

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**MASTER THESIS**

**“YOU WAKE UP EACH DAY WITH FOUR STRANGER  
KIDS”: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH WITH  
CHILDREN LIVING IN CHILDREN’S HOMES**

**NESİBENUR ŞATIROĞLU**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS**

**ISTANBUL, 2023**

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**by**

**NESİBENUR ŞATIROĞLU**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Sociology**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
PROF. RAMAZAN ARAS**

**ISTANBUL, 2023**

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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Signature


This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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## ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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Signature:



## ÖZ

### “HER GÜNE TANIMADIĞIN DÖRT ÇOCUKLA UYANIYORSUN”: ÇOCUK EVLERİNDE YAŞAYAN ÇOCUKLARLA BİR ETNOGRAFİ

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Türkiye'de dezavantajlı çocuklara yönelik pek çok koruma ve bakım modeli bulunmaktadır. Yaşlarına ve cinsiyetlerine göre ayrılmış beş ila altı çocuğun, yirmi dört saatlik vardiyalarda çalışan üç bakım görevlisiyle birlikte kaldığı, “çocuk evleri” modellerden bir tanesidir. Bu araştırma, Yeni Çocukluk Sosyolojisi'nin fikir ve teorilerine paralel olarak, Türkiye'de çocuk evlerinde yaşayan çocuklar açısından çocukluğun deneyimlerini ve kültürel politikalarını anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Araştırma, kültürel politikaları ve günlük yaşam pratiklerini yeniden üreten söylemler karşısında çocukların görüşlerini, kendilerini nasıl konumlandıklarını ve öznelliklerini nasıl gerçekleştirdiklerini anlamak için üç nitel araştırma metodolojisini bir araya getirmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çocuk Evleri, Çocukluğun Kültürel Politikası, Etnografi, Stigma, Yeni Çocukluk Sosyolojisi.

## ABSTRACT

### “YOU WAKE UP EACH DAY WITH FOUR STRANGER KIDS”: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN LIVING IN CHILDREN’S HOMES

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There are many protection and care models for disadvantaged children in Turkey. One model is called “children’s homes,” in which five to six children separated by their age and gender stay together with three care workers who do shifts of twenty-four hours. This research is parallel to the ideas and theories of the New Sociology of Childhood and tries to understand the experiences and cultural politics of childhood with regard to children living in children’s homes in Turkey. The research combines three qualitative research methodologies, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation, to understand children's views and how they position themselves and perform their subjectivity in the face of discourses that reproduce the cultural politics and the practices of their daily lives.

**Keywords:** Children’s Homes, Cultural Politics of Childhood, Embodied Space, New Sociology of Childhood, Stigma.

## DEDICATION



... to the magnet, to the bridge, and to all children.

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First and foremost, I thank my family for always being proud of me and there to support me in whatever I am doing.

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Nesibenur ŐATRIOđLU

ISTANBUL, 2023

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## **LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

MFSS	Ministry of Family and Social Services
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization
SSCPI	Social Services and Child Protection Institution



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

*“I entered a wooden building through its iron door. On the door was written Children’s Home Coordination Center. The security greeted me and asked the reason for my presence. I replied, “I am here to attend the meeting with the manager.” He showed me the way; I found myself in a relatively small room, including an average-sized TV that showed the security cameras in and out of the building, leather chairs, and a coffee table. Here, I was to attend the case meeting with seven other adults in social service about a twelve-year-old child under protection and care in a residential setting. We were to decide which home would be best for her.*

*As soon as we started debating what would be best for her, I thought that the people she is not related to are deciding on behalf of someone. The burden of deciding what to do haunted all of us down, and we were only able to conclude after three hours of discussing and understanding what the child needed. The decision was made. She had to leave the children's home, where she had been living for three years, and be transferred to a new home. This was for her high benefit.”<sup>1</sup>*

We consider a child a ‘normal’ being embedded in daily life. This embeddedness of children through their ‘normality’ sometimes results in neglecting the subjective position of children in their own culture and adult’s culture. However, this taken-for-granted natural being of a child does not mean that it has been neglected in academic studies; on the contrary, they have been studied academically. We should question the way researchers study children and childhood. Studies up to a certain period revolved around the concept of linear ‘development’ of children based on physical and psychological attributes or as-to-be-adults individuals with lacked attributes. Piaget, Vygotsky, Freud, and many other theorists on the developmental axis conceptualized children as something to become, as individuals needing to acquire specific skills to

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<sup>1</sup> Personal observations from the field, 12.12.2024, Istanbul.

reach a certain level of maturity that would prepare them for adult life. The surprising issue is that this is not only the case in psychology and psychiatry but also in sociological theories regarding childhood, which conceptualize the child through an adult perspective from a linear understanding. Much of the early sociological study of childhood socialization was influenced by the dominant theories in developmental psychology at the time.<sup>2</sup> However, the critical gaze of sociology and cultural studies, in general being affected by psychological studies on childhood, disregarded the idea of active participation of children in daily life; hence, early sociological studies on childhood were shaped by the ideas of “universality, naturality, and rationality.”<sup>3</sup> The conceptualization of childhood socialization fed its roots in how children acquire adult culture through becoming social individuals. In this case, children were regarded as passive recipients of society, devoid of agency and practice, but considered future gatekeepers -adults to become- of the orderly society. In this way, “most social theories, through their emphasis on a taken-for-granted adult world, spectacularly fail to constitute the child as an ontology in its own right.”<sup>4</sup> Becoming or being is the main difference in looking at the ontology of the child and thus may bring a paradigm shift in childhood studies, which is what happened in this field. When applied to the sociology of childhood, constructivist and interpretive perspectives argue that children and adults are active participants in the social construction of childhood and the interpretive reproduction of their shared culture.<sup>5</sup> Viewing children and childhood as socially constructive is officially defined as a paradigm shift by the works of Alan Prout and Allison James (1997) in their article named “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems”. Then, studies regarding this paradigm shift as a new sociology of childhood gained interest.

There are a couple of factors that affected the turn of the paradigm. The development of a new sociology of childhood has become closely related to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>6</sup> The articles in UNCRC are fundamental not only in the legal sphere but also for academic purposes, which opens

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<sup>2</sup> William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (London: SAGE Publications, 2018), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Türkan Erdoğan, and Bilge Vakıf, "Çocukluk Sosyolojisinin Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Kuramsal Temelleri," *SEFAD* 44, (2020): 467.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Gabriel, *The Sociology of Early Childhood* (London: SAGE Publications, 2017), 48.

a space for viewing and placing children in a new conceptualization. The three embracive and interrelated principles, ‘the best interests of the child,’ ‘the non-discrimination principle,’ and ‘respect for the child's views,’ provide a framework for academic studies -as well as the everyday life of children-.<sup>7</sup> In addition to those three principles, children as agents in their lives is another vital convention feature. By emphasizing children’s rights, the UNCRC has, in a way, provided ‘agency’ to a child. They also reiterate the right to be heard, cared for, and nurtured, which privileges children to be entitled to get things done by adults and other stakeholders.<sup>8</sup> The protection of children by adults shifted to the children’s rights, meaning children have all agency to claim their rights. While the convention aims to give agency and acknowledge the active participation of children by legally listing their needs, it ‘universalizes’ the notion of the child. As Berry Mayall puts it, “The Convention refers to a universal, free-standing, individual child on a particular developmental trajectory.”<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, this developmental trajectory is based on Western conceptions of childhood and childhood. Despite the universalizing attributes, giving a central stage for children in the legal sphere gave rise to different studies that put children as interlocutors in their lives.

Another factor that affects the paradigm shift could be the rise of feminist studies. While gender and gender roles are actively discussed, mother and childcare are also topics that are critically analyzed. In their article, Türkan Erdoğan and Bilge Vakıf (2020) divide the progress of the sociology of children into two periods: before the 1980s, the traditional theories were dominant, and after the 1980s, works focused on constructive and interpretive theories. During the 1990s, with the works of Alan Prout and Allison James, Jens Qvortrup, and William Corsaro, a paradigm shift in the sociology of childhood was visible.<sup>10</sup> Their works focused on childhood from different standpoints but with a new understanding of childhood. Alan Prout and Allison James’ (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* officially mention the paradigm shift in childhood studies; their book is enriched with works from different fields that

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<sup>7</sup> Gabriel, *The Sociology of Early Childhood*, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Rituraj Sharma, 2020. "Reading UNCRC and Children's Rights Sociologically: A Paradigm Shift from 'Protection to Rights'," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 11, no.9 (2020): 191.

<sup>9</sup> Berry Mayall, "The Sociology of Childhood in Relation to Children's Rights," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 8, (2000): 24.

<sup>10</sup> Erdoğan and Vakıf, "Çocukluk Sosyolojisinin Tarihsel Gelişimi ve Kuramsal Temelleri," 468.

point out certain paradigms of childhood. Jens Qvortrup and his friends' (1994) work *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice, and Politics* give space to empirical research focusing on children's agency as active recipients and producers of the society they live in. Lastly, William Corsaro's (2018) first published in 1997, *The Sociology of Childhood*, reviews different theoretical views by giving contrasts between traditional theories of childhood and modern theories of childhood. In short, the paradigm shift in sociological studies in the field that was named the 'new sociology of childhood' is fed on different stances: feminist studies, Children's Rights Conventions, and rising awareness in the academic field with regards to children gave new theories and understandings of the lives of children by ontologically viewing them as 'beings' and as active individuals in society.

With the established theories and views on the social construction of childhood, we may examine the determinants of childhood in different periods and various locals. Only then do ethnographic studies "resist universal definitions of children and childhood."<sup>11</sup> In this way, we may begin to speak about the cultural politics of childhood, which examines the "different cultural determinants of childhood and children's behavior and the political mechanisms and processes by which these are put into practice at any given time."<sup>12</sup> However, the question is asked: where does cultural politics come from? The cultural politics of childhood were developed by Sharon Stephens, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Carole Sargent, Allison James, and Adrian James.<sup>13</sup> Their books on the topic also contributed much to the notion of cultural politics of childhood, and they paved the way for ethnography regarding the issue. Sharon Stephens' *Children and The Politics of Culture* (1995) puts together a variety of articles that look at cultural politics from different standpoints whereby central themes revolve around the objectification of children to cultural identities, how childhood is a notion that is actively changing, and how there are experienced childhoods different than the ideal cultural, political norms which push those experiences to the margins. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carole Sargent's book *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics*

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<sup>11</sup> Myra Bluebond-Langner, and Jill Korbin, "Challenges and Opportunities in the Anthropology of Childhoods: An Introduction to "Children, Childhoods, and Childhood Studies," *American Anthropologist* 109 no.2 (2007): 242.

<sup>12</sup> Allison James, and Adrian L. James. 2004. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ana Vergara, "The Cultural Politics of Childhood: Public Policies in Post-authoritarian Chile," *Children & Society* (2014): 2.

of *Childhood* (1998) focuses on children's experiences revolving around the concepts of child survival and examines how social, economic, and political factors influence the lives of children.<sup>14</sup> While Allison and Adrian James define childhood as socially constructed in *Constructing Childhood* (2004), they analyze how policies and laws explain a child. They investigate the cultural politics of childhood, grounding their arguments on education, health, crime, and family policies.

Parallel to those discussions above, what cultural politics of childhood suggests is to deconstruct in some way the definition of the child from the physically and cognitively developing realm to view "childhood in its own historical and cultural experience where its meaning, its interpretations, and its interest reside within such contexts."<sup>15</sup> The 'political' in cultural politics of childhood is the small 'p' politics examining the political context of its 'social construction.'<sup>16</sup> Standing off from regarding childhood only as a biological phase of the human life course, cultural politics of childhood examines how the social constructions design and affect 'childhoods' and how children come to terms with it by constructing and reconstructing their 'childhood.' An important point here is that while the cultural politics of childhood tries to understand these mechanisms of social construction, it does not regard it as a top-down process. On the contrary, it regards children with their agency and subjectivity to understand how children perform their subjectivity and agency in the face of such constructive mechanisms. In addition, working on children and childhoods through the lenses of the new paradigm, theorists do not disregard that childhood is a phase of maturation. As theorists, they claim that "as much as we might wish to regard children as authors of their histories, we do have to acknowledge their shared experience, as children, of processes of maturation."<sup>17</sup> Allison and Adrian James put forward three key points of cultural politics of childhood: (1) the primary aim is to ask about the cultural determinants of childhood, which include the social status children are assigned to; (2) how do these cultural determinants and discourse are practiced and (3)

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<sup>14</sup> Linda-Anne Rebhun, "Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood Nancy Scheper-Hughes Carolyn Sargent." *Anthropological Quarterly* 74, no.4 (October 2001): 213.

<sup>15</sup> Jenks, *Childhood*, 60-61.

<sup>16</sup> Allison James, and Adrian James, "The Politics of Childhood-An Overview," In *The Politics of Childhood: International Perspectives, Contemporary Developments*, ed. Jim Goddard, Sally McNamee and Allison James (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 5.

<sup>17</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 5.

how do children experience the cultural determinants of who they are and to what extent they can change these determinants.<sup>18</sup>

This thesis project explores the lives of children residing in residential care through the lens of the new sociology of childhood. The research idea was born during a meeting with fellow social workers while I was working as a psychologist in a residential care facility in Istanbul. Following the meeting, I critically observed the children, their interpersonal relationships, and their interactions with society at large. My objective was to examine their expressions of identity and agency, the legal codes that governed their existence, and the operational aspects of social work practice and executive functions of a social state. The focus was on the discourses of children and social workers in residential care, as well as the broader discourses in society regarding children under the government's care. The cultural politics of children living in residential care, or as they are professionally referred to, "disadvantaged children," were of particular interest. During my fieldwork, I observed how cultural politics were imposed on children in residential care, who were expected to master the representation of being "disadvantaged" and living in residential care without any choice in the matter. Accordingly, this thesis adopts the standpoint of the new sociology of childhood, which regards children as active participants with agency, to examine the cultural politics of childhood with regard to children living in residential care and aims to give voice to these marginalized children. The study involved interviews with children residing in the homes of the association in question. Therefore, it is imperative to provide a general overview of the association and its operation.

I worked in an association that signed a protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Services.<sup>19</sup> There are different types of residential care services in Turkey, but the one I was working in was called "children's homes," in which five to six children live in an apartment with three different "caregivers"<sup>20</sup> who do twenty-four-hour shifts. These Children's homes are segregated based on gender as homes of girls and boys. Each children's home has an assigned "liable person of children's home"<sup>21</sup> who is

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<sup>18</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı.

<sup>20</sup> "Ev bakım personeli."

<sup>21</sup> "Ev sorumlusu."

attained by the state and has specific responsibilities, from keeping the caregivers at the organization to a general inspection of daily life. Each children's home is attached to the children's home coordination centers legally responsible to the Ministry of Family and Social Service. The associations working with the ministry must sign a protocol that binds the two sides based on specific responsibilities and legal rules. The associations are generally responsible for providing economic income for paying each children's home's rent and material needs. There are many associations, and each has different internal regulations. The association I worked as a full-time psychologist provided psycho-social support by hiring social workers and psychologists to work in the field and giving economic resources. We visit each children's home weekly regularly and spend time with children as well as providing counseling to caregivers. We held regular meetings monthly; one was in the children's home with the liable person and the caregivers; the other was inside the association with other social workers. Each meeting had different purposes and subjects, but they both had a common agenda: discussing the psycho-social issues each child was going through. We were called 'home counselors' by definition and worked primarily with the liable person. So, there were two different institutions and a variety of social workers entering children's homes; each was trying to coordinate with the other.

In my research on residential care, I utilized ethnographic methods to provide a voice for the children residing there and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. My primary objective was to differentiate how this marginal group experiences childhood and how cultural elements shape it. The central focus of my investigation revolved around the concept of 'home' as both a physical and a constructed space. My project primarily explores the cultural politics of childhood concerning space, and I aspire to make a valuable contribution to the field of childhood studies in Turkey, which is still in its developmental stages. My thesis project is composed of five primary sections.

The second chapter of my thesis project delves into the methodology I employed. I utilized in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group interviews to gather data on children's lives from multiple perspectives. In-depth interviews provided insight into individuals' perceptions of social reality, while focus group interviews helped me understand the collective understanding of their lives. When

conducting research with children, it's essential to recognize the power imbalance between researcher and participant. I address this issue and suggest solutions to avoid adult-child power imbalances. Reflexivity is also vital to this research. As a psychologist with a critical sociological perspective, my background informed my ideas. However, transitioning from a psychologist to a researcher identity has advantages and disadvantages, which I explore in this chapter.

When discussing the cultural politics of childhood in residential care, it is necessary to consider legal regulations. Chapter 3 is divided into five parts to explain how legal regulations construct childhood. The first part focuses on the historical background of social work practice in Turkey, linking the big picture of the 'social state' with the local practices of caring for the 'disadvantaged group.' The second part examines the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child from a cultural and political perspective of children. This part discusses how the convention dominantly constructs childhood and how it universalizes certain features of childhood by recognizing the rights and needs of children. The third part stresses legal regulations and laws in the Turkish Constitution regarding children, with two legal codes at the focus of the analysis: The Code of Social Services of 2828 and The Code of Child Protection of 5395. Each code defines and constructs the childhoods of children in need of care and protection, which reflects on the daily lives of those children. The fourth part includes a critical analysis of the literature, with an emphasis on a theoretical framework. The literature review is categorized as such: firstly, it looks at studies done about the current experiences of childhood in children's homes in Turkey, and secondly, it looks at studies done about life after leaving residential care when of full age. Both are important because while the former explains the general life and perceptions of children in residential care, the latter explains the transition from childhood to adulthood. Lastly, it examines the literature on different residential care models in other geographical areas. It was essential to look at studies about other care and protection models, such as foster care, to have a more profound idea of the experiences of different childhoods that are pushed to the margins. By defining my own theoretical framework, I point out where my study would fit in the literature.

The present study analyzes the intricate relationship between space and place within the context of 'home' as a lived environment. The unit of analysis comprises

investigations into how children conceptualize home and how a 'children's home' - a space that is both physically lived in and culturally, politically, and economically defined - affects children's experiences. The study draws upon the works of critical and cultural geographers and anthropological studies that have focused on the interrelationships between space, place, and the subject to examine the experiences. In particular, the study examines how space can impact the identity of subjects, as well as how subjects can be shaped by the constructed space. The study employs Setha Low's concept of 'embodied space' to explore the home as a physical, social, cultural, and phenomenological construction. Within this framework, home - particularly regarding children under protection and care - is seen as a space aligned with the subject's body, which embodies the inside/outside dichotomy as well as subject and object positions. The inside characteristic of 'children's home' encompasses a range of interrelationships, including the relationship with social workers, the relationship with the outside world, and the relationship the subjects have with themselves. The outer characteristic, on the other hand, refers to how children's homes are culturally and politically defined by external forces, thus leaving the 'body' open to gazes from the outside world. These constructions of inside and outside regarding children's homes as embodied spaces are highly dynamic and depend on time and policies. As such, they gain new understandings and meanings that give way to various experiences. The study employs Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling's concept of 'unhomely homes' concerning Goffman's concept of 'stigma' to delve deeper into the idea of the outside characteristic. The study explores how normality is defined through the construction of space and how this construction can lead to the experiences of 'stigma' from the outer world. Overall, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on space, place, and the subject while highlighting the unique experiences of children in the context of home.

Chapters 4 and 5 offer a comprehensive analysis of the field, featuring extensive interviews with children residing in care homes and focus group discussions. Chapter 4 delves into a children's home's daily routines and operational procedures, divided into three parts. The first part provides a detailed account of the people in the setting and their relationships with one another, the government, and the children. This section also explores how children perceive themselves as objects to the governmentality practices of the care model's operational power. The second part highlights the issue

of placements between different residential care models, explicitly focusing on embodiment and how children perceive placements in terms of their cultural context. Stability is a rarity for them due to the constant environment, home, and people changes. The third part of this chapter delves into the idea of 'home' as an embodied space for the childhood experience in children's homes, particularly emphasizing the 'inside home' embodiments.

Chapter 5 of this study endeavors to gain insight into how children in residential care perform their identities as a minority in collective spaces. The chapter is mainly concerned with the outward manifestations of the self-exhibited outside the home environment. It has been observed that many children in residential care conceal their status from their peers at school, which engenders the development of a distinct sense of self that is disparate from the self-cultivation within the confines of their residential home. This issue is inexorably linked to the concepts of 'normality' and 'stigmatization.' The first part of the chapter endeavors to expound upon the representation of selves in the schoolyard, while the second part examines the experiences of children and their caregivers in public spaces. The conclusion of this chapter will provide an overview of the salient findings of the study, highlighting the key components that shape the experiences of children in residential care. Additionally, it will consider how society's legal and cultural codes influence childhood construction. Each chapter segment is dedicated to examining the distinct cultural politics of childhood for children in residential care.

The conclusion puts forward the key components and summary of the findings of this study. The decision shows how a given society's legal codes, regulations, and cultural codes influence the experiences of children in residential care, hence affecting the construction of childhood. Each part of the chapter discusses a different cultural politics of childhood for children living in residential care. In the conclusion, the fundamental principles of the determinants of childhood experiences in residential care are outlined. In addition, the question of what could be done for future research on marginal experience of childhoods is discussed

## CHAPTER II

### ETHNOGRAPHY WITH CHILDREN

*“We were inside one of the rooms in a children’s home, which I had attained as a psychologist. The first time I was meeting her. She was singing and dancing to a K-pop song which I knew. “Isn’t that Black Pink?” I asked and sang along to the parts I knew. She opened her eyes with a surprised face. “Oh My Gosh! You are one of us,” she said enthusiastically. As her friend entered the room, she faced her, and with the same expression of surprise, she said: “Our psychologist knows K-pop.” She seemed to be enjoying the fact that a psychologist knew a K-pop song.”<sup>22</sup>*

#### 2.1. Introduction

Is doing ethnographic research with children different from doing it with adults? What are the primary concerns when doing research with children? What about the power dynamics between the researcher and the interlocutor if there is an adult-child binary position? What are the steps and limitations for a researcher to study ‘disadvantaged children’ under legal protection? In this chapter, I will answer these questions. In the first part, I will give information about the steps when doing research with children under the protection and care of the government. The second part focuses on ethnography with children. Using ethnographic methods of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group interviews, I will discuss why each methodology branch is essential when working with children. With the paradigm shift in childhood studies, methodology when working with children also changed, and hence, more phenomenological research methods gained popularity. When doing research with children, ethical concerns are different than that of adults. In addition, the Ministry of Family and Social Services has its ethical boundaries. These will be explained in addition to power dynamics when doing research with children. The chapter concludes with a detailed account of the researcher's reflexivity, which is crucial when

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<sup>22</sup> Notes from the fieldwork, 15.02.2023, Istanbul.

conducting research with children. By being reflexive, the researcher can reflect on their positionality and biases, which can impact the research outcomes.

