Researching identity and culture in place-based struggles

SARGIN, Ayse <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8716-7564>

This is a draft chapter. The final version is available in 'Handbook of Research Methods and Applications for Social Movements', edited by Laurence Cox, Anna Szolucha, Alberto Arribas Lozano and Sutapa Chattopadhyay, published in 2024, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd
https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803922027.00028

Researching Identity and Culture in Place-based Struggles

Ayse Sargin

Abstract

There has been a growing interest in the role of agency and subjectivity in the rise of social movements. While this has entailed a renewed attention to, particularly, the study of identity and culture in collective mobilization, there is scant focus on the methodological aspects of such studies. In this chapter, I discuss how to study identity and culture in social movements from a practical research perspective and in the context of place-based socio-environmental struggles. Drawing on my qualitative, fieldwork-based study of three local, grassroots movements resisting the hydropower boom in Turkey in the mid-2000s, I reflect on and share practical insights and advice in relation to various aspects of research design, data collection and analysis for prospective researchers who are interested in exploring how identity and culture might shape place-based mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

Identity and culture are widely employed concepts across the social sciences and in the sub-field of social movement studies not least due to the so-called 'cultural turn' in the late 20th century, which has signified a growing interest in fathoming the role of agency in social and political change (Nash 2001). A central question in the study of social movements is 'why and how people do the things they do, especially why they do things together' (Goodwin & Jasper 2009, p. 4). This invites thinking on to what extent and how identities and cultures shape subjectivities in collective action. This chapter discusses how to study identity and culture in social movements from a practical research perspective, with a specific focus on place-based struggles in which contention and claims centre around a particular place perceived as significant by movement actors.

The chapter has three parts. In the first part I introduce the major approaches to identity and culture in social movement studies. This part and the following one - where I turn my attention to identity and culture in place-based struggles - should be read both as a brief overview of the relevant literature for the purposes of this chapter and as the overall theoretical framework that informs the discussion on research design further below. In the third part, I explore how to undertake qualitative research on identity and culture in place-based struggles, specifically in the context of socio-environmental conflicts, presenting my PhD research as an example case. Drawing on my fieldwork-based study of three local, grassroots movements resisting the hydropower boom in Turkey, I reflect on various aspects of research design, data collection and analysis, such as setting the research agenda, case selection, sampling, access and reflexivity. My aim is to share practical advice based on my own experience, that might be useful for prospective researchers examining the questions of identity and culture in social movements generally and place-based struggles specifically.

IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT RESEARCH

Identity and culture have gained prominence in the study of social movements from the 1980s onwards, along with other subjective aspects of collective action such as ideas, values and emotions. As much as being part of the broader cultural turn in social theory (Nash 2001), this shift also resulted from an increasing dissatisfaction with the then-prevalent rational-actor models of mobilization for their lack of adequate attention to the socio-psychological processes of group cohesion and grievance interpretation (Polletta & Jasper 2001). It was Melucci's seminal 1989 book which brought to the fore identity and its relationship to mobilization in this context (Flesher Fominaya 2010a).

Melucci argued that collective action is contingent on the construction of collective identity as 'an interactive and shared definition' (1989, p. 34). For Melucci, collective identity is the process through which heterogeneous actors establish themselves as collective actors with common orientations and the will to act together, by continuous 'negotiated interaction' amongst themselves and within their field of action to identify their goals and means (1989, p. 35). Melucci (1989) asserts that while the shared sense of 'we' is constantly negotiated cognitively and emotionally, it also signifies the continuation of the movements beyond their publicly visible activities. Many later conceptualizations in the field stress this shared sense of 'we-ness' and its interactive nature. For instance, for Taylor & Whittier collective identity is 'the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences and solidarity' (1992, p. 105). Similarly, for Snow & Corrigall-Brown it is 'constituted by a shared and interactive sense of "we-ness" and "collective agency"' (2015, p. 175). Others such as Polletta & Jasper see it as 'an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution' (2001, p. 285).

