were able to obtain as a result of a short study, different ethnic and religious groups in Hatay are experiencing various social and cultural problems. The most prominent common concern is the destruction and deterioration of the sense and culture of “Antakyaness”, which plays an important role in the construction of identities and allows people to live together with their differences. In addition, concerns about debris removal, the equitable organization of aid and services, and government practices are among the other problems experienced. In this respect, more detailed fieldwork is required over a longer period.

¹⁸ Disaster agency under the Ministry of Interior

Bibliography

- Astor -Aguilera, M. (2017). Edward Burnett Tylor as Ethnographer. *Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion and Culture*, edited by P.F. Tremett, G. Harvey, and L. T. Sutherland, 107-122. London, UK: Bloomsbury.
- Atay, T. (2017). Sosyal Antropolojide Yöntem ve Etik Sorunu: Klasik Etnografiden Diyalojik Etnografiye Doğru. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Kültürel Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 4 (1), 189-206.
- Çalışkan, A. & Kaya, G. (2021). Deprem Sonrasındaki Toplumsal Dayanışma Pratiklerinin sosyolojik Görünümü: İzmir Depremi Örneği. *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Vizyoner Dergisi*, 12 (32), 1052-1077.
- Davis, T. W. (2010). Earthquakes and the Crises of Faith: Social Transformation in Late Antique Cyprus. *Buried History*, V. 46, 5-16.
- Erdoğan, B. (2023). Depremin Sosyolojisi: 6 Şubat Felaketinin Toplumsal ve Kültürel Boyutları. *TRT Akademi*, 08 (18), 719-725.
- Faas, A.J. & Barrios, R. E. (2015). Applied Anthropology of Risk, Hazards, and Disasters. *Human Organization*, 74 (4), 287-295.
- Fawcett, L. (2000). *Religion, Ethnicity, and Social Change*. London, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Kayabaşı, O. A. (2016). Türk Mitolojisindeki Eskatoloji Mitleri. *Folklor Edebiyat*, 22, (86), 167-180.
- Nakajima, Ş. (2012). Deprem ve Sonrası Psikolojisi. *Okmeydanı Tıp Dergisi*, 28 (2), 150-155.
- Seul, Jeffrey R. (1999). Ours is the Way of God: Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research*, 36 (5), 553-569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343399036005004>
- Tripathi, S. (2013). Disaster and its Socio-Cultural Implication: A Study With Culture and Personality Approach of Anthropology (With Special Reference to Disaster in Japan). *Asian Academic Research Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 1 (16), 58-64.
- Varol, N. & Gültekin, T. (2016). Afet Antropolojisi. *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 15 (59), 1431-1436.
- Antakya*. (2023, 10 Haziran). In *Vikipedi*. Access address: <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antakya>
- Habib-i Neccar Camii*. (2023, 10 Haziran). In *Vikipedi*. Access address: https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habib-i_Neccar_Camii
- Hatay. (2023, 10 Haziran). In *Vikipedi*. Access address: <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hatay>
- Samandaşlı kadınlar: Gitmedik, buradayız! (2023, 29 Ağustos). In *Gazete Karınca*. Access address: <https://gazetekarınca.com/samandagli-kadinlar-gitmedik-buradayiz/>
- UNFPA, yıkıcı depremlerin ardından Türkiye ve Suriye'deki kadınlara ve kız çocuklarına ulaşmak için sahada. (2023, 29 Ağustos). Access address: <https://turkiye.un.org/tr/218305-unfpa-y%C4%B1k%C4%B1c%C4%B1-depremlerin-ard%C4%B1ndan-t%C3%BCrkiye-ve-suriye%E2%80%99deki-kad%C4%B1nlara-ve-k%C4%B1z-%C3%A7ocuklar%C4%B1na>



Photos

Photo 1. Demolished buildings in Old Antakya.



Photo 2 and 3. Rubble completely blocking the street in Old Antakya.



Photo 3.



Photo 4. Affan Kahvesi (Cafe), a symbolic place in Antakya, located on Kurtuluş Street.



Photo 5. Collapsed minaret of a historical mosque in Uzun Çarşı (Long Bazaar).



Photo 6. Demolished private school building in Old Antakya.



Photo 7. Street in old Antakya.



Photo 8. Lonelinessful flowers of old Antakya.



Photo 9. Garden of a demolished primary school.



Photo 10. “Unmanned” cats in Saray Street.



Photo 11. A heavily damaged apartment building on Saray Street.



Photo 12. Hızır Shrine in Samandağ, which was not affected by the earthquake.



Photo 13. “We have not left, we are here” slogan written on the walls of the Defne District.



Photo 14. A graffiti in Samandağ which means “born here, die here”



Photo 15. A graffiti in Samandağ: “Samandağ is ours. We will come back”