## **2.2. Entering Children's Homes**

During my tenure with the association, I had the privilege of serving as a psychologist and obtaining unrestricted access to children's homes. Despite the association's protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Services, obtaining the necessary clearance proved to be a cumbersome process. I had to wait for a week to receive a formal cover letter affirming my position with the governor's permission. Subsequently, I had to apprise the Children's Homes Coordination Center of the same to avoid any impediments while entering and leaving the premises. However, upon resigning from my position, my governorship permission was rescinded. It is noteworthy that conducting research in residential care mandates distinct legal permissions for interviewing children and accessing their homes. For researchers, such permissions are granted at the ministerial level. To obtain the necessary clearance for conducting research in residential care, I formulated a comprehensive research proposal outlining the institution where the research was to be conducted and submitted a petition for legal authorization. The Provincial Directorate in Istanbul was the first point of contact for the submission of said documents, marking the commencement of the clearance process.

After the researcher has permission, the next step is to decide which children's homes will be included in the research. Since I had established a prior rapport with children in my former workplace, I specifically wanted to do my research with them. Being a former psychologist and taking the role of a researcher will be discussed in the reflexivity part of this chapter.

I have chosen two children's homes, each with five children. Both are girls' home. My interlocutors' ages were between 15-18. Since I know the liable person in each children's home and children as well, it was not difficult to build communication with them. When doing research in children's residential care institutions, gaining the trust of children is not enough. Hence, the researcher also needs to establish a rapport with

the adults who are responsible there. Having a prior connection to the individuals in residential care is an advantage to the researcher.

There are three bases of qualitative study in this research: in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation. Before starting to do research during the fieldwork, I would explain the aim and the content of the study to my interlocutors. After having their permission, I would start my interview. Each child would know at any period of the research if they could decide on leaving it or stopping the interview if they would like to. Each interview's date and location would be decided by the interlocutor. Hence, I wanted to minimize the rising power imbalance of the adult-child binary position by giving my interlocutors a sense of power. The focus group interviews were divided into boys' homes and girls' homes. I conducted two focus group interviews to see the collective understanding of themselves and the world around them. The third basis, participant observation, is retrospective in the sense that I included the experiences and observations I did while I was working.

## **2.2. Ethnography with Children**

In the wake of the 'new sociology of childhood' and its novel conceptualization of children as autonomous beings, the methodologies utilized in research concerning children and childhood have undergone a paradigm shift towards qualitative methods. In particular, ethnography has emerged as a potent tool for comprehending children's agency within their society. The present study aligns itself with the new sociology of childhood and leverages ethnographic methodologies to investigate how children perceive themselves and the world around them. Through this approach, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of children's subjective experiences. Ethnography, as a research approach, was originally developed by anthropologists as a means to understand and describe 'other' cultures.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, ethnographic studies do not aim to generalize or generate hypotheses but rather to showcase the meanings that people construct. At the core of ethnography lies the purpose of demonstrating the constructed meanings of people. Ethnographers aim

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<sup>23</sup> Ruth Edmond, "Ethnographic Research with Children and Young People," in *Researching Children's Experience: Approached and Methods*, ed. Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (London: Sage Publications, 2005): 123.

to uncover how people make sense of their world and how they give meaning to their experiences. They do this by immersing themselves in the culture they wish to study and observing and participating in cultural practices and activities. Multi-sited ethnography enjoys a crucial place among ethnographic studies as it helps us understand the global system and its implications on the locals. Primarily, the concept of ‘multi-sited ethnography’ was coined by George E. Marcus in order to understand the decentered connections in different global webs and their influences that exist in different geographies.<sup>24</sup> In George Marcus’ conceptualization of multi-cited ethnography, to be able to state the globalized webs and connections, a more comprehensive point of view on the ways of doing ethnography was needed. Because, in his mind, the classical way of doing ethnography was not enough to state the links between the global system and its reminiscences on the different geographic areas and the varieties of such connections. For George E. Marcus multi-sited ethnography claims that:

...any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study.<sup>25</sup>

The author contends that the objective of multi-sited ethnography is not to render the total global system but rather to explicate the connections between a particular subject and the broader system. To conduct a more comprehensive analysis of ethnographic work, embracing the multi-sited ethnography perspective is imperative. The author elucidates several techniques for constructing a multi-sited ethnography, including following the people, following the metaphor, following the plot, story, or allegory, following the biography, and following the conflict. This study employs the technique of following the metaphor construction. Constructing ethnography by following the metaphor indicates that "when the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography."<sup>26</sup> In this project, the concept of ‘home’ enjoys such a place. I

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<sup>24</sup> Fatih Varol, "Küreselleşme Üzerine Bir Araştırma Yöntemi Olarak Çok-Sahalı Etnografi," *Journal of Human Sciences* 14, no.4 (2017): 4525.

<sup>25</sup> George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 99.

<sup>26</sup> Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," 108.

will be driving my main field analysis from the ideas of home and how children's homes are culturally and discursively produced and, as a result, how these culturally produced discursive practices act upon the children's experiences of childhood.

As much has said to the idea of ethnography, the texts below will discuss the important details to keep in mind when doing ethnography with children as well as the tools the researcher has in order to get into the interaction with the interlocutors -which in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation. When doing research with children, including ethnography, there are some delicacies to take into consideration. The role of the child in the research is one of them. Hilary Levey (2009) defines four roles that children can play in ethnographic research: (1) "as wedges," which help the researcher to get into the field or establish relationships and obtain knowledge; (2) "as collaborators" when children are co-researchers in the process, (3) "as objects of study" when the main focus is children but children are not directly studied and lastly (4) "as subjects of study when children are seen as individuals fully able to answer questions in a worthwhile way."<sup>27</sup> Parallel to the viewpoint of the new sociology of childhood, my research takes the phenomenological approach seriously, and hence, the participants of the research are the subjects of the study "which implies a view of children as sentient beings who can act with intention and as agents in their own lives."<sup>28</sup>

The second aspect under consideration, which is germane to the subjective role of the young interlocutors, pertains to the researcher's own adult position. Ethnography should be done with the concern of gaining "insight into what factors are significant to those children under study rather than assuming what we as researchers see as significant in childhood."<sup>29</sup> It is imperative for researchers to engage in reflexive evaluation by considering their adult perspective and being mindful of age-appropriate methodologies while considering the varying skill levels of children at different stages of development. As social scientists, viewing children as ontological "beings," we must pay close attention to their level of maturation. By incorporating a range of

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<sup>27</sup> Hilary Levey, "'Which one is yours?': Children and Ethnography." *Qual Sociol* 32 (2009): 312.

<sup>28</sup> Sheila Greene, and Malcolm Hill, "Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues," in *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (London: Sage Publications, 2005): 3.

<sup>29</sup> Edmond, "Ethnographic Research with Children and Young People," 136.

methods in ethnographic studies with children, researchers can achieve greater richness and depth in their findings. It is claimed that “because children's experiences are grounded in their own peer cultures and life experiences, it is especially important that researchers use interviews in combination with other methods, both to obtain more valid responses and to strengthen the analysis of interview data.”<sup>30</sup> In this sense, I structured my ethnography on three qualitative research methodologies: in-depth interview, focus group interview, and participant observation.

Since children are the subjects of study, using in-depth interviews from qualitative research methods is appropriate for this research. In-depth interview “uses individuals as the point of departure for the research process and assumes that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world that is ascertainable and able to be shared through verbal communication.”<sup>31</sup> As much as adults, children “come to think of themselves as selves and interpret their encounters with self, the world, and others in very different ways depending on the discourses that are dominant in their culture.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, for this research, in-depth interviews would help the researcher to understand the subjective positions the interlocutors take when they narrate and construct their meanings. “Relative ‘I’s are manifest and sustained through inner and outer stories, woven by forces which move between private qualitative fields and the whole.”<sup>33</sup> In this sense, in-depth interviews provide the ability to analyze patterns through thick descriptions of experiences narrated by the interlocutors.<sup>34</sup> Narration of the constructive process of meaning is crucial for understanding the subjective positions the children take with regard to discourses they are subjected to and with regard to their meaning-building in the face of discourses.

Focus group interviews serve various functions in this study. By definition, “a focus group is a discussion involving a small number of participants, led by a moderator, which seeks to gain an insight into the participants’ experiences, attitudes and/or

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<sup>30</sup> Donna Eder, and Laura Fingerson, "Interviewing Children and Adolescents," in *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*, ed. James Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium (California: Sage Publications, 2003): 40.

<sup>31</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (California: Sage Publications, 2017): 106.

<sup>32</sup> Greene, and Hill, "Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues," 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Donna Thomas, "'Who am I': Reauthoring Self, Stories and Subjectivity in Research with Children," *Global Studies of Childhood* 11, no.3 (2021): 236.

<sup>34</sup> Hesse-Biber, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, 106.

perceptions.”<sup>35</sup> The collective nature of a focus group helps the researcher understand a certain group of interlocutors’ shared meanings. As Laura Fingerson points out, “group interviewing can be used to capture how children and adolescents develop a shared worldview, accomplish their group talk, and develop supportive stories.”<sup>36</sup> (Fingerson 2005, 285) This is the same for doing focus group interviews with children and young people through similar experiences and sharing the same environment. I wanted to see how they constructed their narratives and meaning collectively. Moreover, group settings with children and young people are thought to be a way to counterweigh the power dynamics of the researcher and interlocutors. Despite such advantages, group interviewing may sometimes have disadvantages. As much as the interaction between interlocutors is fundamental and resourceful, the possibility of an interlocutor to change their opinion to fit into the group is unfailing.<sup>37</sup>

I had lots of time and opportunity to do participant observation while working in the association. I got into the daily lives of children, interacted with them, with the caregivers, and with the liable person of the children’s home. I have seen how children interact with peers and social workers as well as with the authoritative bodies of legislation. I gained insights into the ways they view themselves, their families, and the people around them by examining the ways in which they behave and express themselves. This knowledge, when adapted to qualitative studies, is called ethnography. During ethnographic research, “the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily routines of activities, what they find meaningful and how they do so.”<sup>38</sup> Many dynamics regarding their daily life gave me clues and an understanding of the cultural politics of children living in residential care. I was able to see and experience myself as a social worker how laws and regulations define the general daily life of a children’s home and how it constructs their childhood. The observations and notes I have taken while I was working are crucial because if I was only a researcher doing research for a limited amount of time

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<sup>35</sup> Eilis Hennessy, and Caroline Heary, "Exploring Children's Views through Focus Group," in *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (London: Sage Publications, 2005): 236.

<sup>36</sup> Laura Fingerson, "'Yeah Me Too!': Adolescent Talk Building in Group Interviews," *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth* 11 (2005): 285.

<sup>37</sup> Hennessy, and Heary, "Exploring Children's Views through Focus Group," 239.

<sup>38</sup> Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 3.

-since the Ministry of Family and Social Service limits access to knowledge to protect children- the knowledge to analyze the cultural politics of children would be infertile. However, as a participant in the field doing constant observation, I believe the experiences and critical filtering of the field would enhance the understanding of the cultural politics of children living in residential care and add depth to this study.

### **2.3. Ethical Concerns and Power Dynamics**

Ethical concerns are a major discussion when conducting research with children. In the academic field, ethical concerns are evaluated, but there needs to be a consensus on the ethics of doing research with children. Malcolm Hill (2005) considers ethics concerning children's rights and lists four essential principles: (1) right to satisfactory development and wellbeing (welfare rights), which, when applied to research, means that the study should promote children's wellbeing; (2) should avoid any psychological/physical harm that may do to the child; (3) right to appropriate services (provision rights) means the children should feel good in participating such research; lastly, (4) right to express opinions (choice or participatory rights) means children have the freedom to leave the research or choose to stay in it by informed consent.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, these four principles are essential ethical standards in this research.

Despite ethical standards, children living in residential care are also protected by Turkish ministerial ethical rules during research. Although the ethical standards for conducting research with children under protection and care are not listed rigidly, there is a document published by the Department of Education and Publications<sup>40</sup> on the Ministry's website. Titled "For Those Who Will Make Scientific Research Requests Things to Consider," puts forward these principles with regards to ethical standards: getting consent from the participants who are under the protection and care of the government, not affecting them in any negative way, not disrupting the general operation of institutions, not standing against to the privacy principles and legal

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<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Hill, 2005. "Ethical Considerations in Researching Children's Experiences," in *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Methods*, ed. Sheila Greene and Diane Hogan (London: Sage Publications, 2005): 80-81.

<sup>40</sup> Eğitim ve Yayın Dairesi Başkanlığı

legislations and organizing the process by "Personal Data Protection Law No. 6698".<sup>41</sup> According to these ethical standards of the Ministry, children's names, surnames, addresses, and home names must be kept anonymous. The Ministry of Family and Social Service is cautious about the anonymity of children under protection. Even though the child comes and asks the researcher to put their real name, the researcher must keep it anonymous by the Ministry's standards. Herewith, I use fictional names.

While working as a psychologist in a children's home, I was introduced as a psychologist, but soon, the children learned and interacted with me as a researcher. These initial encounters were precious because they gave me an understanding of power dynamics and what it means for the children in the children's home. In the first few months of my work, I encountered many children who told me that they didn't like psychologists because "all they do is just listen to you and tell their secrets to other authorities." Trust and confidentiality issues were a significant problem for the children.

The second thing I noticed was that although having sessions or conversations with a psychologist seemed to be a regular part of their lives, psychologists were equated to therapists. Those who needed therapy were sometimes mocked as "crazy" or "psychopaths" among the children. This is related to the discourse of mental health professions. Mental health professions, including psychology as a discipline, diagnose and define the individual's problem, which means that the power holder becomes the one who describes the other. To be defined by someone with attributes considered "abnormal" scientifically and to be subjected to discourses revolving around the concepts of "disorder" places the individual in an object position, something to be defined and cured. However, as time passed, I received positive feedback, and the sentence "I know you won't tell anyone, that's why I came to you" was often used by the children when they entered my room and sat right in front of me. One of the reasons for this was that I tried to keep the power dynamics in balance. I received many creative nicknames that the children tagged me with, such as "Karşının Taksisi,"

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<sup>41</sup> "Bilimsel Araştırma Taleplerinde Bulunacakların Dikkat Edecekleri Hususlar," Eğitim ve Yayın Dairesi Başkanlığı, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://aile.gov.tr/media/91524/arastirma-talepleri-guncelleme.pdf>.

"Nesi," "Kanka," "Zengin," "Iphone 13 Pro-Max,"<sup>42</sup> in addition to "Hocam" and "Nesibe Abla."<sup>43</sup> When they talked about their secrets, I remember them saying, "You are one of us." It is precious how an adult representing a particular authority is negotiated in children's minds. Their reproduction of authoritative figures was dynamic, but this is not a one-way dialogue; how much an adult researcher could squirm from the representation of authority is also a determinant. Now, I want the reader to imagine this: you are living in residential care, and there is an adult who is larger than you in size, who is different from you in the way he/she talks and dresses, whose representation is authority -especially in Turkish culture -<sup>44</sup> and the same adult sits in front of you to listen to your experiences to write about it in her researcher role. Do you feel what I mean? This is power entering between the adult researcher and the child interlocutor. If a researcher views children as active agents, then the researcher needs to provide tools and gain the ability to reduce the power gap as much as possible. "Addressing children as active agents in research requires the researcher to actively and constantly work toward negotiating and establishing friendly and child-centered relationships with children."<sup>45</sup> To break this power imbalance, the researcher should convey the representation of a 'friend-adult' rather than an 'authority-adult.'

#### **2.4. Reflexivity: As a Psychologist and an Ethnographer**

When conducting research in social sciences, reflexivity is the topic the researcher should critically evaluate due to his or her diverse roles, identities, and characteristics. The characteristics of a researcher in terms of gender, appearance, class, age, race/ethnicity, and religious background are important in this sense. Because "the

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<sup>42</sup> Out of all of my names this sounded very creative to me and gives the researcher an idea about children's own culture, what do they see and distinguish.

<sup>43</sup> Karşının taksisi (the opposite taxi, I was called this name because I was living in the European side of Istanbul, where as children's homes were in Anatolian side. Sometimes I would give a ride to teenagers, at that time, there was a popular Turkish song that used this noun phrase. In a sense the kids decided to call me this was, since I was coming work from the other side.),Nesi (short version of my name), Kanka (bro-sis or pal), zengin (the wealthy), 'hocam' (my teacher), 'abla' (older sister).

<sup>44</sup> In Turkish culture respect for the elderly is crucial. Interestingly, between the years of 1933-2013 primary school students had to attend to "Our Oath" ("Andımız") each morning before entering their classes. A child would come to the stage and list the principles in oath and children would repeat after him/her collectively. One principle is: "My tenet is to protect the minors and respect the elderly." Someone who is older than you is someone to be respected. The ritualized discursive practice of "Our Oath" is very meaningful in terms of cultural politics of childhood.

<sup>45</sup>Emmanuel Mayeza, "Doing Child-Centered Ethnography: Unravelling the Complexities of Reducing the Perceptions of Adult Male Power During Fieldwork," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16 (2017): 9.

researcher's own social biography and relationship with the field constructs the 'lens' through which the researcher views the field."<sup>46</sup> Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference.<sup>47</sup> During research, reflexivity means pointing out the researcher's relevance and position of the researcher with regard to the object of study. "Reflexive practice stresses the point that social researchers are not 'other' from those they research."<sup>48</sup> Reflexivity is a practice in which the researcher defines himself/herself on the basis of his/her being as opposed to the group of study. Attention to reflexivity calls into question the role of the researcher and the method itself, especially with respect to issues of power and representation.<sup>49</sup> In my study, one of the critical bases of reflexivity is also about who I am to children. As Pia Haudrup Christensen puts it, "This is an important precedent to how we relate to each other, a process that both researchers and children engage in."<sup>50</sup>

One of the commentators on the positionality of the researcher, Kirin Narayan, helped us review the positionality of the researcher with regard to the field of the study. She discusses the dichotomy between the 'native' researcher and the 'non-native' one, which was created during the colonial era. Criticizing the historical perspective, she states, "Those who diverge as 'native,' 'indigenous,' or 'insider' anthropologists are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of intimate affinity."<sup>51</sup> She breaks this understanding by arguing that rather than focusing on the nativity of the anthropologist, the focus should be made on the "shifting identities in relationship with the people and issues an anthropologist seeks to represent."<sup>52</sup> Beyond being only a native or non-native, the anthropologist has multiple subjectivities. In this way, the anthropologist, whether 'native' or a 'non-native' to the field of study, carries many representations with herself, and the interactional sphere of the field study will invoke many cultural domains.

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<sup>46</sup> Edmond, "Ethnographic Research with Children and Young People," 126.

<sup>47</sup> Charlotte A. Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008): 4.

<sup>48</sup> Edmond, "Ethnographic Research with Children and Young People," 126.

<sup>49</sup> Levey, "'Which one is yours?': Children and Ethnography," 323.

<sup>50</sup> Pia Haudrup Christensen, "Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation," *Children and Society* 18 (2004): 166.

<sup>51</sup> Kirin Narayan, "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?," *American Anthropologist* 95, no.3 (1993): 671.

<sup>52</sup> Narayan, "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?," 682.

With all being said, detailed accounts of who I am, my family and my educational background should be filtered here. I was born and raised in Istanbul and originally from Sivas. I am 25 years old now. My family is a religious one, and I have been raised with the values of Islam. I studied sociology and psychology in a double major program in Istanbul. I enjoy the ‘analytic gaze’ sociology provided me, and I define myself as a therapist actively giving counseling and therapy to children, adolescents, and adults.

The story of meeting with the association was through my father's connections. While I was studying for a master's program in sociology at Ibn Haldun University, I wanted to improve myself and gain practical experience in the field of psychology. So, I applied for an internship in the association. I did my internship for three months. During this period, I would complete the tasks my supervisor, the head psychologist in the association, gave me. After three months of internship, she offered me the position of ‘home counselor.’ I was hired and started to work as a full-time psychologist for eight children’s homes where girls are staying. Children’s homes where boys stayed were the responsibility of male psychologists. The association was founded to raise children in residential care with national and Islamic values. From the point of view of the association, I was a suitable candidate for the job position ‘who could be a good role model,’ more than a secular psychologist trained in ‘Western’ ideologies.

While I was doing reading for this project, a lightbulb lightened my vision concerning reflexivity and power. Here, I am to confess my sin when talking about power relations and children. As researchers, we envision balancing power dynamics during research. I found myself thinking one day, why do I write this subject in the first place? A belief popped up in my head, fed by my emotions: These children need to make their voices heard, and they need an adult. Someone who is capable of doing, someone who has ‘power’ and can acclaim their agency and recognize their subjectivity. This made me think of the issue of power. I believed I should minimize the power inequation as much as possible so that children feel comfortable enough to raise their voices. However, this thought returns us to the binary position of researcher-researched, observer-observed, or adult-child relationship. Then I thought that rather than viewing this project with an adult researcher and children participators, it should be only the

researcher and participators. This way, one side does not have to ‘feel the need to diminish power imbalance since there will be no fragrance of binary.’ On the contrary, building ‘power with’ will come fore.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

While doing research with children, there are several topics the researcher should always keep in mind. The first of them is ethical issues. Ethical issues are different while doing research with an adult and a child. Ethical problems become more critical if the child is under protection and care, as in my research. An institution’s ethical boundaries and research ethics must be considered. For children under protection and care in Turkey, the Ministry of Family and Social Services has its ethical boundaries and regulations while conducting research with children in any institutional setting.

With the paradigm shift in childhood studies, how children and childhood are viewed has moved from passive recipients of culture to active agents of producing culture. This paradigm shift also entailed a change in doing research with children. Qualitative studies gained interest in understanding and analyzing the subjectivity of children. This research utilizes an ethnographic approach to delve into the perspectives and experiences of children residing in children's homes, drawing from frames of the new sociology of childhood. The study will involve in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation to understand their unique circumstances comprehensively. Hence, I can hear children's views and their experiences of living in children’s homes.

A fundamental and crucial part of ethnographic research always lies behind the fact of power relations and dynamics. There is an interesting relation between *the researcher* and *the researched*, but the ethnographer aims to reduce the effect of power relation to the minimum. The power relation is most visible when doing research with children. In terms of age, physical appearance, mental capacity, and emotional development, an adult is powerful, and an adult is someone who takes care of a child. The cultural discourses are critical considering the power dynamics and relations between adulthood and childhood. When doing research, those power relations coming from the cultural discourse should be minimized to make the interlocutor feel comfortable

enough to talk. This is also the case in my research. To break this power imbalance, a researcher should embrace an adult role, which is the axis of a friend, not an authority. This is also what I have adopted while I was conducting my research.

Reflexivity is an essential aspect of ethnographic studies. A researcher's background can significantly influence the way they perceive the fieldwork. As a researcher, my conservative family upbringing and education in psychology and sociology are crucial subjective features that may impact my research. Therefore, I strive to acknowledge these backgrounds and minimize their influence while conducting my ethnographic study.