One key question is the relationship between collective identity, personal identities and social identities (e.g. identities based on socio-structural positioning such as class, race, gender or on socio-spatial location such as place-based identities). According to Snow & Corrigall-Brown, these three types of identity are distinct yet 'overlapping and interacting' (2015, p. 175). For instance,

the stronger the collective identity, the more it becomes part of one's personal identity and vice versa (Gamson 1991; Jasper 1997). Activists and movements engage in expressive and strategic action to 'align' personal and collective identities (Snow & McAdam 2000; Hunt & Benford 1994) but collective identity is 'never simply the aggregate of individuals' identities' (Polletta & Jasper 2001, p. 298). On the other hand, many movements are rooted in social identities, although this is not a requisite for collective identity. While identities arising from social cleavages are more likely to mobilize (Van Stekelenburg 2013), these preexisting identities - and the associated affective ties and interests - are reconstructed in the course of the struggle (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

Another key question is how collective identity is constructed and manifested. Taylor & Whittier (1992) identify three dimensions of collective identity construction, namely 'boundaries' (accentuation of in-group commonalities and out-group differences), 'consciousness' (reinterpretation of the injustices experienced and definition of common interests), and 'negotiation' (expressive action to assert the group's unique being via its self-presentation and daily interactions). Collective identity is constructed in interaction with the movement's environment: For instance, it may be transformed by external political change (Robnett 2002) or police violence in protests (Drury, Reicher & Stott 2003). Collective identity is expressed and maintained through identity markers such as signs, gestures, songs, clothing, rituals (Snow & Corrigall-Brown 2015), choice of tactics or organizational forms (Jasper 1997) and movement narratives of a shared past (Daphi 2017) which forge emotional bonds and solidarity, although a shared ideology may not always be present. Flesher Fominaya (2019) asserts that not all movements have visible or agreed identity markers either, and, in such cases, it is the continuous group reflection and debate on its self-definition that creates cohesion over time, underlining the need for more attention to the processual aspects of collective identity, as opposed to its properties as a product.

Collective identity discussed above is one dimension of the cultural processes in mobilization. Culture - as the locus of meanings, ideas, norms, values, beliefs, emotions, identities, narratives, memories, rituals, symbols, artifacts and performances - has gained a pivotal role in the study of social movements over the years (see e.g. eds. Johnston & Klandermans 1995; eds. Meyer, Whittier & Robnett 2002; ed. Johnston 2009; eds. Baumgarten, Daphi & Ullrich 2014). Yet culture is a slippery term. Its conceptualization across the social sciences and in social movement studies varies depending on the extent to which culture is viewed as voluntaristic, static, contested, power-laden or an individual-level or consciously-known phenomenon (Swidler 1995; Ullrich, Daphi & Baumgarten 2014) - also, with implications for its study. For instance, culture conceived as norms and values will steer researchers towards individuals' heads, whereas those for whom culture is 'webs' of meaning (Geertz 1973) will focus on the practices and symbols at the collective level (Williams 2004). Ullrich, Daphi & Baumgarten identify some shortcomings of the cultural approaches to the study of social movements as follows: (i) The positioning of culture (subjective/discursive interpretations) in opposition to structure (objective/material institutions and interests) which glosses over the ways in which culture 'structures' collective action (see also Polletta 2008); (ii) prioritization of cognition over emotions (see Jasper 1997) or habits (see Flesher Fominaya 2014); (iii) over-focus on the instrumental uses of culture at the expense of its

non-strategic dimensions; (iv) association of culture with particular movements as opposed to seeing all social action as cultural (2014, pp. 3-5).