## CHAPTER III

# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, THE STATE, AND SOCIAL POLICIES: A CRITIQUE ON DISCOURSES AND LITERATURE

*“On my first visit to the children’s home, I was invited to a home meeting with three caregivers, the liable person of the children’s home, and a social worker from the association. As I entered, I was welcomed sincerely by the caregivers. The door opened, and they invited me to the living room. On the left wall, the TV’s left side was a poster hanging. It was handmade, and at the center was written ‘Children’s Rights,’ and images of children from different geographical backgrounds were attached to each principle. I said, “This is interesting!” The caregiver told me, “We did it together; you may see it on the walls in every children’s home. Because as caregivers, we are expected to ensure children know their rights.” She was right; I saw a similar handmade poster during the next visit to a different home.”<sup>53</sup>*

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the history of the conceptualization of childhood concerning cultural politics of the construction of the concept by reviewing the Rights of Children and the regulations of the Turkish state. This chapter is fundamentally important because it will help to link the legal adjustments to daily practices in social care by seeing how childhood is defined and how it shapes the lives of children in children’s homes. I divided this chapter into three parts: The first part traces the historical progress of the protection and care of children from the Ottoman Empire to modern Turkey. This part takes its analysis from the ‘modernization’ efforts of the Ottoman Empire in relation to children and child policies and takes its final arrival to the present day. How did the models of care for children change? In which ways did the definition

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<sup>53</sup> Personal notes from the fieldwork, 15.01.2022, Istanbul.

and admirations of the state for defining children affect state policies? What are the significant changes in social work for children under protection, and what are the current models of protection and care? These questions will be met. The second part focuses on the Rights of Children in light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children. Through the Convention's legal power and universal feature, the reader will be informed on how the Convention might influence the policies of the states who signed it. This analysis will also help us understand how children in children's homes are subjected to the Convention. The third part critically evaluates the construction of childhood through the state's definitions of legal codes. This part examines the definition of 'disadvantaged children' specifically by making a discourse analysis of the legal codes that bind children under protection to the state as well as the discourses of the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

The present research scenario in Turkey reveals that the majority of studies conducted on children residing in institutional care are primarily in the fields of psychology, sociology, and social work. Each discipline provides a unique viewpoint on the matter of children under protection and care. In particular, psychological studies have focused on the developmental and mental health aspects of children residing in institutional care. Questionnaires are mainly used in this field of research. Studies in the field of social work relating to this issue primarily focus on social work practices and their impact on the daily lives of children. These studies typically gather information through the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. In contrast, there is a scarcity of sociological studies on the topic, which are lacking in theoretical depth. However, some sociological studies do utilize questionnaires and in-depth interviews as methods of data collection. Hence, the fourth part of the chapter will focus on the literature review; then, I will be taking a close look at the theories on agency with respect to children. The last part of the chapter will explain the theoretical framework of the project. Taking the theoretical framing from space and place studies, I will be giving theoretical discussions related to children's homes. Setha Low's important concept, 'embodied space,' will be at the center. In addition to space and place discussions, I will be combining Foucault's work on body, subject, and object positions as well as Goffman's theoretical framework on 'stigma.'

### 3.2. The Historical Overview of Social Work in Turkey

Protecting the rights of children who are in need was always on the agenda of Turkic states, from Seljuks to Ottomans and Modern Turkey. Turkic States, especially after Islam, established many charity organizations to protect children.<sup>54</sup> The importance given to children in need of protection comes mainly from the Islamic virtues. Islam lays a burden on parents in raising the child, but alongside it, Islam assigns the entire society for the care and protection of orphan children who have lost their parents.<sup>55</sup> In Islam, the rights of children whose parents have died are protected by the Sharia Law. Quranic verses explicitly state what should be done to protect these children and their rights. There are 22 verses in the Qur'an that talk about the issues regarding orphan children, and those verses command us to behave nicely to them and give them protection and care. In addition, discourses on Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) being an orphan and having lost his father and mother provide a frame for the construction of discourse on orphan children. Orphan children and protecting their rights are highlighted in many verses in the Qur'an, as well as the teachings and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his pillars. Hence, we could emphasize a discursive transmission of a historical Islamic tradition on protecting children who lost their parents. Charities that are called 'vaqfiyye' practiced their services by taking full account of these teachings.

The transmission of the term "orphanage" from Islam marked the emergence of a longstanding tradition of charitable organizations in Turkey dedicated to providing social services to those in need. However, the formal institutionalization of modern social work and policy in the country can be traced back to the Tanzimat era and subsequent periods. Following the proclamation of the Tanzimat Reform Edict, the modernization process was legally initiated throughout the Empire, leading to the formation or centralization of fundamental institutions. These historical developments have laid the foundation for the current landscape of social work and policy in modern-day Turkey. Even though state apparatus in legal, financial, administrative, and

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<sup>54</sup> Davut Elmacı, "Türkiye'de Koruma Altındaki Çocuklara Yönelik Çocuk Koruma Kuruluşlarındaki Değişimler," *Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3, no.2 (2019): 34.

<sup>55</sup> Alpaslan Alkış, "Evlat Edinme ve Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar Konusunun İslam Hukuku ve İnsan Psikolojisi Açısından Değerlendirilmesi," *Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20, no.39 (2022): 6.

military was the target, intrafamily affairs were gaining attention with increasing public concern.<sup>56</sup> With the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict, new foundations were established in order to protect the rights and goods of orphan children.<sup>57</sup> Darul Aceze, Darül Eytam, and Himaye-i Etfal Community form the basis of current social service institutions for children.<sup>58</sup> Himaye-i Etfal Community plays a distinctive role in the history of child protection through its improvements and legal activities it took. The community, having its base in Ankara, was renamed by Mustafa Kemal as a ‘Child Protection Institution’<sup>59</sup> in 1934.<sup>60</sup> Child Protection Institution served many years in relation to the state under this name. In 1983, the institution was renamed as Social Services and Child Protection Institution (SSCPI), which was legally authorized with the Social Services Code of 2828 and served until 2011 when the Ministry of Family and Social Policies was established at the same year with delegated legislation of 633, then the same Ministry received the name of Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services with the delegated legislation of 703.<sup>61</sup> SSCPI’s social service institutions in field service were attached to Family and Social Policies Provincial Directorates with this enactment.<sup>62</sup> (Yazıcı 2012, 500) With the amendment of the Presidential Decree, the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security was established, and it was published in the Official Gazette of 31461 on 2021 April 21st.<sup>63</sup> Currently, the branch of the Ministry of Family and Social Services, which serves with regard to the protection of children, is named the Directorate General of Child Services.<sup>64</sup>

Above, I have briefly given a historical account of the institutionalization of children’s protection services. In addition to this, it is highly important to give an account of the

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<sup>56</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014): 53.

<sup>57</sup> Elmacı, "Türkiye’de Koruma Altındaki Çocuklara Yönelik Çocuk Koruma Kuruluşlarındaki Değişimler," 35.

<sup>58</sup> Kibar Seyhun Sarı, İbrahim Kürşat Ergüt, and Çiğdem Ünlü Çember, *Türkiye’de Çocuk Hizmetlerinin Tarihsel Süreci* (Ankara: T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2021): 3.

<sup>59</sup> Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu.

<sup>60</sup> Elmacı, "Türkiye’de Koruma Altındaki Çocuklara Yönelik Çocuk Koruma Kuruluşlarındaki Değişimler," 40.

<sup>61</sup> Sarı, Ergüt, and Çember, *Türkiye’de Çocuk Hizmetlerinin Tarihsel Süreci*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ergün Yazıcı, "Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar ve Çocuk Evleri," *Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 9, no.18 (2012): 500.

<sup>63</sup> T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı. n.d. "Tarihçe." Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı. Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.aile.gov.tr/bakanlik/hakkinda/tarihce>.

<sup>64</sup> Çocuk Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü

Children's Rights Convention in Turkey and the developments that followed it. In 1959, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, the United Nations accepted the Declaration of the Rights of Children, and the United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO) offered Turkey to prepare a government bill; hence, on June 1963, UNESCO accepted the "Declaration of the Rights of Turkish Children."<sup>6566</sup> After around thirty years, we see the Convention on the Rights of the Children entering the international arena. Geneva Human Rights Center, UNICEF, World Health Organization, International Labor Organization, Red Crescent, and various non-governmental organizations gave an effort for ten years, which came to fruition with the Convention of Children's Rights being accepted by the United Nations on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1989, which was accepted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1994, was signed on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1995 and came into operation in the Official Gazette.<sup>67</sup> However, the first comprehensive special law concerning the protection of children in need was the law of 5387, which was enforced on 27 May 1949 and at the year of 1957; instead of the former, a new law of 6972 with the name Code of Children in Need of Protection was accepted.<sup>68</sup> Also, inside the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, multiple codes aim to regulate the notions of children and the family. To give an example, the Constitution of 1982 has decrees such as Article 14 named 'The Protection of Family' anchored the protection of family in general and the protection of the child in private; hence, we see how the Constitution defines the concept of 'child' with regards to family: "Family is the foundation of Turkish society and the State may take precautions and organize institutions for the peace and prosperity of family especially for protecting the mother and the children."<sup>69</sup> This article, as well as many other articles, shows us the ways in which the modern state is also a social state to keep order in society. Another law that is substantial is Article 347 of the New Turkish Civil Code, which was enforced in 2001: "If the child's interest and physical and mental developments are found in danger and if the child is abandoned in a sense, then the judge can place the child nearby a family or an

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<sup>65</sup> Türk Çocuk Hakları Beyannamesi

<sup>66</sup> Özlem Ördem Aydoğmuş, 2020. "Türkiye'de Çocukluk Sosyolojisi," *Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi* 16, no.31 (2020): 4479.

<sup>67</sup> Aydoğmuş, "Türkiye'de Çocukluk Sosyolojisi," 4479.

<sup>68</sup> Elmacı, "Türkiye'de Koruma Altındaki Çocuklara Yönelik Çocuk Koruma Kuruluşlarındaki Değişimler," 42.

<sup>69</sup> İsmet Yolcuoğlu, "Türkiye'de Çocuk Koruma Sisteminin Genel Olarak Değerlendirilmesi," *Aile ve Toplum* 5, no.18 (2009): 46.

institution.<sup>70</sup> Article 347 of the New Turkish Civil Code means that if the parents are not capable of looking after the child, then the state judges have a legitimized authority to place children in the best way of sheltering.

As the protection of family and children is officially recognized by law, social policies design and shape social service institutions. There are various ways and models in which the social services in Turkey protect and care for children. These are institutional care, the foster care system, adoption, and the protection and care of the child inside the family. Before the 2000s, mainly barrack types of institutions were more dominant and more prominent in number, and many children could stay together in one institution. However, after the 2000s, children's protection and care institutions evolved into home-type institutions. Institutional care is the system in which children are protected and given care inside a social service institution for twenty hours. The government attains social workers to these institutions. There are various forms of residential care for the protection of children in Turkey. Each has a different name, different internal organization, and profiles of children segregated by age, gender, and protection reasons. These are nursery-dom, children's homes, youth hostels, women's refuges, observatories, protection care and rehabilitation centers, care and social rehabilitation centers, care and rehabilitation centers, children and youth centers, and children supportive centers.<sup>71</sup>

- i. In children's homes, children aged between 3 and 18 are looked after until they reach the age of 18, and each home has five to six children segregated by gender.
- ii. Youth Hostels are social service institutions that look after children aged between 13 and 18.
- iii. Women's Refuges are primarily for women who are under physical and psychological threat, but in addition, their children, who cannot be separated from their mothers, can also stay with their mothers in women's refuges.

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<sup>70</sup> Yolcuoğlu, "Türkiye'de Çocuk Koruma Sisteminin Genel Olarak Değerlendirilmesi," 47.

<sup>71</sup> Respectively, çocuk yuvası, çocuk evleri, yetiştirme yurdu, kadın sığınma evi, gözlem evi, koruma bakım ve rehabilitasyon merkezi, bakım ve sosyal rehabilitasyon merkezi, bakım ve rehabilitasyon merkezi, çocuk ve gençlik merkezi, ve çocuk destek merkezi.

- iv. Observatories for children are the primal intervention institutions for the protection processes of children.
- v. Protection, Care, and Rehabilitation Centers are established for children who are pushed to commit a crime, and they aim to help these children overcome their behavioral disturbances.
- vi. Care and Social Rehabilitation Centers are for children who have lived through traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, loss, and other traumatic life events. These rehabilitation centers work closely with state universities and hospitals to help children overcome their traumas.
- vii. Care and Rehabilitation Centers are for children who are mentally disabled. This social service model could be either residential or daycare.
- viii. Children and Youth Centers are mainly for children who are obliged to live in the streets for whatever reason.
- ix. Children's Supportive Centers are for children who are exposed to crime or have been turned to crime. Children's Supportive Centers are also residential.

The above-mentioned social service models are residential models, and it can be said that children generally could benefit from these models until the age of eighteen – however, there are exceptions up until the age of twenty-five. In addition to the residential care models, there are models designed to care for and protect children near (a) family. These are: (1) foster care family, (2) adoption, (3) supporting near the family, and (4) supporting the family.

(1) The Foster Care System is about placing a child inside a foster family, which, until the child is of full age, is responsible for the protection and care of the child. In the foster family system, the family is paid monthly with a certain salary for each child they care for. (2) Adoption is different than foster care, which is legally placing the child inside the family. Adoption has been arranged in the Turkish Civil Code with articles between 305 and 320, which points out that adoption is a legal institution creating a relationship by affinity between the adoptee and adopter.<sup>72</sup> From these models, compared to Western countries, Turkey practices the institutional care system more often, whereas the foster family system is practiced widely in Western countries.

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<sup>72</sup> Yazıcı, "Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar ve Çocuk Evleri," 506.

Children under protection and care in Western countries are looked after with near a family model in Western countries with a percentage of 75, compared to Turkey, this ratio decreases to 4%.<sup>73</sup> (3) Services aiming for support near the family are officially bound to The Department of Supportive Services Near Family<sup>74</sup> as a branch of the Ministry of Family and Social Services. "Social and Economic Support Service is carried out within the scope of supporting children within their families without being taken into institutional care."<sup>75</sup> (4) Mainly, supporting the family means providing socio-economic support to families who are having hardships in the cost of living.

On the Ministry of Family and Social Services website, one can find the end-year statistics regarding the social work practice for children. The numbers are important and, through the years, give a general view of the development of residential care models in Turkey.

When we look at Table 1, the first thing that attracts attention is how the barrack style of the residential care model diminished as the years passed. So, it is evident that the state embraced more of a home-type residential care model since it is more inside the community and provides more qualified care. The number of children's homes and estates increased over the years. The policies the state has embraced have an important influence on this development. An important reminder we need to give here is that as the residential care models develop and change, one can speak of a changing experience of childhood in social work and protection because the barrack style of the residential care model's daily practices and cultures are different from those of home-type models. As the models evolve, so do the interpersonal relations inside the institution, between children and adults and between children and children. The rules and regulations also change as the model changes. Hence, one can argue about various childhood experiences and different cultural politics of childhood that children are subjected to in different residential settings.

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<sup>73</sup> Yazıcı, "Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar ve Çocuk Evleri," 505.

<sup>74</sup> Aile Yanında Destek Hizmetleri Daire Başkanlığı.

<sup>75</sup> "Social and Economic Support (SED)," Directorate General of Child Services, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services of The Republic of Türkiye, accessed January 24, 2024. <https://www.aile.gov.tr/chgm-en/services/family-oriented-services-1/social-and-economic-support-sed/>.

**Table 3.1. Statistics of the Residential Care Models and Children Under Care and Children Under Care and Protection Across Years<sup>76</sup>**

	Number of children's home estates / Children cared in children's home estates	Number of children's homes / Children cared in children's home.	Number of Children's Supportive Centers (ÇODEM) / Children cared in ÇODEM	Number of nurserydom (0-12) / Children in nurserydom	Number of nurserydom and girl's orphan's asylum (0-18) / Children cared in nurserydom and girl's orphan's asylum	Number of orphan's asylum (13-18) / Children cared in orphan's asylum
<b>2011</b>	36 / 3.004	448 / 2.494	46 / 756		68 / 3.724	89 / 4.342
<b>2012</b>	45 / 3.301	649 / 3.581	54 / 2.665	45 / 2. 665	14 / 1.269	65 / 2.955
<b>2013</b>	61 / 3.952	906 / 4.953	61 / 1.076	21 / 901	9 / 460	42 / 1.339
<b>2014</b>	73 / 4.352	1.015 / 5.068	67 / 1.244	10 / 490	7 / 366	20 / 651
<b>2015</b>	86 / 4.950	1.057 / 5.366	67 / 1.241	7 / 390	6 / 319	10 / 401
<b>2016</b>	92 / 5.257	1.092 / 5.626	68 / 1.463	6 / 323	4 / 254	8 / 396
<b>2017</b>	108 / 6.208	1.195 / 6.341	66 / 1.640			
<b>2018</b>	111 / 6.383	1.192 / 6.199	63 / 1.632			
<b>2019</b>	112 / 6.132	1.192 / 6.164	65 / 1.571			
<b>2020</b>	111 / 6.181	1.193 / 5.956	65 / 1.387			
<b>2021</b>	112 / 6.160	1.193 / 5.649	66 / 1.493			
<b>2022</b>	113 / 6.699	1.187 / 5.851				

<sup>76</sup> 2022 Yıl Sonu Verileri," T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/131765/kurumsal-istatistik-2022.pdf>.

**Table 3.2. Statistics of Various Care Models Across the Years<sup>77</sup>**

	Number of children under institutional care	Number of children supported near their families	Number of children who are adoptees	Number of children who are supported with foster family	Number of Foster Families
<b>2011</b>	14.320	34.982	11.444	1.282	1.190
<b>2012</b>	24.662	33.344	12.057	1.492	1.350
<b>2013</b>	12.681	42.970	12.822	3.351	2.776
<b>2014</b>	12.171	56.018	13.646	3.283	3.283
<b>2015</b>	12.667	71.845	14.515	4.615	3.797
<b>2016</b>	13.319	84.872	15.007	5.004	4.115
<b>2017</b>	14.189	104.729	16.171	5.642	4.654
<b>2018</b>	14.214	119.537	16.809	6.468	5.289
<b>2019</b>	13.867	125.258	17.403	7.259	5.967
<b>2020</b>	13.524	126.508	17.896	7.864	6.481
<b>2021</b>	13.302	137.863	18.391	8.459	6.978
<b>2022</b>	14.141	154.853	18.947	9.011	7.439

Table 2 presents the statistics of different care models across years. When we consider the increased rate of foster family application in Turkey, we can say it is low. For example, in the last three years, encapsulant of 2020, 2021, and 2022, the number of foster families only increased by 958. The reason for this could be related to the culture of Turkish society. Turkish culture highly values kinship bonds. Blood relations are important in culture and traditions. In a sense, it is influential in Turkish people's minds whether it is a good idea or not to adopt someone who is not from your own blood relations. Hence, it could be one of the reasons why the number of foster families has been increasing very slowly over the years. Also, depending on the sensitivity to religious boundaries, privacy issues become a determinant of adoption processes. The citizens in Turkey mainly believe in Islam as a religion, and Islam has a concept of

<sup>77</sup> "2022 Yıl Sonu Verileri," T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/131765/kurumsal-istatistik-2022.pdf>.

‘mahremiyet,’ primacy/intimacy, which has its own rules in Sharia Law to protect it. Since Islam considers the relationship between the lineage of the adopted child and the adopter as invalid, there is no confidentiality relationship between the adopted child and the new family. As a result, the adopted child and family members being non-mahram statuses to each other continues.<sup>78</sup> An example of this from daily life routines could be the veiling of women and the limited interaction and physical boundary women should take to males out of their intimacy circle. If the adopted child reaches puberty, Islam orders them to be veiled; however, since there is no intimate relationship between the adoptee and the adopter, the child cannot show her hair to her father who adopted. This privacy/intimacy issue is also one of the reasons Turkish people take a step back toward adoption.

Although residential care for children appears well-structured and regulated, the reality is much more complex. There are various discussions and debates among children and adults and between children and adults. These discussions significantly impact the everyday lives of children in residential care. Currently, the primary challenge children and social workers face in residential care is the need to guarantee that they will remain in one institution permanently. Frequent changes in care personnel have a negative impact on the children, as well as on the workers. Furthermore, children may be transferred to different homes depending on various factors such as institutional settings, their behavior, and their individual needs. These changes may occur within a specific model or across different models, creating a dominant discourse in the everyday lives of the children.

While I was working in the field, one of the discourses among children caught my attention regarding this topic, which was the discourse of “ÇODEM.”<sup>79</sup> Each institutional model has different profiles of children who are under protection and care. For children in children’s homes, kids in ÇODEM are seen as ‘misfits’<sup>80</sup> due to their behavioral problems. The interesting case is that when a child in a children’s home is threatened to be ‘sent’ to ÇODEM, they distinguish themselves from that profile. One

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<sup>78</sup> Alkış, "Evlad Edinme ve Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar Konusunun İslam Hukuku ve İnsan Psikolojisi Açısından Değerlendirilmesi," 15-16.

<sup>79</sup> Çocuk Destek Merkezi, in English Children Supportive Center

<sup>80</sup> ‘Problemlı’

day, three girls escaped from school and came back at 1 am. This was a huge chaos for social workers. I also talked to these three kids to understand why they would do such a thing. “They threatened us with sending us to ÇODEM; there was nothing we could do.” The adults mainly threaten to scare children and condition them to behave harmoniously as well as obey the rules of the children’s home. When children behave in such a way that departs from the rule of the house, children are scared to be sent to ÇODEM. Interestingly, one day, one of the girls came to me and said, “They always threaten us with ÇODEM; however, it never happens. I did a lot of things and went against the rules of our legislative person and children’s home. Nothing happened to me; here I am still.”

The procedural methodology employed in instituting modifications, both within and across institutions, follows a systematic sequence. For children in children’s homes, if the child is having hardship in her/his home, firstly, other children’s homes are tried for her. There are three phases in this step. The child is relocated to a children’s home with his/her peers; if she is having hardship with adaptability there, then she is sent to a home with children younger than her, and if this does not work, she is sent to a home where children are older than her. Upon the completion of all social service programs, including therapy, volunteer support, increased social interaction, one-on-one care, and the child is still struggling to adapt and, causing disharmony in the home and setting ‘a negative example’ to other children, the child is transferred to an alternative institutional model. Each institutional model has different regulations in terms of alterations. It is essential to emphasize that the steps above are specific to children’s homes. Furthermore, with permission from the ministry, the provincial directorate regulates each step and phase of the alteration process. A central government unit is responsible for handling all aspects of operation in every children’s home coordination center.