Social movement scholars take interest in culture both as the formative context of movements - such as the national discursive contexts often rooted in institutional relations (e.g. Ferree et al. 2002) or popular culture shaping everyday interactions (e.g. Cox 2014) - and with respect to the internal cultures of movements defined as 'the norms, beliefs, symbols, identities, stories and the like that produce solidarity, motivate participants, and maintain collective action' (Williams 2004, p. 94). A number of scholars point out that the interaction between the broader cultural frameworks and movement cultures is marked by contestation (see e.g. Fantasia 1988; Fantasia & Hirsch 1995; Steinberg 2002; Cox 2014), also underlining the plural and fragmented character of culture. As movements draw on existing community networks (Gould 1995) or everyday ways of thinking, skills and practices (Cox 2014), they also create and sustain new, oppositional cultural and institutional forms of interaction - such as what Fantasia (1988) calls 'cultures of solidarity'. In this sense, movement cultures are counter cultures located within the wider dominant culture and that challenge the hegemonic meanings and social arrangements. Alternative meanings are created in the struggle (Fantasia 1988; Fantasia & Hirsch 1995) and dialogically, rendering movement cultures 'dynamic and relational' (Steinberg 2002, p. 224) as opposed to ready-made and static. According to Cox (2014), movement cultures are also 'developmental', built through a process of learning that involves articulations of everyday knowledge and practices, as well as internal contention over how to mobilize.

PLACE-BASED STRUGGLES, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Along with identity and culture, there has been a growing interest in the spatiality of mobilization from the 1990s onwards, paving the way for an interdisciplinary body of work that bridges social movement studies and critical geography (Routledge 2013). A key argument is that space is not a mere 'container' of collective action, but all aspects of mobilization - such as grievance interpretation, recruitment and tactics - are socio-spatially constituted (Miller 2000; Martin & Miller 2003). On the other hand, geographers differentiate place from 'abstract space': Place is 'where basic social practices - consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support and social reproduction etc. - are lived out' and 'where everyday life is *situated*' (Merrifield 1993, p. 522, original emphasis). It is constituted by a 'sense of place'; the individual and collective emotions associated with and the meanings attributed to a discrete site (Agnew 1987). In this sense, place indicates 'why social movements occur where they do', 'the nature of specific movements' and 'the spirit of movement agency, that which inspires and motivates people' (Routledge, cited in Miller 2000, p. 37).

Place-based struggles are movements in which contention and claims centre around a particular place which is perceived as significant for needs, priorities or imaginaries of movements (see Leitner, Sheppard & Sziarto 2008, pp. 161-162). While public spaces may also be imbued with meanings as part of mobilization (see e.g. Yuen 2018), here I will focus on struggles over localities which host populations with usually preexisting identities and ties, based on, for instance, kinship or neighbourship; common language, ethnicity or religion; shared history, culture, everyday

practices or feelings of place attachment. Local, grassroots socio-environmental mobilizations that resist harmful state or corporate activity in rural or urban settlements to defend place-specific ways of life and livelihoods are examples of this latter type (see e.g. Anguelovski & Martinez-Alier 2014; Pelenc et al. 2019). These struggles are 'forms of cultural politics, that is, of the cultural-becoming-political' (Escobar 2001, p. 156), in the sense that, for instance, resistance in a rural setting 'convert[s] the cultural sentiment for the land - the peasant's sense of place - into a political demand for the absolute right to its continued use' articulating local cultural elements, such as songs, symbols or myths (Routledge 1996, p. 518).

While places are characterized by a 'particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place' (Massey 1994, p. 5), they are also situated within broader socio-economic and political processes. Thus, places are socially constructed because of *both* the attributed meanings and the fixing of their boundaries and identities. Martin (2003) argues that place-based struggles strategically construct a particular place as a territorially bounded community with common experiences and interests, and legitimate the local as the appropriate scale for mobilization through 'place-framing'. This process of place-based collective identity construction arises on selective discursive accounts of the place and its inhabitants, which, for instance, stress the authenticity of the built landscape in urban neighbourhood activism (Martin 2003) or the common cultural origins and history in indigenous mobilizations (Adler 2012), downplaying divergence, social divides, political differences and contestation. Therefore, place-based struggles both draw on preexisting identities and place attachments, and reconstruct and revitalize them around place-oriented goals. In fact, it may be argued that preexisting identities are even more central to collective identity construction in place-based struggles, especially in the face of an external threat, due to the already dense social networks facilitated by proximity (Nicholls 2007). On the other hand, place-based struggles can potentially be sites of political imaginaries that transcend place-boundedness, enabling solidarities or mobilization across scales or territories (see e.g. Rice & Burke 2018).