### **3.3. Children’s Rights**

What is a child? Who defines it? How is childhood conceptualized in the present day, and what are the cultural determinants of it? Above, I have tried to explain how childhood is socially constructed. In different geographies and societies, children were subjected to different legal codes, whether cultural, religious, or secular. However,

equally important, the ideas on children and childhood that were borne out from the 'West's Enlightened days affected the non-Western geographies and their discourses on childhood from the time it was born. That is why UNCRC enjoys a crucial standpoint when it comes to children and childhood studies. Thus, for this project, the importance of UNCRC comes from the fact that it is universal and global and enters into the discourses of non-Western countries through its binding decision. Of course, UNCRC is not the only small "p" politics of childhood, but it serves a significant role in it. To understand this role, we need to take a closer look at the Convention and the background of it.

The course of history witnessed many theorists and thinkers spending their time sitting at their desks and speculating about the creature of the junior human that is called the child. For example, during the ancient era of philosophy, Aristo emphasized that the child is a calamity, which is the source of hardships, diseases, and accidents.<sup>81</sup> He emphasizes this thought depending on two conceptions: Final and Formal Causality. Considering these two conceptions, the child is an immature version of humankind, which, if it develops itself, can enjoy maturity into adulthood. The nature of childhood development includes moral and cognitive branches. The idea of development reinforces the idea of development through stages, and it is much of the case of thinkers on childhood uses. According to this idea, since children are immature and need to develop into mature adults, they need to overcome certain stages of development that are age-based. However, this kind of view compresses the definition of 'the child' only to the phases of development and reduces the whole concept of childhood to the developmental axis.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, during the Middle Ages of Europe, one cannot speak of a child as someone to be protected. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with rising enlightenment tendencies, philosophers puzzled their brains to understand junior adults.<sup>82</sup> The concept of childhood as an age of innocence was the creation of the following century and was the product of the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Sevinç Güçlü, "Çocukluk ve Çocukluğun Sosyolojisi Bağlamında Çocuk Hakları," *Sosyoloji Dergisi* (2016): 4.

<sup>82</sup> Yolcuoğlu, "Türkiye'de Çocuk Koruma Sisteminin Genel Olarak Değerlendirilmesi," 44.

<sup>83</sup> Laurance Brockliss, 2016. "Introduction: The Western Concept of Childhood," in *Childhood in the Late Ottoman Empire and After*, ed. Benjamin C. Fortna (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 1.

The definition of childhood in the axis of innocence made many differences in the definition and the daily lives and interactions of children with adults. When you define something as innocent, you also define it as in need of care and protection from the outside world. This is an essential seed in the transformation of childhood. The 20th-century childhood paradigm is fed from such a definition of childhood, and traces of it can be seen in the works of Rousseau on the one hand and Locke on the other in the Enlightenment era. The reflections of “Romantic Childhood” in Rousseau’s *Emile*, first published in 1792, carry three important highlights: (1) the child is essential only by itself, not for one or the other cause; (2) the child is different from an adult, the child is authentic and have valuable psychological features, and childhood is mainly close to the nature; (3) thirdly, education should not spoil the organic and natural development of children.<sup>84</sup> As pointed out by Sevinç Güçlü, for Locke, children are future citizens, and the idea of ‘tabula rasa’ in relation to children necessitates the support from the family, school, environment, and state to fill in this empty plate.<sup>85</sup> The intellectual discovery of children as ‘innocent’ during the Enlightenment changed how children experience their childhoods.

According to Mehmet Sağlam and Neriman Aral, it is believed that this changing view towards children with the rise of Enlightenment entered the legal documents and texts in Switzerland in 1779 with the first social policy document. In addition, after World War I, the International Organization for Children was established to provide for the urgent needs of children. This organization was later named the International Children’s Welfare Organization, and with their efforts, the Geneva Declaration of Children’s Rights was accepted by the League of Nations General Assembly on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1924.<sup>86</sup> The Geneva Declaration of Children’s Rights included four principles involving the rights of living, growing, protection, and participation.<sup>87</sup> The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established after World War II in 1946.<sup>88</sup> With the tremendous efforts of UNICEF and other social

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<sup>84</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1921), 41-73.

<sup>85</sup> Güçlü, "Çocukluk ve Çocukluğun Sosyolojisi Bağlamında Çocuk Hakları," 6.

<sup>86</sup> Mehmet Sağlam, and Neriman Aral, "Tarihsel Süreç İçerisinde Çocuk ve Çocukluk Kavramları," *Çocuk ve Medeniyet 2* (2016): 51.

<sup>87</sup> Aydoğmuş, "Türkiye’de Çocukluk Sosyolojisi," 4478.

<sup>88</sup> "History," UNICEF, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/history#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20International%20Children's,had%20played%20in%20the%20war.>

organizations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was accepted by the United Nations National Assembly in 1989.

The Convention is important. It is legally binding, universal, definitive, and worldwide. It presents a definition of a child that would reflect on childhood experiences. Although the intellectual seeds of the Convention come from the Western world, it has much of the capacity to influence non-Western geographies. It is a legal document that, through the reinforcement of law, requires the states who signed the convention to edit their policies in accordance with it. Then, we see how the daily life practices of individuals are shaped accordingly. How does the convention could affect daily life? It is through the relation between the state and the individual, between the law and the practices of it. Allison and Adrian James define law with respect to the construction of childhood as such:

...as one of the primary mechanisms for social ordering, comprising a system of principles and practices that underpin the social construction of a wide range of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and relationships. It is law that defines the rights and responsibilities of, and therefore the relationships between, citizens in any given cultural and political context. It is law, therefore, that also creates and sustains the regulatory frameworks that define 'childhood' as a particular kind of collectivity specific to a particular locale; and, therefore, it is also in and through the operation of law that the everyday interactions that take place between adults and children are encapsulated, routinized and systematized.<sup>89</sup>

Law thus has the role of the mediator and organizer of the daily life of individuals, their relationships with one another, and their essential organization of life. Modern law, with respect to UNCRC, defines the roles of society, the family, education, and culture to look after the children and provide the means for children to develop their emotional, physical, and social capacities. Such a vision that the convention predicates upon the structures of society necessitates the reorganization of law that could shape the relations between each structure. This is how UNCRC organizes the structures that children are in relation to with respect to their legal features. One of the most important aspects of the convention is how it assigns responsibility to families, society, and the state to uphold its principles. However, the primary responsibility falls on the states that have signed the convention. The convention is divided into three parts, with a total of fifty-four articles. Each part emphasizes a specific subject related to the rights of children under one of four main titles. Rabia Dirican points out that the right to survival

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<sup>89</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 49.

defines the necessary needs that are fundamental for the survival of the child, such as nutrition, sheltering, enough life standard, and benefit from health services; the right to grow summarizes the components in order to put into practice their potentials such as in education, cultural activities, thought, religion and right of conscience. The right to be protected involves the necessity of protection from all kinds of neglect, abuse, and exploitation, which also composes the particular security and rehabilitation of refugee children and children who are abused and neglected. The right to participate is the right of children to have an active role in society, such as having a say and explaining their own views.<sup>90</sup> The definition of rights in each part and the articles concerning it thus will give us a frame for the construction of modern childhood.

When one is eager to know about the rights of the children and opens UNCRC, the preamble will greet the guest reader. The preamble will give hints to understand what kind of childhood is defined. It states:

... the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance, convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, considering that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity, bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth..."<sup>91</sup>

According to this part of the preamble, childhood is defined in relation to keywords such as care, family, society, protection, and growing. The child is defined as being cared for, protected, and assisted by his/her family. The child is then defined in relation to adults responsible for providing care and protecting it. Thus, childhood is separated from adulthood in this respect but defined in relation to adulthood. One of the key features of childhood defined in UNCRC is that children are subjects of their own and need care and protection by various structures of society. I find certain articles of the convention very pleasingly interesting, as if the convention gives birth to the 'modern

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<sup>90</sup> Rabia Dirican, "Tarihi Süreçte Çocukluk ve Çocuk Hakları," *Çocuk ve Gelişim Dergisi* 2, no.2 (2018): 46-47.

<sup>91</sup> UNICEF. 1990. "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." September 2.

child.’ While Article 1 defines who the child is, I call Articles 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, and 16 the birth of the child as an individual and a subject of its own. I define these articles as the birth because they define the rights of children. As Allison James and Adrian James argue, “Given that one of the purposes of the law is to protect the vulnerable and those living on the margins of society, the *raison d’être* of the UNCRC was to articulate those rights that were seen to be universal and central to the process of moving children from the margins to the center of society.”<sup>92</sup> Hence, the birth of the child is not only aimed at the legal sphere but also through the power of law penetrating daily life, which reinforces the birth of the child in society as well. Taking a closer look at the articles will deepen our understanding. Article 1 of the convention states that “a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier.”<sup>93</sup> The age limit is critical because it will define children when turning eighteen as adults in the face of the law, which in turn reflects on the daily practices, cultures, discourses, and visions of children themselves. In other words, the law defines the age of childhood with the aim of “creating and sustaining the regulatory frameworks that define childhoods and therefore also the social practices that encapsulate and systematize the everyday interactions between adults and children.”<sup>94</sup> I would add to this comment the ideas on adulthood and childhood. Children and adults interact in the face of the law, but childhoods and adulthoods enjoy the interaction with one another. In this sense, turning eighteen is equated with turning an adult, which, as a result, will define adulthood as well. For example, in Turkey, when a child reaches 18, the child can vote, sue, and marry without permission from their parents. In this case, turning 18 is understood as turning an adult for children. Even though each child is subjected to this article, the way it is experienced highly varies when we consider children under the protection and care of the government. Generally, in Turkey, when children under protection and care reach 18, they encounter a recession of the decision of protection and care regarding social policy. There are exceptions to this case where the child under protection and care can benefit from such policies until the age of twenty-five. However, the meaning of turning eighteen has a collective understanding of children in institutional care. It is as if when a child under protection and care turns eighteen, it is a turning point, meaning

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<sup>92</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 84.

<sup>93</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 1.

<sup>94</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 66.

leaving the children's home and being obliged to care for himself/herself. There was a girl aged fourteen while I was working in a children's home. I still vividly remember her comment about this. She stated that "the state cares about us and looks after us until we are eighteen; however, when we turn eighteen, it feels like we are bound to have enough capacity to care for ourselves, when you don't even know how to pay the bill of a house it is a major cause of stress. It feels as if they say, 'Go out and survive'." This was generally the case, as I have observed in the field. There were a couple of children who turned eighteen and had to leave the children's home. The process is as follows: if the child gets into university, the child can stay in the dormitories of the state or the university dormitory, or if the child starts working, he/she can rent a house of their own, or the child has to return to his/her biological family regardless of they want or not. In Turkish culture, turning eighteen is related to becoming a free individual of one's own. This is much the case for children who live beside their families since they are guaranteed the same rights as adults. However, the idea of turning eighteen for children in children's homes has very different meanings, as stated above, sometimes inclined with the emotions of fear, anxiety, stress, and overwhelming. Then, it would not be absurd to talk about the cultural politics of childhood. As childhood is defined with an upper limit of age, the children under protection and care are first subjected to the necessities of the age below and above. Since they are under the legal protection of the state, they have a unique relationship with it. It loads them with specific types of discourses among themselves as well as among the social workers who are interacting with them. Then, we can say that Article 1 can be read through the cultural politics of childhood in relation to children in institutional care.

I have defined Articles 6,7,8,12,14, and 16 as the birth of the children in society. This definition, as I have said, defined the child as an individual of its own. Article 6 of the convention acknowledges children's right to life and gives the responsibility to sustain this right to the state parties. The birth starts and continues with Article 7: "The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents."<sup>95</sup> The child individually has a name, a nationality, and

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<sup>95</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 7(1).

parents who are caring for him/her. The individual child then is not only a part of a family but a part of a wider society and a nation. Then, the identity is ensured with Article 8: “State’s Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.”<sup>96</sup> The state has to respect the right to preserve identity. This is crucial because the right to preserve a child’s identity is seen as more significant than the state. The state has to respect it, no matter what kind of state it is. Alongside recognizing the identity of the child, the convention stresses upon hearing the voice of the child with Article 12: “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child...”<sup>97</sup> In addition, necessary means should be established for this article to come alive, such as “...the child shall, in particular, be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child...”<sup>98</sup> So now, when we look, UNCRC has defined the child, given a name to it, and recognized its identity, and now the convention talks about hearing them. It is as if the child is taking shape in the face of law and society. Moreover, the shape gets sharper: “States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.”<sup>99</sup> Children have freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. What a harsh statement it is. Article 16 is even tougher: “No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor unlawful attacks on his or her honor and reputation.”<sup>100</sup> Now, we have a child in conception entirely in shape, with a definition, a name, an identity, and rights of its own. The child now is an individual in the face of the law. Hence, it will reflect on the social policies as well as the daily lives of both adults and children.

Another issue we need to mention concerning the convention is the notion of ‘best interest.’ “In all actions concerning the children, whether undertaken by public or private welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”<sup>101</sup> This

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<sup>96</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 8(1).

<sup>97</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 12(1).

<sup>98</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 12(2).

<sup>99</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 14 (1).

<sup>100</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 16(1).

<sup>101</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 3(1).

statement is the third article of the convention, which is highly debatable in terms of what the ‘best interest’ is and who determines it. This theme is so central that it reflects on states’ policies. For example, policies regarding children in the Constitution of Turkey excessively highlight ‘the best interest.’ However, the idea of best interest still hangs in the air with a title only. The Convention, by mentioning the ‘best interest’ superficially, actually gives a space for the cultural determinants of the interest depending on the geography and cultural transmission. The best interest of a child living in Africa may vary from that of a child living in Australia, making the issue culturally dependent. The best interest principle can be viewed directly from the reference point of the cultural politics of childhood because children who are in specific situations and need the protection of a government based on their rights and the articles of the Convention will be subjected not only to the legal document of UNCRC and policies but also to the cultural code of that particular society in terms of defining children and what is best for them. In this sense, it can be said that even though the convention puts forward a modern childhood and constructs it universally, the central theme of best interest proves there are different childhoods in different contexts.

We all went to school and learned how to become good citizens, depending on the geography we lived in. We all were subjected to the collective memory construction of the state through education. This is one way of constructing childhood. Article 28 directly charges primary education to be compulsory and secondary education to be variable and available to all.<sup>102</sup> James and James put a great emphasis on education and how it forms the cultural politics of childhood by giving education in the hands of the state. They claim that:

Thus, although the Convention identifies education as a key component of the global childhood and the right of children around the world, it simultaneously, reinforces the roles of education policy, education law and educational practices as the hand-servants of the State and the primary means by which different childhoods are produced and imposed upon children in different cultures, in order to produce tomorrow’s citizens. It is therefore a key component of the cultural politics of childhood.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, sec. 28(1).

<sup>103</sup> James, and James. *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, 85.

I want to give an example here. For some time in Turkey, before starting to lecture, for children in primary school, it was compulsory to attend the morning ceremony of reading “Our Oath” (Andımız) between the years of 1933-2013. Our Oath was a text that listed the responsibilities, the visions, and the aims of a Turkish child with a lot of nationalist and Kemalist discourses. It was an officially forced ritual to be read every morning by all children at school. I remember it from my primary education years. Grades from first to fifth would gather either in the garden or inside the school, depending on the weather. One student would be elected, and the student would come forward. He/she would start reading the Oath. At each sentence of the text, the student would stop and wait until the crowd repeats the exact sentence. You were expected to respect the Oath, not talk while it was read, and raise your voice as much as possible. The Oath is still in my memory with all of its words, and it would go like this:

I am Turkish, I am true, I am hardworking. My tenet is to protect the minors, respect the elderly, and love my country (nation) more than I love my existence. My ideal is to rise and go ahead. Great Atatürk, I vow that I will walk endlessly to the target you have shown. My existence shall be a gift to the Turkish existence. Bless who says I am Turkish.<sup>104</sup>

The Oath was written by Minister of National Education Reşit Galip in 1933.<sup>105</sup> Thinking back to the zeitgeist of the era, nationalist ideologies, and tendencies were at their peak not only in the Turkish Republican context but also around the world. We are talking about an era in which the world got out from the First World War, where the nation-state voices were so high. Hence, the nation-state, through education, had a nationalist agenda as well. The nation-state aimed to reach political, individual, and societal ends through education. Political aim expects to reach the idea that students grasp the current political organization and behave accordingly.<sup>106</sup> Through the same political aims, the Oath was regarded as a ritual whereby education and the nation-state could come together. Not surprisingly, the Ministerial Notice with a publication number of 1749/42 titled “About the Text, The Student, Will Repeat Everyday” was published to guide how to teach this to students on May 18th, 1933.<sup>107</sup> The children

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<sup>104</sup> “Türküm. Doğruyum. Çalışkanım. İlkem; küçüklerimi saymak, büyüklerimi korumak, yurdumu milletimi özümnden çok sevmektir. Ülküm yükselmek ve ileri gitmektir. Ey büyük Atatürk, açtığın yolda, gösterdiğin hedefe durmadan yürüyeceğime ant içerim. Varlığım, Türk varlığına armağan olsun. Ne mutlu Türküm diyene!”

<sup>105</sup> Sadık Kartal, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Eğitim İdeolojisi ve "Andımız" Metni," *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no.12 (2019): 28.

<sup>106</sup> Kartal, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Eğitim İdeolojisi ve "Andımız" Metni," 26.

<sup>107</sup> Kartal, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Eğitim İdeolojisi ve "Andımız" Metni," 29.

were taught and forced to memorize the Oath and were expected to ritually and collectively perform it each morning from Monday to Friday during the school days. The Oath includes being a citizen and child, protecting, respecting, and glorifying the nation. It is an excellent example of the cultural politics of childhood through education. It is not performed contemporarily, but as an example, it shows us how education policies open such a gate for the cultural politics of childhood. Hence, as the Convention obliges education for the states, it also reinforces the tool for cultural politics of childhood.

As we approach UNCRC through this perspective, the convention itself is a part of the cultural politics of childhood because it has cultural, social, and political determinants of the experiences of childhood as well as the definition of a child. The convention is groundbreaking; as I have mentioned, it provided the birth of the ‘modern child’ in the face of law and, hence, society. So, it has accelerated the paradigm shift with regard to viewing children. Seeing children in need of care and protection from the state, family, and society but at the same time defining them with certain rights raises a new understanding of childhood in all spheres of life, whether education, administration, or social. Most importantly, recognizing children as subjects of their own and having an individual existence with voices worthy of listening was one catalysator for the paradigm shift in academic studies.

#### **3.4. Defining the ‘Disadvantaged Children’**

*“I was first an intern at the place where I worked. I was in the central building where administrative bodies were located. I was there to help my supervisor. While I was staying in the psychologist’s office, two children came in. One of them was waiting for her therapy session. They were about 7 and 8. It seemed to me the younger one learned reading new. She found a magazine and started spelling: “dis-ad-van-ta-ge, disadvantaged, what does it mean? Disadvantaged.” She addressed the question to her friend.”<sup>108</sup>*

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<sup>108</sup> Personal observations from the field, 14.07.2021, Istanbul

As I have explained above, law is an essential factor in defining and ordering social reality. Laws regarding children are also important in such a way that they define the child, its rights, who is responsible for them, and the definition of children whose parents are not able to provide care and protection. There are two fundamental laws regarding children and social policy. These are the Law of Social Services of 2828 and the Law of Child Protection of 5395. In addition, the Ministry of Family and Social Services regulates certain instructions with regard to the operation of children's homes. Those formal documents, through their instructions and principles, define the relations between social workers and children and between the state and children. It is essential to see the definition and boundaries of such a care model through the written codes of government. This part of the chapter will focus on the definitions of children in specific legal codes of the Turkish Constitution. In addition to this, through discourse analysis, this chapter will put forward how the state defines and constructs the childhoods of the group through its bureaucratic activities.

I want to start with the Law of Social Services of 2828. This legal code is fundamental because it defines and gathers all social work practices for all age groups under one specific law. In 1983, the government reinforced the law with the aim of centralizing social services. With Article 3 of the Law of Social Services of 2828, 'Child who needs protection' is defined as such:

"Children who need protection" are in danger in terms of their body, soul, virtue development, and personal security, as well as;

1. Either motherless or fatherless, both motherless or fatherless,
2. Either mother or father is undefined; both mother and father are undefined,
3. Either abandoned by mother or father, abandoned by both the mother and father,
4. Neglected by their mother or father and left unprotected and dragged to disorderliness to every kind of social danger, such as in the face of prostitution, beggary, and the usage of alcohol and substances.<sup>109</sup>

So, children who require protection and care are those whose parents have passed away (either one or both) or those who have been exposed to disorderliness and crime. The following articles define the care models of each age group by stating the purpose of the care model. Inside the law, nurseries, borstals, day nurseries, children's supportive centers, children's homes, and children's home estates are mentioned and defined for

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<sup>109</sup> Code of Social Services, 1983, sec. 3(b)

the protection and care of children, fitting the definition of Article 3. One of the crucial articles inside the law is Article 4 section k, which states that:

Children who need protection shall be supported in relation to Turkish custom, tradition, and belief, have national virtue, be self-assured, be filled with human respect and love, be raised by Atatürkist thought and Atatürk's principles and reforms, providing them with an occupation or helping them have a profession and following them inside the society even after the protection order is revoked and supporting them within the bounds of possibility.<sup>110</sup>

What is crucial in this article is that children who are under the protection and care of the Turkish state, regardless of their national identity, will be protected in relation to Turkish customs and systems of thought. Inside my field, there were many children whose nationalities were different from Turkish. There were children from Syria, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan etc. However, Syrian children are dominant in number compared to other nationalities. The reason for this is the population of Syrian migrants in Turkey, which is around 3.2 million.<sup>111</sup> When Syrians took refuge in Turkey due to war, the population of Syrians increased. Some were poor, and some had enough resources to care for themselves. Nevertheless, for Syrian children who are under the protection and care of the government, their parents have either died, and these children started living on the streets, or these children were forced to commit an illegal act such as robbery. So, the Turkish state also provides protection and care for children from different nationalities. This raises some tensions when you work inside the field between people who have different political views towards the Syrian refugees since Syrian refugees are a central theme for political debate in Turkey, television channels, and the dialogues and conversations of the citizens. I remember one time we were having a meeting about the problems inside the home and the children living there. We discussed what they need, their 'misbehaviors,' and how they could be diminished to maintain peace at home. There was a Syrian girl who disturbed her friend and fought at school. I remember one care personnel saying, "I do not understand why the state takes care of migrant children. They are not our children. Moreover, they will be ungrateful to the Turkish state when they grow up. Instead, only Turkish children should be cared for and protected in children's homes." When

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<sup>110</sup> Code of Social Services, 1983, sec. 4(k)

<sup>111</sup> "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sayısı," Mülteciler Derneği, accessed October 19, 2023, <https://muletciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/#:~:text=Türkiye%27de%20kayıtlı%20altına%20alınmış,yılın%20en%20düşük%20seviyesine%20geriledi.>

a social worker has a more politically nationalistic view, they might make comments as such. What is crucial here is the Turkish state's fundamental principle that regardless of nationality, children who are under the protection and care of the Turkish state will be raised with Turkish culture and vision. I will discuss such practices that enforce these laws in children's homes. It is crucial because it influences the daily life of children.

Education is an indispensable tool that facilitates the provision of a vision to children under protection. It is through education that nation-states collectively construct their citizens, starting from primary school. The present study delves into children's homes, a model of care under the aegis of the state, and examines how the state enters the sphere of children's homes through its institutions and regulations to raise awareness of Turkish culture and vision. Firstly, each children's home employs a preacher, a woman preacher for girls' homes, and a man preacher for boys' homes, who visit children every week. These preachers spend time with children, answering their questions regarding Islam or teaching them about different subjects in Islam. The Ministry of Religious Affairs appoints the preachers. It is noteworthy that even children belonging to other religions, such as Christianity, are subjected to this activity. While no child is forced to attend the weekly meetings of the preachers, the crucial aspect lies in the construction of childhood through the institutions of the state. Thus, the way the state defines children, childhood, and the means of providing protection and care affect the practices that the state obliges to. Secondly, in children's homes, it is also essential to impart knowledge about national and religious holidays. National holidays are an integral part of education and rituals at school. Especially if the children's home is supported by an NGO with religious tendencies, these rituals are seen more prominently. The reason for this is that the rituals for religious holidays are widely practiced across the country and are an intrinsic part of the culture. Moreover, the meaning attached to the religious holidays is significant because it means gathering, belonging, seeing your relatives, eating together, and having a good time together. Therefore, the provincial directorate necessitates the rituals of religious affairs. For example, during religious holidays, Turkish people visit their families and relatives. So, each liable person at home is expected to visit the children's home they are responsible for during each religious holiday. If the children's home is supported economically by an association, the reach to material sources is easier, and this

expands in number because the association provides a budget for certain events and holidays through the volunteers who give to charity. The financial resources are important for such days because, in Turkish culture, prior to the religious holiday, each child is dressed in new clothes. These clothes are carefully selected. The same ritual is practiced for children in children's homes. Thus, we see how the laws intervene in the daily lives of children.

One of the other vital articles regarding children under protection and care is Article 24, titled 'The Recession of Protection Decision and Protection Duration.' It states that:

Protection decision generally continues until the child becomes of full age. However, this decision might be recessed before full age when the situations causing protection to diminish through the advice of institutional responsibilities to the courts, and also, even after the child becomes of full age with the child's approval, the protection decision might continue. When the child becomes of full age, the conditions for the protection decision to continue are the following:

- a) From children under protection and care who are 18,
  1. Those who continue secondary school until 20,
  2. For those who continue higher education until age 25, their protection decisions might be prolonged.
- b) For those who are at the age of 18 and are not continuing with higher education with the aim of helping them get a profession, their protection decision might be prolonged until the age of 20.<sup>112</sup>

Since for children, knowing that when you turn 18, you must leave the care, and if you meet the conditions of the law, your care status might be prolonged, turning 18 is meaningful to them. For those I have discussed this issue, turning eighteen was becoming an adult, but it is something they fear due to not knowing how to fend for themselves and the uncertainty of where they will live, whom they will meet, and what they will do. In this sense, even though their understandings of the age of 18 have positive meanings sometimes, it has negative feelings such as stress, fear, anxiety, and being overwhelmed. The article defining the age children of the Law of Social Services is part of the production and construction of childhood for those living in children's homes. If your care status is recessed when you turn eighteen, you are no longer under the protection; hence, you are out of the decision. Even though the Law regulates a following plan for children who leave residential care, knowing you will be alone on your own is enough to prove how the Law intervenes in the daily lives of those children,

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<sup>112</sup> Code of Social Services, 1983, sec. 24(a) and (b).

how it defines them, and how the laws watch children through its courts and binding decisions.

One of the other legal codes regarding children is the Child Protection Law of 5395, which aims to put forward regulations for children in need of protection or children who are driven to crime. Article 3 of the Child Protection Law defines children as children in need of protection, children who are driven to crime, the courts, the juvenile judge, the institution, and the social worker. It states that:

- a) Child: A person who has not completed the age of eighteen, even if he/she is an adult at an earlier age. In this context,
  - 1. Child in need of protection: Child whose physical, mental, moral, social, and emotional development and personal safety is in danger, neglected or abused or who is a victim of crime,
  - 2. Child driven to crime: Alleged committing an act defined as a crime in the law.
- b) Court: Juvenile courts and juvenile heavy penal courts,
- c) Juvenile judge: Except for those who have been prosecuted, the application is to be applied to juvenile delinquents and children in need of protection. Juvenile court judge who gives the injunction orders,
- d) Institution: The official or private institutions where the child within the scope of this Law is taken care of and the injunction orders are fulfilled,<sup>113</sup>

The present Law under scrutiny is noteworthy for its definition of children and its alignment with the definition of children as posited by the UNCRC. So, in this case, childhood is defined as the period between the ages of zero to eighteen. Specifically, the law conceptualizes childhood as the period between the ages of zero to eighteen, which serves as a regulatory framework for children's law and manifests consequences for children's lives in the legal, judicial, and societal domains. As previously discussed, the UNCRC establishes a universal childhood with contextualized meanings shaped by nation-states. This Law aligns with the UNCRC as it defines children with the appropriate age span and recognizes them as entities requiring care and protection. Notably, the state bears the responsibility of acknowledging the rights of children, as articulated in Article 4:

- a) Ensuring the child's right to life, development, protection, and participation,
- b) Protecting the child's interests and well-being,
- c) Not being discriminated against for any reason,
- d) Ensuring the child's participation in the decision-making process by informing him or her,
- e) Working in cooperation with family members, relevant persons, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations,
- f) Following a fair, effective, and fast procedure based on human rights,

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<sup>113</sup> Code of Child Protection, 2005, sec.3

- g) Paying special attention to the situation of the child during the investigation and prosecution process,
- h) In making and implementing decisions, Supporting the child's education and training appropriate to his/her age and development, development of his/her personality and social responsibility,
- i) Applying to imprisonment as a last resort with measures restricting freedom for children,
- j) Seeing care and keeping in the institution as a last resort while taking the injunction decision,
- k) Keeping children separate from adults in institutions where they are cared for and supervised and where injunction orders are applied.<sup>114</sup>

In this sense, we again can feel and sense the influence of UNCRC on those states that signed the convention. Ensuring the rights of children, protecting their interests, preventing discrimination, working with family and societal institutions, and supporting their education are all implementations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children. One of the central themes of UNCRC was to give children a voice in matters concerning their own lives. Hence, the Child Protection Law of 5395 also points its finger to recognize the children's agency. Article 39, titled "The Audit Plan and Report," is about how the audit plan is prepared. It is stated that:

- (2) While preparing the inspection plan;
  - a) The purpose, nature, and duration of the measure taken against the child,
  - b) The needs of the child,
  - c) The seriousness of the dangerous situation the child is in,
  - d) The degree of support given to the child by the child's parents, guardian, and the person responsible for his care and supervision,
  - e) The nature of the act constituting a crime, if measures have been taken due to being driven to crime,
  - f) The child's opinion,"<sup>115</sup>

As the principles of the article show, an audit plan is prepared for the needs of children as well, and the ideas of children are taken into account. The f principle directly recognizes the agency of children in the face of the law, which is definitive in terms of defining what a child is. The principal b is also essential. Hence, children have needs of their own; first, they need to be protected by the family. If the family is not eligible to do so, then the responsibility of protecting the child is on the institutions of the state and the public.

Until this body of paragraphs, I have given how the state defines the 'disadvantage'ness and how the legal definitions regulate childhood experiences. However, when we turn our heads to the idea of 'disadvantage,' it also encompasses

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<sup>114</sup> Code of Child Protection, 2005, sec.4

<sup>115</sup> Code of Child Protection, 2005, sec.39(2)

the word ‘advantage.’ ‘Dis-advantage’ is like a coin; on one side, we see advantage, and on the other, the lack of advantage is defined according to the other surface. While some children enjoy the advantages, some do not. I guess one of the primary mechanisms that define what advantage is and what is not is the Convention on the Rights of Children, and the other is the legal codes of the Constitution. To be ‘disadvantageous’ for a child first means not being able to enjoy the rights the Convention accepts and defines for children. Secondly, it means lacking an adequate family life depending on the economy, social relations, or power relations inside the household. Then, being disadvantageous immediately means lacking an attribute or a possession others have, but some do not. Since some do not have these important defined attributes, these individuals should be protected and cared for. The idea of ‘disadvantage’ comes from this kind of root.

We can see how the convention influences regulations concerning children. On the one hand, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children constructs a universal understanding of childhood by regulating specific definitions and responsibilities for children. On the other hand, leaving the ‘best interest’ principle at the hands of states who signed the convention opens a space for the construction of local childhoods. Because each geography has different cultural, social, economic, and political interests defined for its citizens, it influences the construction of childhood. When we look at the development of social work practices for children in Turkey, we can say that Turkic states, as well as the Ottoman Empire, have the tradition of looking after children in need of protection. This also might be influenced by the religious discourses and religious verses of the Qur’an. The modern Turkish state bureaucratizes social care practices through its ministerial bodies and the provincials operating under the ministry. While modern social work practice at first focused more on the barrack style of residential care, with the idea of the home type of residential care, the old style was changed. The reason for this is to provide children with a care model that provides an easy means to socialize with the wider community. However, the standard care model in Turkey is the residential care model, which is highly expensive. On the other hand, we see the numbers of foster care low, and as the years pass, the statistics show that foster families have a low rate of increase compared to the number of children who need protection and care. This is also, in a way, related to the cultural understanding of Turkish society. Kinship relations are significant for Turkish society.

Hence, the low number of adoptees as well as foster families can be explained through such a cultural determinant. As one discusses the historical development of care models, one must put forward the laws and regulations that necessitate the social work practice. The modern state is involved in family relations and defines the family as the protector of children. If the family is not eligible to do so, then the state is responsible for the protection of the children. Hence, the definitions produced for children in need of care in the legal code are important because they construct the childhood of children who are under protection and care. Not only are their childhoods constructed, but also their adulthood is constructed through the regulations of providing profession or prolonging the decision of protection. One of the critical things with regard to the law defining children in need of care and protection is how the Turkish state necessitates the teaching of Turkish customs, visions, and Atatürkist principles to children regardless of their national identity. This is another cultural determinant of the cultural politics of childhood in residential care. As these regulations have a binding power over the institutions of the state and since the institutions are the source of operations of children's homes, the law reinforces itself on the daily practices of children, the way they understand themselves, the future of their life as well as the way they understand their childhood.

### **3.5. Learning from the Literature**

There are studies valuable to understanding the cultural politics of childhood for 'disadvantaged' children in Turkey. The literature in the Turkish context can be divided into two categories: Studies that focus on life currently in residential care and studies that focus on life after leaving residential care. Both categories give enhanced knowledge of children's perceptions about their experienced childhoods, their understanding of subjectivity, and how they manage their childhood in relation to social institutions such as education, family, religion, and state.

Fulya Torun's (1986) master's thesis is about the perceptions of children under protection towards members of family and family relations. Using projective tests and analyzing each child's responses to the certain visual of the test, Torun tries to understand the perception of children in children's homes towards the institution of family and how it differs from children living with their parents in ghettos. The study

is a comparative study of 130 children aged between 9-10. The author found that children living in institutional care feel alone and cannot understand the quality between parents since they have not seen a role model. They view the scene presented in the projective test as a threat since the children in institutional care have distrust towards their family as well as towards the world. This study is beneficial for drawing a frame for how younger children in institutional care might view the concept of family and family relations. This thesis is very old, but it is crucial because, during those years, Turkey embraced barrack-style residential care in which the number of children and the number of social workers was low. It was like youth hostels where, in a building, many children stayed together in crowded rooms. It had no similarities to a home-like environment. It could be said that children's understanding of family might be influenced by such an environment where they have not seen any example of family and home life.<sup>116</sup>

Fatih Aydođdu's (2016) work on children in children's homes focuses on the problems children encounter and their expectancies. The study consisted of fifteen children aged between 10-18 living in a children's home in Erzincan. Through semi-structured interviews, the problems children faced were listed as such: disagreements and arguments among children, strict rules, an inadequate number of teachers, and limited means of communication. In addition, the second result of the study was that children's expectancies revolved around the problems they faced. According to Aydođdu's research, children expected a warmer home with fewer arguments and strict rules, more teachers, and enhanced means of communication.<sup>117</sup> (Aydođdu 2016, 68) Rules are central themes for residential care. Sometimes, rules appear as punishments, sometimes they appear as negotiations, and sometimes they appear as protection.

Muhammed Sinan Karabıyık's (2018) master's thesis focuses on the sociology of childhood. He stresses the main idea of the Republic of Turkey's understanding and construction of modern childhood and how the experiences of children under protection and care fit into or do not fit into this modern childhood construction. He

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<sup>116</sup> Fulya Torun, "Çocuk Yuvalarında Kalan 9-10 Yaşlarındaki Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocukların Aile Bireylerini ve Aile İlişkilerini Algılamaları" (Master's Thesis, Hacettepe University, 1986), 57-68.

<sup>117</sup> Aydođdu, Fatih. 2016. "Çocuk Evinde Kalan Çocukların Karşılaştıkları Sorunların ve Beklentilerinin İncelenmesi." Ankara Sağlık Bilimleri Dergisi 1-2-3 (2016) 63-71.

analyzed the social life practices of children under protection, their relationship with their peers and adults, their future plans and thoughts, and their comments on protection services. By using grounded theory in his analysis, Karabıyık categorized twelve fields: life at home and social relations, life at school and social relations, life in neighborhood and social relations, thoughts about family and expectations, thoughts about economy and expectations, thoughts about religion and religious services and expectations, thoughts about education and expectations, thoughts about state politics and expectations, thoughts about leisure activities and expectations, thoughts about provided services and expectations, thought about care personnel and expectations, lastly thoughts about social workers and expectations.<sup>118</sup> He found that there are similarities between the lifestyles of children in children's homes and children near their families concerning daily life activities such as dinner time, the time of entrance and exit, study times, and leisure activities are designed in accordance with school time. Most of his interlocutors define children's homes as family-like but not a family. In addition, Karabıyık puts forward how children view different residential care models and define them.<sup>119</sup> This makes us think their childhood experiences vary from one residential model to the next. The theme of family like but not a family is an important one. Knowing you do not possess a certain normality comparing the majority of society puts you in the number of minorities. There is a duality here. When the child is in the public sphere, interpersonal relations are inevitably crucial, such as school, and the child becomes a minority. But, when the same child returns back home, he or she enjoys the majority because they stay with other children living at home. The duality is important because it is a feature of their identity, sometimes to be contested, sometimes to be kept as a secret, and sometimes to be shared vividly.

Cihan Ekinci and Rasim Tösten's (2018) study on the perception of school for children aged between 13 and 18 in residential care focuses on how children in residential care view school and what kinds of meaning they attach to it. Through the responses of children's sixty metaphorical representations of school, Ekinci and Tösten categorized them into eight themes. These are places of knowledge and enlightenment, belonging,

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<sup>118</sup> Muhammed Sinan Karabıyık, "Bir Çocukluk Sosyolojisi Araştırması: Koruma Altındaki Çocukların Çocukluk Deneyimleri," (PhD diss., Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, 2018), 82-101.

<sup>119</sup> Karabıyık, "Bir Çocukluk Sosyolojisi Araştırması: Koruma Altındaki Çocukların Çocukluk Deneyimleri," 102.

hope for the future, restriction, maturity, source of happiness, gathering, and protection. Inside the theme of belonging, the home metaphor is commonly used by children. According to Ekinci and Tösten, school as a social support for children provides them with a sense of belonging.<sup>120</sup>

Hasan Şenocak's (2005) is also about the experiences of residential care. He has done questionnaires with children living in barrack-style residential care, aiming to put forward the inadequacies in care policies by giving voice to children. At the time of this dissertation, the home-type residential care model was uncommon across the country. It had only five years of history at the time of the dissertation. Hence, the barrack-style residential care models were more common in social work practices. The study consisted of three different residential care institutions in Istanbul with children above the age of thirteen. According to the results of questionnaires, Şenocak found that barrack-style residential care provides material needs, but it is inefficient in terms of providing emotional needs. Children responded to the question, "Do you think you receive enough care and attention gave negative responses. Another key result in this study is that barrack style residential care model was not enough to prepare children for life after leaving the residential care." Most of the children, when they age out from residential care, believe that they are not ready for life.<sup>121</sup> The findings of this dissertation are important. I have argued in the previous chapters that aging out and becoming an adult have unique meanings for children in residential care since they have to leave the care and 'jump in' to a different type of life.

Hüseyin Çayır's (2020) study focuses on childhood experiences in residential care. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 20 adults who had experienced childhood in residential care. The aim of the study was to put forward their thoughts on family, attitudes towards foster care and adoption, and their experienced problems and expectations. Çayır also emphasizes the issues of turning eighteen and leaving care, the discourse of 'orphan,' the idea of having a normal family, and a need for

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<sup>120</sup> Cihan Ekinci, and and Rasim Tösten, "Koruma Altında Bulunan 13-18 Yaş Arası Çocukların Okul Algısı," *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12 (2018): 376.

<sup>121</sup> Hasan Şenocak, "Korunmaya Muhtaç Çocuklar: İstanbul Yetiştirme Yurtları Üzerine Bir Alan Araştırması," (PhD diss., İstanbul University, 2005), 232.

attachment. These are actually key titles for understanding the cultural politics of childhood.<sup>122</sup>

Umut Yanardağ's (2019) article also discusses life after leaving residential care. This study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 14 participants living in Burdur, Turkey. Focusing on life during residential care and after it puts forward a central theme: stigmatization at work. Being called a 'residential kid' at work, carrying the certain judgment of a minority group, and trying to manage your daily life at work in the face of it were the main points of this stigmatization. The interlocutors of Yanardağ are complaining about how their past is known by people at work, how they are sometimes stigmatized, and the discourse they are subjected to. These are central themes for the understanding of the politics of childhood. It is enlightening how such stigma stays with you even as an adult. This work is important to see how the politics of an experienced childhood affects current experiences of adulthood. The article is fundamental to see how childhoods are in communication with adulthoods; not only is childhood stigmatized, but also adulthood is, in relation to it.<sup>123</sup>

Aybüke Tiryaki and Gülen Baran focused on the childhood experiences of female interlocutors who were under care and protection in residential care. The interlocutors explained their negative experiences regarding residential care as not having a private space and properties, deficient individual attention, and negative attitudes and behaviors of the staff and other children in care.<sup>124</sup> (2015, 42) Not having private space is a great way of understanding when we link it with the idea of placement in between and across institutions in the residential care model. Knowing that the bed or the desk is not yours fully is one reality of such a childhood. Knowing that there would be a placement and having to adjust yourself to another children's home and necessarily embrace a different bed is one of the primary issues.

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<sup>122</sup> Hüseyin Çayır, "Kurum Bakımında Kalmış Kişilerin Aileye Dair Düşünceleri," *Kadim Akademi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4, no.1 (June 2020): 75-96.

<sup>123</sup> Umut Yanardağ, "Kurum Bakımı Hizmetlerinden Yararlanmış Bireylerin Kurum Bakımı Sonrası Yaşam Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel bir Araştırma," *Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3 no.2 (2019): 60-77.

<sup>124</sup> Aybüke Yurteri Tiryaki and Gülen Baran, "Kurum Bakımı Deneyimi Olan Kadınların Çocukluk Dönemi Kurum Yaşantıları: Nitel Bir Araştırma," *Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet* 26, no.1 (2015): 42.

I believe reading from different geographical contexts is important for this study. Therefore, I added literature reviews from different geographies regarding childcare models. It is valuable because it helped me to do a cross-cultural analysis as well as see the similarities and differences of childhood experiences in residential care. Since I am working in a group that has marginal childhood experiences, seeing similar experiences deepens my understanding of childhood experiences in residential care.

While the literature in Turkey focuses on the experiences of residential care, life after leaving residential care, and how children in residential care view the care models, the studies abroad focus on this and different care models, how children experience these care models, and the issues of identity, for instance, Lisa Ann Schelbe's (2013) dissertation focuses on children aging out and leaving residential care. Rather than focusing on children who are currently under protection and care in an institution, this study focuses on children who left when they turned eighteen. This opens different debates about the cultural politics of children living in residential care. She tries to understand how children negotiate with the 'independence' of aging out and leaving the care system.<sup>125</sup>

Steven Roche and his colleagues designed a qualitative study with children in residential care. Their primary focus was on the relationships between children, residential care staff, and their families. It informs us how children in residential care in the Philippines view family. In their findings, no matter how difficult parents they have, children in residential care "conceptualize or desire strong connections with their family."<sup>126</sup> In addition, the cultural component of religion is felt through the narrations of children. As the authors put it, since the Philippines is a highly Christian community, children's understanding of life is enhanced by religion. They put meaning in their life in accordance with religion.

Mariela Neagu and Judy Sebba's (2019) study is about the identity formation of children in residential care and how placements affect their identity formation. The

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<sup>125</sup> Lisa Ann Schelbe, "'Some Type of Way': An Ethnography of Youth Aging Out of the Child Welfare System," (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2013), 32.

<sup>126</sup> Steven Roche, Catherine Flynn, and Philip Mendes, "'They become my second family': Children's Relational Lives and Relationship-Based Practice in Residential Care in the Philippines," *Child & Family Social Work* 26, 4 (2021): 658.

participants have experienced different types of care models, such as institutional care, foster care, and adoption. Drawing their theoretical framework from Breakwell's (1986) concept of threatened identities, they view it as how children start losing their kin identity and start to internalize a collective identity as children under protection and care. The study embarks on a retrospective gaze and designs a qualitative approach with people aged between 20 and 31 years. One of the main conclusions they arrived at was that people in residential and foster care managed their identities by hiding them from the wider community. In addition, it is emphasized that the self-esteem of children under care was enhanced through qualified relationships with their peers and caregivers. This study enlightens the cultural politics of childhood for marginal experiences because it gives a deep understanding of how they manage their life in the face of stigmatization and how they perform their agency through their identity formation.<sup>127</sup> (Neagu and Sebba 2019, 7)

Helen Woods's (2019) dissertation, I believe, is one of the key ethnographic works that would contribute to this study. She has done an ethnographic study with two different residential care institutions, particularly with children's homes. She used the concept of 'social death' to understand how placements affect the experiences of children in children's homes. She regards placements as a sort of alienation through experienced social loss. This thesis is very valuable for the understanding of the cultural politics of childhood within the care system. Placements and knowing you can be moved from one children's home to the next was also one of the main themes in my field. When a child goes to another one, the other children at home would immediately think about who will come in his/her stead, or they would start thinking, will someone else go as well?<sup>128</sup> (Woods 2019)

Ruth Edmond's (2014) work is another informative work with regard to children in residential care. This work primarily focuses on how children in residential care in Ireland manage their identity with their peers at school and at home. One of the important findings Edmond reached was about 'normality.' Not having a 'proper'

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<sup>127</sup> Mariela Neagu and Judy Sebba, "Who Do They Think They Are: Making Sense of Self in Residential Care, Foster Care and Adoption," *Children and Youth Services Review* 105 (2019): 7.