HOW TO RESEARCH IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN PLACE-BASED STRUGGLES: AN EXAMPLE OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Decisions around methodological choices are more often than not entangled with the specific research aims and questions, researchers' ontological and epistemological orientations, as well as time and money constraints. In the context of elusive and complex phenomena such as identity and culture, an additional consideration in methodological choices is to what extent the objects of study are measurable. For instance, Roose (2014) points out that only particular conceptualizations of culture that are clear, specific and that allow causal analysis are conducive to its quantitative assessment - such as his suggested definition of culture as 'a pattern of prevalent values, beliefs, and emotions' as opposed to approaches that, for instance, construe culture as 'webs' of meanings (see Geertz 1973). Similarly, Saunders (2015) conceptualizes collective identity in terms of four indicators - namely worldviews, goals, norms, and identification with other participants and the protest organizers - for its quantitative analysis through protest surveys.

Such quantitative approaches can yield valuable, generalizable data on motivational and relational aspects of mobilization. On the other hand, the data gathered is likely to be more attuned to the product aspect of collective identity, as opposed to its processual dimensions, i.e. the internal contestations and negotiations shaping movement identity and culture, only as a result of which the movement emerges as a more or less 'unified empirical actor' (Melucci 1995, p. 55) and particularly 'in its visible moments of protest or mobilization' (Flesher Fominaya 2010b, p. 398). From this perspective, a qualitative methodology may be more well-suited to unpack the contentious, developmental and not-always-visible character of movement identity and culture, as well as the behind-the-scenes or 'submerged relationships' and 'everyday activities' that constitute them (Melucci 1995, p. 57).

Overall, qualitative approaches enable richer insights into the 'complexity and subjectivity of lived experience' (Ravitch & Carl 2016, p. 39) and the processes of meaning-making and social interaction. While - like surveys - in-depth, qualitative interviews locate collective identity and culture in individual actors' heads (Johnston 2009, p. 21), the less structured nature of the latter can enable a deeper understanding of meanings at the individual level. Furthermore, participant observation coupled with interviews can also help uncover what is not reflected on by the actors (Ullrich, Daphi & Baumgarten 2014, p. 14) or articulated in the interviews (Flesher Fominaya 2019, p. 441), as well as the 'chemistry of collective action' within its social context (Fantasia 1988, p. 236) and the everyday practices that incorporate the 'cultural "logics of action" and whole ways of doing politics' (Flesher Fominaya 2019, p. 441).

The rest of this section aims to share practical advice on undertaking qualitative research on identity and culture in place-based struggles, drawing on my fieldwork-based study conducted in 2017-2019 to examine three place-based movements resisting the hydropower boom in Turkey. After a brief account of the background of these struggles, I discuss some considerations on setting the research agenda, case selection, defining the field and sampling. This is followed by reflections on data collection and analysis, including gaining access and reflexivity.

Background: Place-based Struggles against the Hydropower Boom in Turkey

Turkey has experienced a hydropower boom since the mid-2000s, as manifold state-sanctioned and corporate-led projects to generate hydropower have mushroomed in streams and rivers across the country. Although hydropower was not novel in the energy scene of Turkey, this new phase was unprecedented in a number of respects. It occurred as part of the liberalization of the energy market, enabling private companies emerge as the major actors, against the background of weakened environmental legislation and government financial incentives to encourage newcomers to the market (Erensü 2017). Most of the new projects were small, run-of-the-river plants, several of which were built usually consecutively on the same streams/rivers, resulting in the separation of water from the riverbed for kilometres along a valley. These were promoted as green alternatives to large dams, while small and large dams continued to be built (Akbulut, Adaman & Arsel 2018).