<sup>128</sup> Helen Woods, "Residential Care, Stigma and Relational Alienation: Exploring the Lived Experience of Children's Homes with Young People and Carers An Ethnographic Study," (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2019), 33.

family setting, a home and life standard that does not fit in with the 'societal normality' is in the face of children in care. They know the facts and feel they are outliers. They acknowledge their sense of self through these facts. This study is crucial because those facts of being the minority, outliers, and abnormal are a result of the cultural politics of childhood for children living in residential care.<sup>129</sup> (Edmond 2014, 194-202)

I have also tried to search for childhood experiences in different care models. Foster care is not common in Turkey; hence, there has not been an adequate number of studies done with children about this care model. However, across the world, there have been many studies with regard to the experiences of children in the foster care system.

Cas O'Neill's (2004) work on foster care consisted of 8 participants. Interestingly, there were similarities between my field experiences and observations. The article stresses the importance of maintaining relations with the biological family as well as analyzes the conception of family and family life. O'Neill put forward that no matter how negative experiences they have with their biological parents, it is important for children to narrate their history through their family. It was the same in my field as well. Some children who have gone through serious adversities try to maintain their relations with their families.<sup>130</sup>

Hanne Warming (2006) also focuses on the experiences of children in foster care. The study is done with the Børnetinget project and gives deeper knowledge on the idea of participation of children in decision-making and the outputs of doing qualitative research with children in foster care. Very importantly, Warming puts forward the idea that as children in foster care, through their narratives from personal interviews, the ways in which the social construction of childhood arises can be detected and analyzed. Since the focus is on participation, one key finding that Warming reached was how

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<sup>129</sup> Ruth Edmond, "Longing to Belong: Children in Residential Care and Their Experiences of Peer Relationships at School and in the Children's Home," *Child and Family Social Work* 19 (2014): 194-202.

<sup>130</sup> Cas O'Neill, "'I Remember the First Time I Went into Foster Care It's a Long Story...': Children, Permanent Parents and Other Supportive Adults Talk About the Experience of Moving from One Family to Another," *Journal of Family Studies* 10, no.2 (2004): 205-219.

foster children wish to be legally recognized. One conceptualization of being recognized for foster children was taking part and being valued.<sup>131</sup>

Surprisingly, there was no ethnographic study with a participant observation design, nor was there any study with children in residential care with in-depth interviews. Although the methodologies are qualitative, they are done through questionnaires or structured, semi-structured interviews. On the other hand, children's homes or any other residential care model is very complex. I believe this thesis project will contribute to the study of the sociology of childhood because it uses participant observation as well as in-depth interviews to understand the cultural politics of childhood with regard to space and place and how it reflects on the daily lives of children. In addition to this, the theoretical framework is a strength of this project. Children's homes, in terms of their operation, are highly institutional, hierarchical, and structural care models, even though their name has the word "home" in it. The state has a direct relation to the care model, which makes the analysis even more layered. In order to reach that analysis, I will frame my work in lines of space-place-body theories. It is important to give such a theoretical lineage because children's home, 'as home,' departs from the 'general' idea of home in several ways, yet it still remains a home in the professional language. Hence, the idea of analyzing the concept of 'children's home' as a constructed and constructive space opens the doors for an analysis of space/place-body-culture. Setha Low's 'embodied space' and Erving Goffman's 'stigma' will be used.

### **3.6. Theoretical Framework**

My intention in writing this thesis project is to provide insights into children's experiences in children's homes and investigate how the cultural politics of childhood could be examined. The analysis thus far has delved into the UNCRC and Turkish Law, which regulate the concept of 'child' and shape childhood experiences. The crux of the thesis project, however, lies in examining the concept of 'home.' The study will draw on theories of space, place, subject, and culture, with a particular emphasis on

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<sup>131</sup> Hanne Warming, "How Can You Know? You're Not a Foster Child: Dilemmas and Possibilities of Giving Voice to Children in Foster Care," *Children, Youth and Environments* 16, no.2 (2005): 28-50.

Setha Low's theory of 'embodied space' and Erving Goffman's concept of 'stigma' To illuminate the concept.

Before embarking upon an explication of the intricate interplay between space, place, and the subject, it is imperative to explicate the fundamental distinction between place and space and the intricate relationship between the two. Furthermore, it is essential to investigate how individuals experience place and ascribe meaning to it. Place denotes the tangible environment that individuals encounter in their quotidian lives, whereas space assumes a more metaphoric and semantic position. Whilst the sensory faculties of touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing are utilized when we experience the world around us, there are also other sensory abilities, such as tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive sensations, which are typically the purview of cognitive neurosciences. However, in our daily lives, we experience inner and outer senses within the context of time, space, and place. Therefore, it is untenable to bifurcate the individual from their lived experience of space and place. This ontological conundrum has led to a paradigm called 'embodiment' in the scientific community. The term embodiment and its discourse regarding space and place will be expounded upon after a more comprehensive analysis of these concepts.

There are four theories regarding the relation between space and place: (1) space and place are distinctive entities and have no correlation nor connection between the two; (2) space and place are distinctive entities but have a common ground between them that seems to be overlapping; (3) most commonly used by social scientists is the idea that space comes first then comes the place, meaning “space is the more encompassing construct, while place retains its relevance and meaning but only as a subset of space”; (4) place as the wider encompassing entity in relation to space.<sup>132</sup> Edward Relph (1976) explains the relation between space and place as such:

Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analyzed. Yet, however we feel or know or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general, it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2017): 12.

<sup>133</sup> Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976): 8.

In Relph's understanding, the place comes before, and then space is constructed through the meaning-making process of places. Then, he argues that place is more encompassing, and without its existence, we cannot talk about space. Relph contributes to an uncommon way of thinking about space/place. Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) introduces the humanistic perspective regarding space and place. His conceptualization stems from the humans' understanding and feelings towards space and place; hence, he starts his analysis from the individual. He states, "Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning."<sup>134</sup> The humanistic perspective, therefore, primarily aims to understand humans from many contexts without falling into reductionism. According to Tuan, "The study of space, from the humanistic perspective, is the study of a people's feelings and ideas in the stream of experience."<sup>135</sup> To conceptualize various experiences of space and place, he proposes personal experiential space, group experiential space, mythical-conceptual space, places as public symbols, and places as fields of care.<sup>136</sup> For the theoretical framework of this project, I believe the conception of mythical-conceptual space would be most fitting. According to Tuan, mythical conceptual space represents a greater space where the human experiences space as itself. It means that the mythical conceptual space includes the world at large and how that type of space is "the product of the generalizing mind."<sup>137</sup> Home, in this sense, falls into the mythical conceptual space because it speaks to "the abstract structure of the world."<sup>138</sup> I want the reader to consider the concept of home as a space that stems from the lived experience of home as a place, influenced by the structure of the world that entails economy, politics, and culture. One example could be given to the idea of legal adjustments regarding family that affect the idea of home. Or we can talk about migration and diaspora in relation to it. For my study, however, children's home as a mythical-conceptual space means that as children experience their childhoods in an institutional setting that is called 'home,' the conceptualization of home inside the world system structures affects their experiences. So, I am talking about a two-way

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<sup>134</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," in *Philosophy in Geography*, ed. Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979): 387.

<sup>135</sup> Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," 388.

<sup>136</sup> Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," 400-404.

<sup>137</sup> Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," 404.

<sup>138</sup> Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," 404.

relation in which children make meaning and understand from their lived experience within a confined place that is called home and how the generalized knowledge of children's home as a space defines the place itself and the individuals experiencing it. Right at this moment of conceptualization, I would like to bring Setha Low's (2017) conception of "embodied space" from her book *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. The importance of her concept of embodied space lies in the fact that it helps the anthropologist to put the body inside the space and place discussions as well as recognize the subject and object positions of the body in space and culture. According to Low:

The conceptual frame of "embodied space" integrates body/space/culture and connects microanalyses of individual bodies and place-making to macro-analyses of social, economic, and political forces. Embodied space addresses both the experiential and material aspects of the body in space as well as the merging of body/space as a location that can communicate, transform and contest existing social structures ... Embodied space draws these disparate notions together. It underscores the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience and as a center of agency – a location for speaking and acting on the world.<sup>139</sup>

Through her analysis, the subject becomes the product of space as well as the producer of it. In my study, the concept of the "children's home" is considered an embodied space for childhood experiences. The term "embodied" refers to the notion that the reality of the children's homes is carried within an individual's lifetime, regardless of temporality and spatiality. It is an embodied space because, first, children themselves experience the children's home as a lived space within; second, children's homes have a unique operation in which politics and culture are involved; third, it is an embodied space because this embodiment is also felt when the individual walks out of children's home and is encountering the wide society through its cultural 'normality.' Children's homes are embodied spaces because the meaning they carry within the home as a lived place 'inside' and a lived space 'outside' requires some tactics and techniques for the body to act and feel in certain ways. The body as a part of the analysis of *em'bodi'ment* of space is important because it embodies something involved within the 'body.' However, then, what is the relation of the body to all of this? "The space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations,

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<sup>139</sup> Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, 94.

and cultural predispositions.”<sup>140</sup> Then, the embodiment of space is not only about the feelings, thoughts, and lived experiences within that certain place; it is a sense of self. If I embody the space, I carry a sense of myself in that particular place and time that will become the space in my body. Psychologists mainly call this phenomenon ‘place-identity.’ In a way, I carry the place-identity as a constructed space in me that involves emotions, feelings, discourses, social norms, and cultural beliefs. “We experience not only the physical realities, for example, of the particular neighborhood we grew up in but also the social meanings and beliefs attached to it by those - who live outside of it as well as its residents. All of these ‘cognitions’ define the person’s place- identity.”<sup>141</sup> The idea of place-identity resonates with the identity of space embodiment. Even though when psychological explanations in tone see the individual as the only source of feeling and experience, I would argue that culture defining such spaces influences the way we ‘wear’ our place identities. This explanation is parallel to the observations I have made in the field. When a place is defined on the margins of ‘normality’ with all due respect to societal norms, then the identities of individuals have to make up in that particular place are influenced by it. To explain it better, I will present an example. Living in children’s homes is marginal; it deviates from the ‘normal’ or ‘common.’ When the lack of normality is encountered, stigma becomes inevitable not only in the experiences of relations between subjects and groups but also between the relation of ‘I’ and ‘Me.’ Since the discourse and limits that define children’s homes entail the stereotype of ‘the margins,’ the self as I and I are in a constant dilemma of feeling ‘the marginal being’ and trying to fit into the general society with such an identity that feeds from the place-identity or- embodied space, then, children’s home as an embodied space becomes the source of identity -I would warn the reader that this does not mean it is the only source but one of the varying sources- which defines the relation ‘I’ has with ‘me’ as well as ‘I’ has with the society, and the relation society has with ‘Him/Her.’ Culture, space/place, and body operate onto, in between, and into each other through interconnected and interrelated pathways.

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<sup>140</sup> Setha Low, and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, "Locating Culture," in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003): 2.

<sup>141</sup> Harold Proshansky, Abbe Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff, "Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self, " *The People, Place and Space Reader* in, ed. Jen Jack Gieseeking, William Mangold, Cindi Katz, Setha Low, and Suan Saegert, (New York: Routledge: 2014): 77-78.

It is crucial to introduce the concept of stigma when we discuss ‘normality’ and ‘marginality’ are discussed. Erving Goffman is one of the preliminary theorists who analyzed and theorized the concept. In his view, stigma has a ‘different attribute’ when compared to the general society.

While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind—in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma,...

In the body of the individual, the ‘difference’ and its visibility are important for the cause of and exposure to stigma. Through the visibility of difference, the other can see and conceptualize the difference in the body and hence can stigmatize the individual. Goffman (2006) also mentions different types of stigmas: “abominations of the body are the various physical deformities, blemishes of individual character” which are undesirable, “these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior” and lastly there are “the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion.”<sup>143</sup> Let us consider deviance with an invisible attribute form such as a mental health problem or, in our case, living in a children’s home. When one lives in a children’s home, it can be kept as a secret since it is a deviance from normality; then, the outer world would not see the ‘deviance’ since it is not on the physical surface of the body. However, if the subject tries to hide the deviance from the majority more and more, then we can argue that the body is trying to protect itself from the ‘possibility of stigma.’ Because if such a possibility of stigma comes true, the body will be exposed to certain discourses, affections, and attributes that are qualified with the stigma at hand—stereotype. The issue of stigma entails power relations of subjects interacting with each other, and the idea of deviance in relation to space and place can be the source of stigmatization and stereotyping. The examples of exposure to stigma will be discussed in the next chapter with field observations and in-depth interviews.

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<sup>142</sup> Erving Goffman, "Selections From Stigma," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006): 131.

<sup>143</sup> Goffman, "Selections From Stigma," 132.

In order to grasp and analyze the cultural politics of childhood in children's homes - or the cultural determinants of childhood experiences in residential care – it is vital to analyze place/space with respect to subject and culture. Because, through lived place and constructed space, the body becomes a trajectory in which the object and subject positions can be discussed. The body becomes active and passive at the same time. The discursive practices defining the space define the body living in that space through the processes of embodiment– or place identity inevitably. Then, the place identity is performed inside and outside children's homes in various ways. For the following chapters, I have separated life at home from the outside in order to understand how children's home is embodied and how children perform this embodiment throughout their lives. It may seem to the reader that such differentiation produces an in/out dichotomy, but the main idea beneath is to analyze home as an embodied space and how this embodiment reflects itself in the life course of children living in children's homes.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

In tracing the historical trajectory of social work and child protection in Turkey, this chapter has presented a comprehensive overview that spans from the early Turkic states to the modern era. Charities were always on the agenda of Turkic states until the Ottoman Empire, and it continued to the Republican era. With the formation of the modern state, social services gained a bureaucratic and institutional nature, starting with the Tanzimat era. Many institutions at the time were founded, and they became the seeds of modern social service institutions. With the globalization of the modern world, UNCRC made its influence felt in many geographies, including Turkey. Legal regulations made UNCRC's influence visible, not only in legal proceedings but also in daily life perceptions of children and childhood. From there, I have examined different care practices regarding children and how these care models evolved over time. Before, there were dormitory types of residential models in which the number of children was many, but then, at the start of the 2000s, this model evolved to a more home-like environment where fewer children were cared for and protected.

The second part of the chapter focused on UNCRC and how the Convention's articles are born out of Enlightenment ideas shaping the modern understanding of childhood.

With UNCRC, the world now focuses on a globalized and universalized concept of childhood, and each state signing the convention has regulated its legal proceedings according to the convention's principles. By examining certain articles of the Convention, my aim was to show how a different concept of childhood was born out of a legal document in which children were seen as actors on their own, having specific rights and identities and claiming the right to be heard. However, the "best interest" principle brings the question of cultural determinants, which influence the views regarding what is in the best interest and how it can be provided for children in different localities. Fundamentally, UNCRC not only serves as a legal document but also enjoys a position in academic studies as well as in the daily lives of individuals. By recognizing children as individuals with their own rights, the Convention feeds the paradigm shift in the conception of childhood.

When we consider the legal regulations on child protection and care in Turkey, one of the words we come across frequently is the word *disadvantage*. Defining children under protection and care with this word produces such discourses among the legal professions and regulations, but it also produces a discourse in social trajectory. From there, I have analyzed the legal codes in the Turkish Constitution to see how childhood is constructed in the legal sphere and its reflections on the daily lives of individuals. These legal codes not only define the individual child and the concept of childhood in general but also, with the Law of Social Services, how children under protection and care are defined. From there, the legal codes also regulate the daily lives of children in children's homes by bringing certain routines and events into their lives, including education, religion, and national holiday celebrations. From here, we can say that cultural politics and legal documents enter children's lives and not only shape and reshape their lives now, but it becomes something to shape their futures as well. The legal principle of the age of eighteen is one of those regulations. Then, we can conclude that childhood is a social construction, having its roots in the cultural determinants of society, which makes us arrive at the idea of cultural politics of childhood.

I was surprised when I saw the studies done in the context of Turkey with children living in residential care. The number of studies that used qualitative research methods was low, and there was no comprehensive ethnographic study. Despite this fact, I have categorized the literature review into two: studies focusing on the lives of children who

are currently living in residential care and studies focusing on life after children's home, examining the experiences of individuals. I have also included a literature review from different geographies around the world in order to provide a cross-cultural analysis.

The last part of the chapter puts forward my theoretical framework. Until this part, the analysis mainly focused on how regulatory frameworks such as the Convention and the Turkish Constitution shape the definition of a child and childhood. But, with this part, I introduce how living in children's homes shapes the experiences and construction of childhood for children living in residential care. I have anchored the concept of *home*, and from there, I have moved to the theories of space and place, arguing children's homes become embodied spaces both in and outside the home. Specifically, the theories of 'embodied space' by Setha Low and 'stigma' by Erving Goffman have been helpful for me in understanding and analyzing the dynamics of everyday life for children living in residential care.

## CHAPTER IV

### LIFE AT HOME

*"I was waiting at the door, rang the bell. Excited I am, a girl opened the door. She wore a pink sweatshirt and sweatpants. She had dark brown hair with bangs on her face and tied her hair on her back. She saw me, and she started yelling to a lady inside: "Derya Abla! There's a strange abla at the door." She went inside. Derya came and let me in. As I walked through the entrance, the kitchen was on the left; there was a woman sitting on the kitchen diner and writing something. The living room was next to the door. I was welcomed there. Blue armchairs, a TV, and four kids."*<sup>144</sup>

#### 4.1. Introduction

Children's homes in Turkey could be tied to only a Children's Home Coordination Center, or a children's home could be supported by a non-governmental association that signs a protocol with the ministry. When the children's home is tied to an association, children interact with not only the staff from the institution but also staff from the association. When a decision has to be made regarding the children's home, the ideas of the association's staff would be considered, but the final decision would be made by the staff of the coordination center since they are responsible legally for all the procedures of children's home. So, the staff from associations would give consultation and advice, and if it is suitable for the institutional staff, the decision would be made accordingly.

This chapter is about the association's and institution's procedural activities. Since children's homes are not family homes nor formal institutions entirely, their procedures have different effects on children. It is home, but it is an institution. Firstly, this chapter will examine the concept of 'home' and how children's homes can be conceptualized with regard to it. Thinking of 'home' as a place and a space is vital for

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<sup>144</sup> Personal observations from the fieldwork in Istanbul.

analyzing children's embodied practices. I will focus on home 'inside' in this part – what it means to carry 'home' outside will be discussed in the next chapter. The second part of the chapter will focus on the general operations and daily life practices in children's homes. In this part, I will give detailed accounts of how the institutional procedures are understood and how meaning is constructed in children's dialogues. The last part examines a particular procedure within residential care: "placement." It is a fundamental aspect because placements between children's homes and across other residential settings affect the way children experience and perceive children's homes, the social staff, and the coordination center.

#### **4.2. Where is Home?**

What is home? Is it a house? A dwelling? A shelter? Where is home? Is it only a physical location where people go out each morning and return each evening? Who stays in a home? All of these questions are crucial to understanding the idea of home in the face of culture. I will start with myself; when I say home, I think of a family living inside, either having children or not. Moreover, I think of a student's home where several students stay while studying college. I think of a place devoid of surveillance and public scrutiny, somewhere private. Home resonates with coziness, security, being with others, and having a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. The physical organization connotes with the verb 'living.' However, living is not only between our relations with tangible physicality nor tangible objects; living also entails interrelationality with people, feeling senses and emotions, and thinking of thoughts.

It is reasonable to start the discussion by explaining two terms that are used interchangeably in the English language: home and house. Even though I will point out the theoretical difference between them, it is important for the reader to know that in the Turkish language, there are not two words describing what is called 'ev.' So, 'ev' is both the home and the house. There is no separation in between. For the English language, home and house refer to different things. "Although a house is an object, a part of the environment, home is best conceived of as a kind of relationship between

people and their environment.”<sup>145</sup> So, as the house is the physical environment in which objects exist in the locality of the house, home is the totality of relations where feelings, emotions, thoughts, and interactions come into existence. “Home is often described in the literature as a haven or refuge.”<sup>146</sup> So home is a place where the bodies find comfort, a sense of security, and tranquility. However, this view of home as a refuge stems from the idea that home as a physical and lived space separates the individual from the public space, such as work or crowds that people encounter daily.<sup>147</sup> The distinctiveness of home as a space that is private and away from public scrutiny or public space is very much a modern conceptualization of home in a modern world. Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory, and Linda Mckie emphasize how home is seen and produced as a space away from public life and how it is constructed through politics as well. They claimed that

The notion of the home as a physical location and a psychological concept is often a positive one of warmth, security, and a haven from the pressures of paid employment and public life. Media images and political discourse take it for granted that "a home" is something we all desire. However, the home is also a site for the creation and operation of inequitable relations that can be expressed in psychological tensions and violence. A concept of home often is employed by governments as a bounded and clearly demarcated space for safeguarding "family life" and the promotion of national identity and nationalism. In this context, the haven of "home" and "homeland" are spaces from which undesirables - those who do not conform - are excluded.<sup>148</sup>

As home is both a physical location and a lived experience, including the daily practices of individuals, home as a space is also a contest for power relations, identity, and the production of media. Society produces ideas and imageries of home that come into being as a normality. Who lives at home, who does what at home as much as micro-politics but refers to macro-politics through its organization by institutions and reproduction by specific means. Home, then, is both a lived place and a produced space by individuals, institutions, and culture. Then, what makes a house ‘a home’ is also produced and culturally defined.

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<sup>145</sup> Kimberly Dovey, "Home and Homelessness," in *Home Environments*, ed. Irwin Altman and Carol Werner, (New York: Plenum Press, 1985): 34.

<sup>146</sup> Shelley Mallet, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of The Literature," *The Sociological Review*, 52, no.1 (2004): 70.

<sup>147</sup> Mallet, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of The Literature," 71.

<sup>148</sup> Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory, and Linda Mckie, "'Doing Home': Patriarchy, Caring and Space," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no.3 (1997): 343.

Let us turn to the interplay between the body, culture, and home as a space. The culturally defined nature of 'home,' when combined with the notion of space, brings us to the analysis that the body, through its experience at home, encounters an embodied space. Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006), while conceptualizing home as an entity where feelings and lived experiences come alive, pinpoint those "feelings, ideas and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial" and, as a result, "home is thus a spatial imaginary: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places."<sup>149</sup> Home in their conceptualization has a wider tone that links home and society and other spaces and places to each other. The properties of home as space must be detailed to get deeper into the analysis. Kimberley Dovey defines properties of home: (1) home as order -spatial, temporal, and sociocultural; (2) home as identity – a temporal identity; and (3) home as connectedness.<sup>150</sup> What she describes are about the subject, the space, interrelations, and the culture. Home as an order is about the subject's state of being at/in a home, and the spatial character of order is about spatial orientation between the objects and other subjects. The temporal character is about the past and future that links the past experience of place into the current moment as well as reflecting onto the future, and the sociocultural character revolves around "cultural beliefs and social practices."<sup>151</sup> The first property of home as a space refers to home as a lived place where individuals spatially, temporally, and socioculturally live. The second property Dovey mentions is the link between the subjective self-identity and space. She states that:

...the phenomenon of home is more than the experience of being oriented within a familiar order; it also means to be identified with the place in which we dwell. Although home as the order has a strong cognitive element, home as identity is primarily affective and emotional, reflecting the adage that home is where the heart is. Identity implies a certain bonding or mergence of person and place such that the place takes its identity from the dweller and the dweller takes his or her identity from the place. There is an integrity, a connectedness between the dweller and dwelling. Home as order and as identity are strongly interrelated; yet whereas order is concerned with "where" we are at home, identity broaches the questions of "who" we are, as expressed in the home, and "how" we are at home.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Alison Blunt, and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006): 2.

<sup>150</sup> Dovey, "Home and Homelessness," 33-64.

<sup>151</sup> Dovey, "Home and Homelessness," 36-37.

<sup>152</sup> Dovey, "Home and Homelessness," 40.

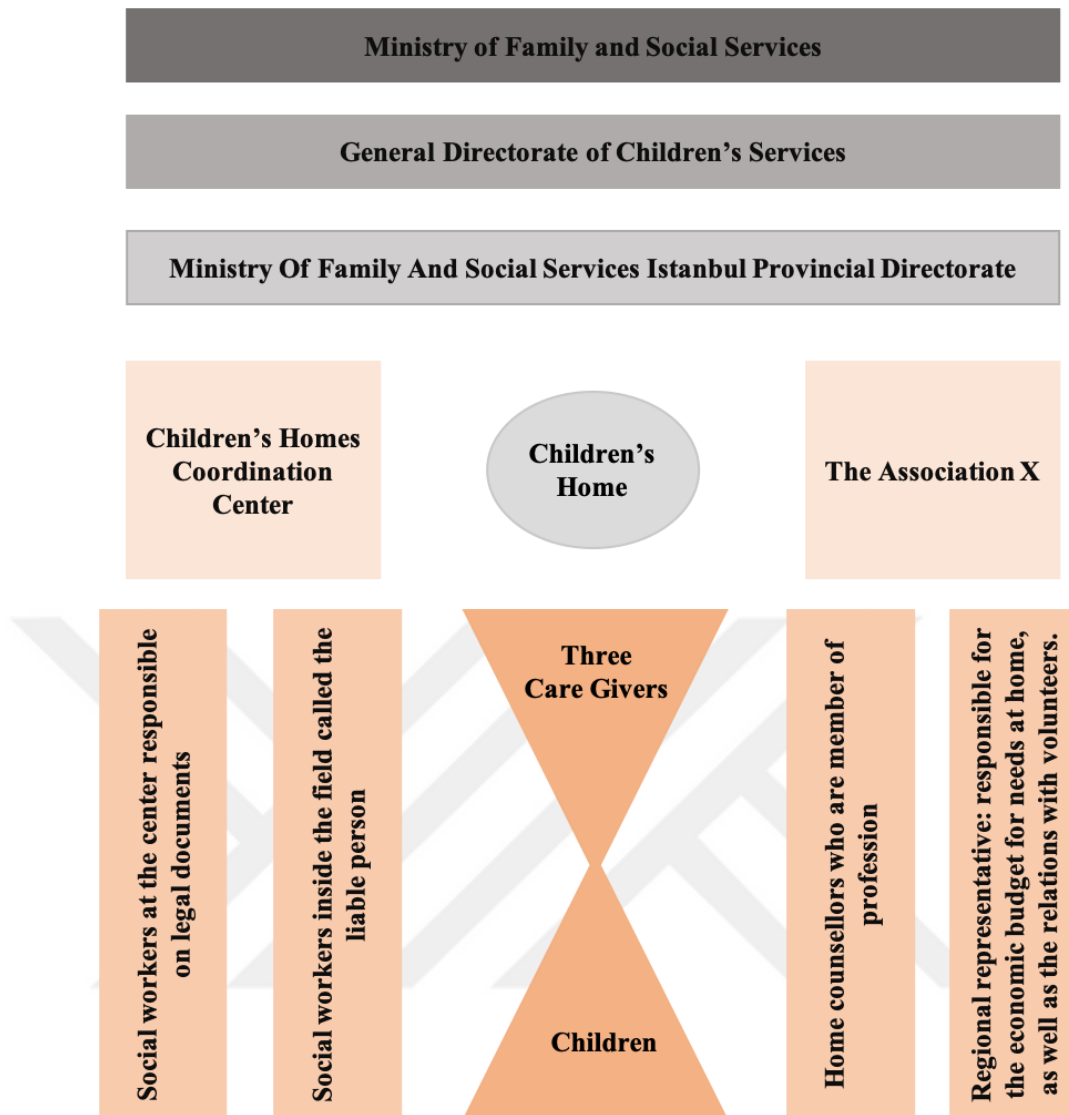
Home as an identity of the dweller and the dwell as the cornerstone of the dweller's identity is crucial for this project. "Home as a place and an imaginary constitutes identities – people's senses of themselves are related to and produced through lived and imaginative experiences of home."<sup>153</sup> Home as a space becomes a subject and object experience of the body. This line of definition is what the term 'embodied space' would like to give. As I have put forward in Chapter 3, embodiment also entails the subject - not a passive one; on the contrary, an active subject that has agency over the space it embodies. The two-way relationship of home as a source of identity and identity of the subject as the defining source of the dweller refers to the main problem of 'embodied space.'

#### **4.3. General Operation Inside Children's Homes, Discourses, and the Construction of a Culture**

As I have explained before, Children's Home include many interpersonal relations and institutional relations. In my field study, the children were in direct relation with both the government's institution of Children's Homes Coordination Center and The Association X. Through these two distinct but working together entities; children were interacting with various adults of various statuses. To visualize the bureaucratic, hierarchical structure of the children's home and institutions, I present a diagram.

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<sup>153</sup> Blunt, and Dowling, *Home*, 24.



**Figure 4.1. Institutions in Relation to Children's Home and Their Hierarchical Structure**

The diagram is crucial to understanding the relations of institutions with one another and the relations of the staff with one another and children. In this sense, the staff at the coordination center works with the ones in the association. Both are in touch with the children and caregivers. At the top of the structure and above the coordination center and the association, hierarchically, there are three institutions. The crucial thing is to comprehend how the relations are operating, what the practices that shape operation are, and how they reflect upon the cultural politics of childhood. The liable person is a member of the profession attained by the government and holds every legal responsibility of children. Generally, one liable person is responsible for three different children's homes. However, this might change according to the circumstances in the

coordination center and children's homes. The liable person is in charge of the general operation of the children's home. They need to organize caregivers and children. The caregivers are responsible for 24-hour shifts with children at home. During their shifts, they have responsibilities: cleaning, cooking, spending time with children, helping children with their homework, assuring each child's safety and health routines, when in need visiting children's school, seeing their teacher, when in need taking the children to the hospital, filling the daily legal documents. The liable person must attend the health appointments. While the liable person could meet the needs of the home and children by him/herself, she/he can organize the circumstances for meeting the need. As the liable person organizes the caregivers and gathers them in a common point of view, he/she also has to check and supervise them on their relations with children, how they cook, clean, and shop with the quarters allowance given by the state ideally. If there are faults in such practices, then the liable person has to fix them and report them to the coordination center. The liable person must visit children's homes frequently when children are at home and not. They are expected to spend quality time with children and establish a mutual relationship with them. The home counselors work side by side with the liable persons to check and supervise the relations of caregivers with the children. For the general operation of homes, the home counselors can give advice based on the individual needs of children. Home counselors are responsible for following the psycho-social statuses of children and have to report each child's situation to the association. In terms of operation and legal responsibilities, home counselors do not enjoy a legal 'power' over the inspection of the caregivers and the general process at children's homes. This is basically the relationship between adults who work in children's homes.

Each month, a meeting is held in each home to discuss and notify the new decisions made in the coordination center. So, the liable person introduces the decisions and gives information on how to make them operate. Home counselors, three caregivers, the regional representative, and the liable person are all expected to join the meeting held at home. The monthly agenda of each meeting is first the new decisions, the general situations at home, the relations of children among themselves and the psychological and social situation and problems that each children face and what would be the solutions for it. For children, the meaning of these meetings is not the same as the social worker's understanding and operation. For them, the purpose of

meetings meant something else: ‘gossip’. They view the meeting as the time when adults come together and gossip about them and their behaviors; through the eyes of children, caregivers were complaining about them. The meeting meant new rules, new restrictions for the children even though the same rules continued. We were to attend to a morning meeting at one children’s home where girls above the age 12 were staying. The eldest girl at home, she was about to leave home for school. She came into the living room to say goodbye and while she was walking out the door she said: “Have nice gossips about us.” And then she left.<sup>154</sup> So, for children in a sense the meeting meant the monitoring of their behaviors and collectively discussion about it. When you gossip about someone, the person you are gossiping about becomes an object from the subject of position. Because that person is subjected to the object position of the discourses the gossipers are constructing. From this point of view, rather than being the object of discussion can be emphasized as the perception of children towards the meeting. Because as children living in residential care, they know they are under the protection of the state, and the social workers who are adults. Their childhood is experienced in relation to the politics of human interpersonal relations where they have to be able to perform in daily life. ‘Gossip’ inside the meetings was one of the politics of interrelations they have constructed. Interestingly, the discourse of ‘gossip’ was common among the other children’s home. Mainly it was used in children’s homes where ages were above eleven or twelve. From this point of view, it can be said that it was part of their peer culture of living in residential care. Because all children are subjected to the meetings held, all meetings included the details of monthly situations of children’s home and guess what who is living inside those homes, children themselves. As they produce this discourse, they also construct their own childhoods.

Another important operation at children’s homes is the official reports regarding to the unexpected events and circumstances that appear in children’s home. For example, if a child falls down and hurt his/her knees while playing in the garden, the care giver has to write an official report with the notice of liable person and hand over it to the coordination center where each official report is collected in each children’s document. This was not only for injuries but also for misbehaviors of children, the care giver is expected to write it down and hand it over to the coordination center. There are

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<sup>154</sup> Personal observation from the field in Istanbul.

instances where some children escape from home or come home later than the time that is defined or refuse to take their medications. Sometimes the official reports are written when there is a big fight between children. Also, sometimes when there is theft at home and the common money of the children's home is less than the official report is written. In terms of power relations and governmentality, the official report means lots of things. Each child knows that the official reports written about them when they misbehave are recorded and kept in the documents that their names are written on. It is as if the history record of a child. So, when a child is transferred to a new children's home, or to a different residential care model, the child is introduced there through her documentation which adults read and have an information and knowledge on the child. Only an adult could write an official report about a child and only an adult could read it. In this sense, when we look at this case from a Foucauldian perspective, the records of the official reports are a form of surveillance for children living in residential care. It is a form of biopolitics in which when your behavior is once written on the report, you know when you conduct the same behavior, it will be written again. And generally, those actions and behaviors which are regarded as negative for the children's home are written. In order for a child not to have a thick folder, the official reports must be less in number which means controlling one's behaviors in accordance with the rules and regulations of a children's home. Each child complains about the official report. It is used as a means of discipline; it is directed towards the behavior of theirs. There is not only the gaze of adults who are watching their behaviors but also knowing the gazes of an official report mentally reinforces itself on to the subject. It becomes one of the features of their childhood. The children I spoke to about the issue of the official report said that how care givers sometimes use the discourse of official report in order to discipline their behaviors. Some children fear from it, some are not. Because as a children's official reports pile up with 'inappropriate behaviors in children's home' and the child is not eligible to continue to be cared inside the children's home model due to her behaviors and relations with adults and other children, that child is transferred to another residential care model. One time, while we were sitting and talking about the children's home, the institution and the association with children in children's home, Gizem (16) said;

It feels like the institution does not care about us; it threatens us with sending us to ÇODEM. At first, I was scared from these conversations but then I started not caring

about it. But it feels like we are objects which the institution could easily change our locations from one place to another, therefore I do not feel close to the institution.<sup>155</sup>

The idea of being easily removed from one's place with the approval of an institution is in the eyes of the children could be read as objectification of their embodiments. However, in my field, even though children would be threatened to be transferred to ÇODEM, the institution would not do it, or if they do it, it would first be the best interest for other children at home as well as the last solution for the crisis in children's home. But the threats of transferring children to another residential care model is a form of disciplining their bodies, behaviors, attitudes. On the other hand, children are subjected to such power dynamic, the knowledge of such places as produced over and over again becomes a part of their lives and their culture. There are different residential care models which are recognized in big fonts. Such as ÇODEM<sup>156</sup> or ÇOGEM<sup>157</sup> Because for each of the two residential cares, the profile of children is defined as children who are forced to commit a crime. Those children from the point of views of both social workers are more 'problematic' in terms of their behaviors, education and morals.

Relations are also crucial part of the children living in residential care. Relations among them and relations they build with the adults are also defining characteristics of power dynamics. However, it would be unjust to only read the relationships through the perspective of power because children when they bound with the care givers, the liable persons as well as the home counsellors, find a good resource of support. The crucial thing here is that how each individual adult in the setting approaches to the children. If the children felt understood by the others and feel that their ideas and comments are important, then we can talk about balancing the power relations at home. In addition to this, the friendships they form in children's homes are crucial to the development of their social capital as well. Because the dual nature of representing themselves in public and at home sometimes creates an ambivalence for them. At school, you present a different history but when you come home you experience similar childhoods with other children at children's home.

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<sup>155</sup> Personel interview with Gizem in Istanbul on July 23rd, 2023.

<sup>156</sup> ÇODEM, Çocuk Destek Merkezi, Child Supportive Center

<sup>157</sup> ÇOGEM, Çocuk ve Gençlik Merkezi, Child and Youth Center

So, among children they have their understanding of regulations and policies with regards to the decisions they are subjected to. Through the articulation of children's discourses among themselves, they also produce a peer culture among them as well as they produce the construction of their childhoods through their discourses. It is a two-way analysis, both the structure of childhood which comprises of the policies, regulations, interrelations in residential care construct childhood as well as the social actions of children construct childhood, and it is in relation to one another.

#### **4.4. Placements**

One of the key issues for residential care is the phenomenon of instability. *Placement* is the term that is used for the phenomenon of instability. Placement and replacement means the changes in the shift of caregivers from one home to another, or replacement of one social worker with another, and placement-replacement of children from one home to another. I will give several examples: a caregiver working in children's home A, might get a change in her shift to children's home B: A child named Naciye living in children's home X might be placed into the children's home Y; a liable person who is 'in charge' of children's home W, could be attained to children's home Z. Sometimes these placements are done in the purpose of temporal solutions and remains as temporal when thinks 'go back to general operation'. However, constantly being in the system, which forces one to encounter shifts and changes in relationships and places, forms a sense of instability. Children living in children's homes are subjected to the constant flow of people as well as replacements of themselves, of their physical environment, of their school, of the people they have built a connection with. When I started working in the field, it was difficult for them to get used to a new face and each time, they made it visible by saying to me: "You will never be like Rumeysa Hoca." Rumeysa Hoca was the former psychologist and home counsellor of the association. In a conversation with 15 years old Asiye, she admitted this to me in the following words:

*"When Rumeysa Hoca left, I was first mad at her. Why would she leave. Then you came and I felt angry to you. Because it felt like you were trying to take her place. Then I got used to it. It is always what happens. We get used to someone, but we know*

*that person is not going to be stable, he/she will leave as well. It is the same for caregivers, the liable persons too. I have lived with many different care givers.*"<sup>158</sup>

For these children, losing social bonds is a part of the childhood that they are living. Since they are not living with a family that parents and other children are stable over the years, and not replaced with some other individuals, their experiences of a home differ, and they face with the reality of losing their loved ones. Their emotions are also embodied in this sense. From their perspectives, replacements are something they got used to. Bahar (14) also made a similar comment on this:

*"When you are little, it is difficult to get used to it. I am here since the age of 5. At first, losing the care givers whom you feel comfortable with is disturbing. But as you grow older you get used to it. And I know, you will not be stable as well, you will go too."*<sup>159</sup>

In the face of replacements, if they have not transferred to another residential care model, children are the ones who are stable and behind. Even when we consider the fact that each caregiver is responsible for the twenty-hour shift. If Hayriye finishes her shift next day, Mücella comes the day after Nebahat. But the constant stability in the system is children living at home. There is also the idea of saying goodbye to your relations since the system requires doing so. Being the ones who are 'left behind' or who are stable is another cultural politics of childhood.

Replacements are a crucial issue for residential care. Because if a child does not fit into a home, and that home's environment and children are not good for her, then based on the 'best interest principle' the child is transferred to a new home. The best interest principle enters the stage when the child harms herself or others at home. In these circumstances, children's ideas are not taken but adults intervene and decide on what the child needs and what would be best for her/him. What is important here is how children practice their action regarding replacements. They have the right to ask for replacements themselves. Then, the liable person takes into consideration and informs the coordination center to see which homes are available for replacement.

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<sup>158</sup> Personal interview with Asiye in Istanbul on August 18th 2022.

<sup>159</sup> Personal interview with Bahar in Istanbul on August 15th 2022.

16 years-old Ayşen was escaping from her home constantly. She said she wanted a replacement from her liable person but, there was not a suitable home for her. In our conversations, she said she prefers escaping than to live in that home. In addition, in her view, escaping from home is a way of resistance to this issue. She takes action in order to make her expectations come true. Her resistant agency is reflected in her discourses: "He did not change my home, so I decided to run away. I cannot stay at that home one more day. I had enough of the people there."<sup>160</sup> Days after, when there was a suitable home, she was replaced, and she did not act upon escaping. Other example is 14-years-old Bahar. When she was bullied by another child at her home, despite her best friend's presence she wanted to be replaced. The liable person considered this issue and there was a suitable home for her, so she was relocated in another children's home.<sup>161</sup>

So, sometimes replacements are negative experiences of children when it is not in their control, and sometimes it is a wish for children. They have a right to say what they want to say. However crucially, rather than having that right, the capacity to act upon it is much more critical. Acting upon for some, like Ayşen, meant to escape; for some, like Bahar, it meant waiting to be replaced.

Much can be said when we consider 're/placement' with respect to space and place. In a home where a constant flow of people and children is the norm, the idea of place, as well as relations within place, are defined by its temporariness. As it has been stated:

To be always on the move is, of course, to lose place, to be placeless and have, instead, merely scenes and images. A scene may be of a place but the scene itself is not a place. It lacks stability: it is in the nature of a scene to shift with every change of perspective.<sup>162</sup>

While children in children's homes were constantly aware of sudden re-placements of caregivers, other children and the self, their view towards the world becomes a part of this temporary culture. When we started to build a deeper connection within the field, Meryem told me:

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<sup>160</sup> Personal interview with Ayşen in Istanbul on October 27th 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Personal observation in the field on June 19th 2022.

<sup>162</sup> Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," 411.

*“I know you will go as well, this is what happens, when I was little I wanted to stay with Merve Mom but they took her away and gave her to another children’s home. Then, Kübra abla entered my life, I love her so much and then they took her as well and appoint her with a different home. Now, you came, and I know you will go too.”<sup>163</sup>*

Constantly living in a system whose main characteristic is the temporality of places, people and the relation between, it is inevitable to look at the people that one newly meets as someone to come and go.

It is fair to say that the experiences of children in children’s homes and the culture of the system are one of the determinants of the construction of their childhood. They are bounded by certain interrelationships in each decision that is made about them. Sometimes, they enjoy a subject position through social actions and practices of daily life, but sometimes, they enjoy the object position when adults on behalf of them decide about them. The very culture of the system of children’s homes through professional relations, legal practices and replacements are big titles under the cultural politics of childhood for children living in children’s homes.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

We as individuals experience our physical surroundings in physical, social, political and emotional aspects. The dynamic relation between space and place is instrumental for us to understand the way individuals are physically, socially and psychologically experiencing the place itself. In this chapter I analyzed how children’s home as a place turns out to be an embodied space which the place combines with the feelings and experiences, turning it to be a space simultaneously, which then influencing, the way *I* feel about myself, the way *I* view the world, and the way *I* interact with the social trajectory. Through the framework of embodied space, I put forward the idea that home is not solely a physical place but it is also a produced and reproduced space influenced by the cultural determinants, social sphere and subjective experiences of individuals. I argue that home as a concept influenced by cultural, social and individual dynamics,

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<sup>163</sup> Personal interview with Meryem in Istanbul on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2022.

in addition to this it is influencing the representation of self , the subjective identities parallel to the experiences one goes through at home.

Children's home as a space and a place is crucial in these terms. For children in children's home, home as an entity is not something fully a home for them. It is not fully an institution either. It has a complex structure filled with various relations between the care personnel, social workers and the children inside. Hence the experiences in this 'home-like' environment also shaped by the way in which children's home discourse is produced by the culture, political and the social spheres but also this discourse is produced by the sayings and experiences of children living there. What I argue is that children's home as an embodied space, is shaping the way children see their identities, and represent that identity towards the social. Since space is socially constructed, children's home as a constructed and an embodied space is influenced by the cultural politics.

## CHAPTER V

### OUTSIDE "HOME"

*"I had arrived at her school. We had an appointment to hurry up. I ran up to her class. Students were on break. I found the class 8-E and opened the door. My head inside the class and body outside the door, trying to look for her until my eye caught her. Called for her when she did not see me. "Hüsna! I am here, let's go." She was happy to see me. She said, "Okay, I am packing my bags. Wait for a second." I got out of the class, but I was able to hear her, "She is my sister, yes." She came in, and we walked to the school principal's office. I said to the principal, "I needed to take Hüsna, with your permission." He asked, "Who are you? Aha, yeah, you must be from the institution." While I said involuntarily, "Yes, I am." Hüsna's voice was higher than mine when she said, "No, she is my sister." She controlled the room and looked at the faces of other children. She seemed upset with the principal as well as with me. She told me later that no student at her school knows that she lives in a children's home, and she does not want anyone to hear about it."<sup>164</sup>*

#### 5.1. Introduction

When you engage with people who have a marginal lifestyle, you detect the tactics and strategies they develop to integrate themselves into the mainstream community. When you are in a marginal group, you also embody the stereotypes of it in the discursive arena. The discourses revolve independently from you but are inclined to the surface of the very body you are performing; the individual develops strategies. These strategies can be seen as social actions that influence the structure as well as social actions that are influenced by the structure. This chapter analyses how children in children's homes perform themselves in collective places such as school, street, or any other place. The first part of this chapter focuses on the performativity at school through the idea of the 'normal.' Going to school and being inside the classroom with

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<sup>164</sup> Personal observation from the field in Istanbul.