Furthermore, leasing of streams and rivers to private companies for up to 49 years for hydropower generation amounted to water and land grabbing in previously unseen ways (Islar 2012), entailing risks of dispossession and displacement for the locals, due to their now restricted access to the streams/rivers and the adjacent meadows that have been the source of local livelihoods (such as agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing) as well as place-based cultural practices across generations. From the mid-2000s onwards, many communities have organized to resist the implementation of these new hydropower projects in their villages and towns, through litigation, protests, rallies and sometimes direct action. Movement actors are locals-turned-activists some of whom have lived their entire lives in the places where the proposed projects are located. Among them are subsistence farmers, small business owners, low-rank civil servants and retirees. Essentially, these local, grassroots movements - some of which have lasted for years - are place-based defenses of the rural landscapes, the associated communities, local livelihoods, identities and cultures (see e.g. Yaka 2017; Sayan 2019; Aslan 2019).

Setting the Research Agenda

Identifying the research aims and questions is a central aspect of any research design (Creswell and Poth 2018, pp. 193-210). The topic of identity and culture in place-based struggles is broad and may generate various research questions from diverse angles. Exploration of questions around identity and culture may also be part of a broader research framework that focuses on other aspects of mobilization. The main aim in my study of the struggles against hydropower in Turkey was to comparatively examine the discursive processes within which distinct movements - set in different local contexts characterized by differing ethno-religious identities, cultural practices and political orientations - problematized the proposed projects and conceived resistance as possible. Drawing on my research experience, below I suggest three key issues which are worth attention in any study that, in some way, deals with the questions of identity and culture in place-based struggles.

First, the interaction between (i) individual identities, social identities and (movement) collective identity, and between (ii) the broader cultural frameworks and movement culture should be given some thought. To what extent and in what manner collective identity construction draws on the preexisting individual and social identities (based on socio-cultural positioning or place-based attachments, ties and memories)? In what ways movement culture is embedded in national discursive contexts or everyday practices and popular culture? How do the movement collective identity and culture, and the shared experience of a collective struggle shape or transform the preexisting individual and social identities and the wider culture in a community?

The second issue to consider is the changing, developmental character of movement identity and culture in the course of struggle. Activists interpret, discuss, negotiate, learn, adapt and innovate: This is what makes movements move and a movement culture rather a 'culture-in-movement' (Cox 2014, p. 49). An understanding of the changes in the trajectories of movement identity and culture at the collective level can also be combined with that of the changes in individual activists' life trajectories, while taking note of the dynamics between the two. The third issue to address is the particular ways in which the place, the community, and the link between them are

construed in movement discourses. As Massey points out, there is rarely 'a single sense of place which everyone shares' in a community (1991, p. 28), and 'places do not have single, unique "identities"; they are full of internal conflicts' (1991, p. 29). In this sense, the researcher should be attentive to both (i) the collective identity construction and place-framing processes that create a cohesive community and place identity out of these internal conflicts, in a way that facilitates mobilization, and (ii) the tensions, ambivalences, dissent, and negotiations involved in these processes, as well as the locals who may choose not to support or join these movements.

Case Selection, Defining the Field and Sampling

Case study enables an in-depth study - a 'thick description' as Geertz (1973) puts it - of social phenomena (Yin 2018). It may involve a single case or multiple cases, with case selection depending on what the research questions are. In my own research, I opted for multiple cases, as I aimed to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of each struggle both in its own right and within a comparative framework.