'other' children who have families commonly is one aspect of encountering their childhood experiences in the public sphere. However, most crucially, in addition to this, children in children's homes have a desire to hide their care and protection status at school frequently. They have their own interpretation of why they would like to do this. So, in the first part of the chapter, I will be focusing on how children in children's homes represent themselves.

The second part of the chapter focuses on different examples of encounters in public spaces such as parks, shopping malls, or even streets. Children's encounters with their own children's home aspect are not something they experience only at school; public spaces also remind them of what they have not. In this second part, I will give narrations from children.

The third and last part focuses on Erving Goffman's concept of stigma. Stigma becomes one of the major issues in the lives of children living in children's homes because they are subjected to negative discourses on residential care. The history of residential care and the stereotyping that has been produced and is still being produced puts the children in children's homes to a certain profile of children, which does not have a positive connotation. Therefore, they encounter stigma in many places; sometimes, it is school, and sometimes, it is the workplace when they turn eighteen and start working. This last chapter gives accounts of how children in children's homes are being stigmatized.

## **5.2. Representation of Self in the Face of 'Normality'**

The above opening is only one example of children and their experiences at school. Most of them do not want their residential care status to be known by their friends and teachers at school. It disturbs them. Asude (17) explained this issue as such:

*"I do not want them to know it is not normal. They will ask so many questions about my family, about the place I live. Instead, I say something else, like I live with my family or a relative. But the most disturbing motivation to keep it a secret is that I do not want people to pity me or mercy me. Because I really cannot bear the looks on*

*their faces. Then, they start to become a giver all of a sudden. What hurts the most is that when they give money. I do not want it. I have a pride.*"<sup>165</sup>

Asude's narrative is one explanation for keeping it a secret. For her, the emotional dimension is the most unbearable part of sharing her history and residential care status. She does not define herself as a child to be pitied. In doing so, she tries to detach herself from the greater social actions to which she would be subjected. On the other hand, Bahar (14) looks at the issue from the perspective of the normal. She narrated:

*"Of course, I do not share, because I had experienced it once when I was in primary school. The teacher learned about my residential care status. It was disturbing. I say I live with my friends, and my family is away, providing me with the material sources I need. I mean, imagine you are living with four children with whom you have no blood relation. You wake up with them each day. It is not normal, and I do not want to be seen as a freak".*<sup>166</sup>

According to Bahar's views, the school can be viewed as a place where the gazes of normality are watched over the body of the abnormal. The gaze belongs not only to the 'normal' children who live with their families, fitting into the norms of society, but the gaze also belongs to the 'normal childhoods.' In the existence of normality, defining oneself with abnormality in terms of conditions and circumstances is one form of shaping the identity to include oneself in societal norms and, hence, practicing social action in accordance with it.

This issue is not to be kept a secret for all children. Some children in my field study did not prefer to keep it a secret. However, they mentioned they have faced stigmatization and discourses about it. Safiye (17) was a tempered girl, and she would be involved in fights frequently. She was involved in a fight with another girl at her school one of the days. While they were punching and beating each other, the other student said: "Go back to your orphanage, you orphan! You do not even have a family." Safiye reflected on her emotions as such:

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<sup>165</sup> Personal interview with Asude in Istanbul on July 23rd 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Personal interview with Bahar in Istanbul on August 28th 2022.

*“When she called me as such, I actually wanted to kill her; I could do it, by the way. I mean, we can fight, yes, but using my residential status in such a mocking and derogatory way made me very angry. It is not my fault to live in a children’s home. It is not like I wanted to live here. Nor did I want my parents to die. It is so hurting to hear it in the face of a crisis.”<sup>167</sup>*

Being called an orphan and feeling angry towards the other girl is the explanation Safiye gives in the face of stigma. For stigma to occur, an individual does not have to want a certain deficiency. For stigma, a certain individual just has to carry the deficiency. Stigma, whether it is seen on the surface of the body or learned by visual communication, occurs anyway. This issue can also be read through the power dynamics. The majority of society, since it is the norm and normality, more in number and fitting in with the societal requests, may see in themselves more power to stigmatize those who are the minority and at the margins of society. Normality encountering abnormality finds the discursive resources to stigmatize those who are not like it. Hence, the theme of normality and stigmatization is an important element of the cultural politics of children in residential care.

### **5.3. Public Spaces**

*“One day, 14-year-old Esra came to me and said she needed to talk with me. She did not seem okay; she looked like she was upset at something. I arranged an individual meeting with her. She came to my room in the office. After my long efforts of trying to let her talk and providing a safe environment for her, she started saying: “I did not feel okay today, so I escaped from school because I remembered my family. I escaped school and went to the beach. I sat there alone and listened to some music. I saw a family; the boy was probably two years old. His mom and dad were holding his hands. I never had it. I never know the feeling of family. I never felt it, and I have recognized it at the moment. I had never had such a childhood and wouldn’t have it; at the moment, it was as if my heart sank. That is what I felt.” Her brown eyes were filled with tears, which she was trying to hold back. “You do not have to hold your tears, I said.” She*

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<sup>167</sup> Personal interview with Safiye in Istanbul on May 15th 2022,

*hugged me and cried for a while. All I could do was to remain in silence. Her heart sank, and I witnessed it”.*<sup>168</sup>

Public spaces are a reminder of something. They approve the identities of children living in residential care. Esra’s experience was such that one. When you see what does not belong to you every day in the street, it reminds you of what you do not have. It was the case of Esra and other children as well. One day, we were playing an interactive game in which there were certain social questions. Five children in one children’s home and me. At one of the questions, we started a deeper conversation about families in general. 16 years old Gizem narrated:

*“I think families should not love their children publicly because not everyone has the fortune of having a family. I, myself, will not love my children or show affection to them in public. Because I am sixteen, you know, actually, I am old enough, but still, I have not gotten used to seeing such family scenes. It reminds me of my childhood and family. Since I know what it’s like to have a childhood like this and the feeling when you see a family, I do not want other children who are in similar conditions like mine to feel the same way.”*<sup>169</sup>

The others also nodded their head, showing that they agreed. This is something collectively felt by children living in children’s homes. They are faced with the emotion of longing for something they once had or never had. Which one is worse is not debatable. The issue here is that since you are experiencing a minority type of childhood without your family, you are constantly reminded of what normal childhood is like. As you walk in the park, as you go shopping, or even as you know, the caregivers have children, and their children are experiencing ‘normal childhoods.’ So the constant reminders of norms of family life, as well as constant gazes of the normality, in a way, haunt these children and leave them with a feeling of longing.

To put these themes in the framework of cultural politics of childhood is that since children carry not only the residential care status but all etiquettes and features regarding being the child in residential care, they are subjected to discourses boundless

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<sup>168</sup> Personal observation from the field in Istanbul.

<sup>169</sup> Focus group interview with five children living in the same home in Istanbul on April 23rd 2022.

from time and space. However, at an instance, they are face to face with the possibility of such reminders of being the minority, being not the ‘normal,’ and having not the ‘normal.’ Sometimes, it occurs in the form of stigma; sometimes, it occurs in the form of emotions; and sometimes, it occurs in the form of watching a scene.

#### 5.4. The Question of Stigma

The question of stigma is an important characteristic when we consider the politics of space and place. Since this thesis tries to understand and analyze the cultural politics of childhood, how children’s home as a space is defined and lived is an important issue to consider. One of the pioneering sociological and anthropological studies on the subject of stigma comes from the work of Erving Goffman. In his essay, he goes far back to understanding the meaning of ‘stigma.’ On the definition of stigma, he states that.

The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.<sup>170</sup>

For the Greeks, then, stigma was a practice done by the ‘common normal’ to leave a mark on the deviant body. It is, in a sense, a ritual of social exclusion and the practice of it for Greeks. When we consider stigma and children’s homes, even though the ‘deviance’ from the normality is not seen on the physical surface of the body, the very narration of autobiography a child repeats to himself/herself entails a sort of ‘deviant’ beginning. Interestingly, the stigma that children in children’s homes experience comes from the historical conceptions and constructions of children living in residential care. The stigma includes the attributes that the child in a children’s home does not have and the attributes the child has because he/she lives in a residential setting. Then, we are talking about a certain stereotype. Vesile, 19 years old and full age, was no longer staying in the children’s home. I met her through the connections of the association, and she was under protection and care in the association’s home in a different city. She came to Istanbul for education. She told me once:

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<sup>170</sup> Goffman, "Selections From Stigma," 131.

*“I went to my friend’s workplace to visit her there. She was attained as an official worker. Then I realized how uncomfortable she was. Because, like, while she was being hospitable towards me, her eyes were constantly inside the place. Like she was pulling up a chair, but she put an effort to do it so silently. I asked her, “Are you okay?” She was saying something in whispers. Because she seemed stressed to me. She said, “Yes, I am.” I asked her again, “What is the problem? You are constantly looking around.” She answered, “I am trying to keep my profile low because whatever I do is in front of them. Some of them know that I grew up in residential care, and I do not want them to think badly. Because you know Ayşe, she was told bad things about her residential care experience, something like no surprise you are a person like this. She was so upset about it.” How worse it is, I said to myself. Like, you become an adult and start working then you start worrying about what they will say because you have grown up in residential care. Then I decided to start my own business. Because in a sense, being attained by the government without getting into the KPSS<sup>171</sup> means that you have grown up in residential care. I know it is a good opportunity to start life after a children’s home, but it is so children’s home-like. I mean, I do not want to carry any reminder of the children’s home with me to the workplace.”<sup>172</sup>*

According to Vesile, being in residential care means the state ensures ease in getting a job, and this easiness is a source of remembrance, a ‘memory cue’ that reminds her of her children’s home. I guess, however, she talks about the remembrance of children’s home experiences with the idea of identity society pushes these kids into. She found it strange how her friend was constantly checking and controlling the environment, positioning her body in accordance with the environment, and finding tactics of control such as eye movements and tone of voice. The stigma here comes from the fact that the body has lived in one of the “unhomely homes.”<sup>173</sup> Unhomely homes are the opposite of homely homes, which are ideal homes in society. Society defines what a homely home is. For a home to fall into the category of ideal homes, there should be a family, which there are “familial based gender relations.”<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of family is also an essential criterion because it generally refers to a small group where

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<sup>171</sup> KPSS (Kamu Personeli Seçim Sınavı) means “Public Personnel Selection Exam.”

<sup>172</sup> Personal interview with Vesile through online platform on May 13th 2023.

<sup>173</sup> Blunt, and Dowling, *Home*, 26.

<sup>174</sup> Blunt, and Dowling, *Home*, 110.

people inside are bound between themselves through marriage or kinship relations through blood relativeness. Any conception of the family might fall off from this representation. Children's homes are falling out of this ideal home as a homely home type. Even though "children are presumed to be key inhabitants of 'homely' homes," for children in children's homes living with four or five children, the body has no relation to others, nothing but sharing the same environment, which falls into the category of 'unhomely homes.'<sup>175</sup> Umut Yanardağ's work (2019), focusing on in-depth interviews with interlocutors, portrays an understanding of life experiences after residential care of children who benefit from it. Those interlocutors' firsthand experiences and narrations are important because they point out the same issue of stigma and stereotyping. One interlocutor in Yanardağ's study stated that:

The manager was not attained when I started working and when his designation had made, me and my branch manager went to him, and branch manager introduced me. When the manager heard that I was a residential care child, he said the residential children never work. I could not bear, and I said, you do not know the way I work, watch and see, if I have a mistake, you'll tell me.<sup>176</sup>

There is some consensus on what a child in residential care is like. What are the attributes of it? What are the characteristics of them? These attributions are formed and constructed through time, and historically, they form and shape the perception of children who grew up in residential care. The unhomely nature of residential care might label all the other care models as unhomely. Hence, the body is open to constant stigmatization from various public spaces. We see how the most potent discourses also construct space. When the manager says, 'the residential children never work,' he refers to children in a particular place. Moreover, by defining the children in that place as 'not working,' residential care becomes a space where meaning is constructed.

Of course, not all experiences revolve around stigma and stereotyping, but these stand in a crucial point to understand children's homes as socially constructed and embodied spaces. Life outside the home for children in children's home means caring for the embodied space with you, even if it is not inclined on the surface of your physical body, with you everywhere. Sometimes, this everywhere and every time characteristic

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<sup>175</sup> Blunt, and Dowling, *Home*, 115.

<sup>176</sup> Umut Yanardağ, "Kurum Bakımı Hizmetlerinden Yararlanmış Bireylerin Kurum Bakımı Sonrası Yaşam Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel bir Araştırma," *Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3, no.2 (2019): 73.

of embodiment results in negative and unwanted experiences such as constant exposure to the gazes of the normal or being subjected to stigma and stereotyping. Hence, embodied space shows itself in and out of home. This is why space is independent of the physical form of location, an entity that could travel along the time continuum.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In this part, I have focused on how children encounter life outside ‘home’ in terms of identity and how they represent themselves with specific tactics and strategies. My primary aim was to show how children’s home as an embodied space reflects the experiences of children both inside and outside the home. It is essential because home as an embodied space for children in children’s homes means a lot for their identity. By focusing on the performance aspect of the children in various spaces such as the school, shopping mall, and street, I have explored the tactics and strategies children use to represent themselves.

This chapter also analyzed how not having a non-conventional childhood affects the views of these children in terms of their circumstances. In this sense, the public space is always a reminder for children in children’s homes because they can encounter many family moments that they have lacked. Esra and Gizem’s narrations are of fundamental importance when we consider how encountering normality and gazes of normality influences their childhood experiences.

Stigmatization and stereotyping are the main experiences these children go through. Historically, discourses produced on residential care and children under protection and government do not enjoy a positive sentiment. This discourse production historically and contemporarily influences the way society views these children and reflects on the workplace, school, and hospital. I argue that children’s homes, as embodied spaces, become companions in the lives of those children.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

This thesis project critically examines the cultural politics of childhood within the sociological context, considering the new sociology of childhood, the paradigm shift. The paradigm shift in childhood studies enabled a 'new sociology of childhood' inspired by constructivist and interpretive perspectives, challenging this passive conception and positing children as active participants in the social construction of childhood. The notion that childhood is socially constructed lets researchers like me dig deeper into understanding the cultural, political, social, and economic determinants that construct childhood. The cultural politics of childhood emerges as a pivotal concept, aiming to deconstruct traditional childhood definitions often rooted in physical and cognitive development. This deconstruction seeks to understand childhood within its own historical and cultural context, emphasizing the significance of cultural determinants in shaping childhood experiences. The 'political' aspect of the cultural politics of childhood is underscored, referring to examining the political context surrounding the social construction of childhood. In my field study of children's homes, I presented cultural determinants of childhood through the relations between space, body, and culture. I explained how childhoods in residential care are socially constructed and under the subjection of cultural politics. Childhood is generally a socially constructed phenomenon; the other institutions and social realities of society influence it. Examining a childhood that is pushed to the. Margin is the strength of this study, and I hope it paves the way for further studies and research.

When there's a paradigm shift, methodology is influenced by it. Qualitative methods gained interest with the paradigm shift in childhood studies and seeing children as active recipients and producers of culture. To present a comprehensive analysis, I introduced multi-sited ethnography as a crucial tool for comprehending the global system's implications on local contexts. I employed the technique of following the metaphor, focusing on the concept of 'home' as a central theme in understanding

children's culturally and discursively produced experiences. I emphasized a phenomenological approach, treating children as sentient beings capable of intentional action. I eclectically used three qualitative research methods: in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and participant observation. Notably, a researcher must bear in mind the power imbalance when doing ethnography with children. It is essential to maintain a friend-like figure as an adult in the field.

There is a rooted historical tradition of child protection, starting with Turkic states coming to the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey. Charity organizations and society's perception of orphans are influenced by Islamic principles. The Qur'an strictly mentions the rights of children. Child protection and care have always been on the agenda of related institutions throughout the history of Turkey. The bureaucratization, centralization, and modernization started only after the promulgation of the Tanzimat Edict. The development of care models is also an important factor for social services. Before the barrack-style residential care model was embraced during the 2000s, it shifted to a home-like model. In shifting the model, the Ministry aims to provide children with a home-like atmosphere.

UNCRC is an essential document for childhood studies. I argue that the convention is a significant force in shaping the daily lives of individuals, organizing societal structures, and influencing the relationships between the state, families, and children. I identified key articles within the UNCRC, such as those related to the right to life, identity, freedom of thought, and privacy, as instrumental in defining the child as an individual with rights. The idea of "best interest" is discussed as a central yet culturally variable concept within the convention. I argue that the Convention is a legal document that gives birth to autonomous children recognizing their agency. However, emphasizing only on UNCRC is not enough. It is crucial to see the links between macro and micro. UNCRC is one of the products of globalization. It defines a certain type of childhood with needs and rights. Through the analysis of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, I present how the convention creates, constructs, and defines a universal childhood one hand but also how it leaves a space for the construction of it locally. However, how the convention influences the daily lives of children is the most important theme with regard to UNCRC. UNCRC affects the experiences of childhood through the signature each state has under the convention.

When a state signs the convention, it needs to arrange its legal regulations accordingly. This is the case in Turkey. With a combination of the Convention and the Turkish Constitution, children and childhoods are socially constructed. I discuss the legal framework in Turkey concerning the protection and care of children, focusing on two key laws: the Law of Social Services of 2828 and the Child Protection Law of 5395. The Law of Social Services defines children in need of protection and outlines care models for different age groups. Notably, it emphasizes raising children under protection and care with Turkish customs and principles. The text explores the role of education in shaping children's perspectives and how the state, through various institutions and regulations, influences children's understanding of Turkish culture and vision. Additionally, the discussion covers the age at which protection decisions are recessed, the importance of national and religious holidays for residential care, and the agency of children in the legal process. The Child Protection Law of 5395 aligns with the UNCRC in defining childhood as the period from zero to eighteen and highlights the state's responsibilities in ensuring children's rights, protection, and participation. Turning eighteen is stepping into adulthood, and hence, has a meaning for the lives of children. Then, I argue the state's political and legal agenda is one of the determinants of the cultural politics of childhood.

The theoretical framework of this study is built on three fundamental concepts: space/place, body, and stigma. These concepts are particularly important because the thesis undertakes the task of exploring the cultural politics of childhood for children living in residential care, where the unit of analysis is the notion of home. The lens of Setha Low's embodied space provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which the marginal experience of childhood in residential care affects the daily lives of children in school, at work, and at home. Given that a child's home is socially, politically, and culturally constructed, the process of meaning-making through the bodies inhabiting the space leads to different constructions and embodiments of children's homes. Consequently, the home becomes an embodied space that transcends time and physical location. In exploring the concept of space/place, the thesis acknowledges that it is an essential element in the lives of children living in residential care. Children in such care have limited physical spaces and are often confined to a specific location. This confinement can result in feelings of isolation and detachment, which perpetuate the stigma of being a child in residential care. Furthermore, I

explored the notion of the body, which is crucial in understanding the experiences of children in residential care. The body is the primary site of experience and the medium through which children interact with their environment. The body is also the locus of power relations, social norms, and cultural practices. Hence, the body is not only a physical entity, but it is also a symbolic and political entity that shapes the experiences of children in residential care. Through my theoretical framework, I divided experiences inside the home and outside.

Children in children's homes have different understandings of the operations of the children's home. The power dynamics are so complex in one sense, but it is as simple as the power dynamics between an adult and a child. Hence, the way they understand the practices done by the social worker can be read by their status as a child and the social worker's status as an adult. But this is also a two-way construction of childhood.

Children who grow up in children's homes often experience a dual sense of identity often. They are caught in a difficult situation where they must represent themselves in a way that avoids social stigmatization and ensures that they are perceived as 'normal' by society. This creates a sense of ambivalence, where they are torn between wanting to fit in and the knowledge that they are not the same as children who grow up in traditional family settings. To cope with this dilemma, children develop their own tactics and strategies to navigate these challenges. However, despite their efforts to fit in, they still feel a sense of internal ambivalence. It is a feeling that is not only self-imposed but is also perpetuated by society. As a result, these children experience a collective sense of longing for the life they once had or never had. The constant reminders from society that they are different only serve to reinforce this sense of ambivalence. It is a reminder of the fact that they are not the same as children who grow up in traditional family settings. This creates a sense of sadness and yearning for something that is elusive and difficult to attain. Consequently, the children living in children's homes may feel like outsiders, longing for acceptance and a sense of belonging that they may never fully experience.

The academic study of childhood experiences is a vital area of research that has garnered much attention in recent years. While many studies have been conducted on children living in residential care, studies of the margins are equally important to

recognize the power imbalances that exist. It also gives readers a chance to raise their voices and researchers the opportunity to witness different life histories. In the context of studies of marginal childhoods, the discussion of space and place naturally highlights the issue of power relations and cultural politics and has an activist tone. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the importance of space and place in shaping childhood experiences, particularly for minority groups. By giving voice to children, the reader has encountered the narration of their experiences. I guess one thing is important here for the ministry to regulate. The way society, social workers, and caregivers perceive children's homes influences the way children view themselves as an individual and as an individual belonging to society. The environment can be home-like physically as much as possible, but the physical standards will not change the perceptions and will not prevent stigma and stereotyping.

I have learned many things about sociological studies and psychotherapy practices from children's homes. I hope this thesis will make a modest contribution to further studies on childhood and shed light on the importance of studies focusing on marginal lifestyles in recognizing the power imbalances that exist. Through this, we may be able to change the negative stigma associated with children living in residential care and create a more positive perception of their homes. The scholarly investigation of childhood experiences constitutes a vital field of research. It is of paramount importance to persevere in our diligent exploration of this domain in order to effectuate affirmative transformations in the lives of children worldwide.

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# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 18.05.2023-26059



T.C.  
İBN HALDUN ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği  
Kurulu Başkanlığı

Sayı : E-71395021-300-26059  
Konu : Etik Kurulu Kararı - Nesibenur  
Şatırođlu

18.05.2023

### İLGİLİ MAKAMA

Kurulumuza başvuran Nesibenur Şatırođlu'nun " You wake up each day with four stranger kids": An Ethnographic Research with Children Living in Children's Homes" isimli projesi; amaç, araştırma türü, veri toplama araçları, süreç ve işlemler, veri analizleri dikkate alınmak suretiyle 18.05.2023 tarihinde değerlendirilerek 2023/03-10 karar numarası ile etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

Bilgilerinizi arz/rica ederim.

Prof. Dr. Alev ERKİLET  
Başkan

Bu belge, güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

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