My first case was the Munzur Valley resistance. It is mobilized against the proposed hydropower projects on the Munzur River, around the town of Ovacık in the province of Tunceli (originally called Dersim), which is home to Kurdish *Alevi*s, a major ethno-religious minority, whose long history there has been marked with oppression by and resistance against the state. My second case was the Fındıklı resistance, which is mobilized against the projects on the two streams surrounding the town of Fındıklı in the province of Rize, where a state-supported, lucrative tea monoculture constitutes local livelihoods and place-based identities. My third case was the Ödük Valley resistance against the projects on the Ödük Stream in the province of Erzurum, which is inhabited by people who are known for their strong nationalism, piety and loyalty to the state.

My main strategy in case selection was to identify struggles that were located within the same geographical region, but differed in terms of their socio-cultural contexts. Each of the three cases discussed above are in places characterized by differing ethno-religious identities, cultural practices and political orientations, while they are all located in Northeast Turkey. My reasoning behind choosing cases from the same geographical region was to ensure that each place had similar physical landscape features, allowing me, instead, to engage in a socio-cultural comparison. In this sense, both socio-cultural characteristics and physical landscape features of a place may be considered as factors in case selection in the context of place-based struggles.

Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte describe the field as 'the natural, nonlaboratory setting or location where activities in which a researcher is interested take place' (cited in Balsiger and Lambelet 2014, p. 152). In place-based struggles, the field is obviously the contested locality. In my case, it covered primarily the towns and the adjacent villages where the proposed hydropower projects were located and the resistance against them took place. However, mobilization may not always be restricted to these places. For instance, in the Munzur Valley resistance, organizing, public awareness-raising and protests also take place outside of Dersim, such as in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city that hosts considerable numbers of Kurdish *Alevi* migrants. Furthermore, in Fındıklı, the movement has inspired similar activism against

hydropower in the neighbouring towns, with sustained collaboration across movements. In such cases, I extended my fieldwork to these other places to spend time with the resisting locals and make sense of the multi-spatial character of the struggles. Marcus refers to this as 'follow[ing] the conflict' and its 'multi-sited construction' (1998, pp. 94-95).

Sampling is 'purposeful' or 'strategic' in qualitative research, as the aim is 'to deliberately select individuals because of their unique ability to answer the study's research questions' (Ravitch & Carl 2016, p. 140). As a technique of purposeful sampling, 'snowball sampling' - in which each new contact leads the researcher to the other - is particularly suitable for place-based struggles in localities with dense social networks and ties, where large sections of the community are involved in mobilization, while there are little or no formal social movement organizations with identifiable members. On the other hand, it also entails the risk of being 'stuck' in a circle of friends, neighbours or relatives, or people similar in terms of age, gender, occupation or political views, which may lead to the resentment of others not contacted, especially if there are internal rivalries that the researcher is yet to be aware of. In my own research, I tried to avoid this risk by finding other ways to meet with new people, such as attending cultural events or engaging in daily conversations in shops, cafes or parks. This also allowed me to meet those who were not vocally opposed to the projects or who remained on the margins of the movements for a variety of reasons.

Data: What to Look for

A qualitative research into identity and culture involves an exploration of the content of meanings and the processes through which they are created; their symbolic aspects, as well as material forms. It incorporates the study of ideas, identifications, emotions, images, texts, signs, performances, as well as stories and memories, through the use of research approaches and methods such as discourse and frame analysis (e.g. Lindekilde 2014), narrative analysis (e.g. ed. Davis 2002), focus groups (e.g. della Porta 2014a), in-depth interviews (e.g. Blee & Taylor 2002), participant observation (e.g. Balsiger & Lambelet 2014) or a combination of these and others. Here I will focus on interviews and participant observation, as I relied heavily on these in my research.

In-depth semi-structured interviews are invaluable for probing into movement participants' individual and collective cognitions, emotions, motives and identities (see Blee & Taylor 2002). In my research, they enabled rich data on how the resisting locals perceived the proposed hydropower projects, why they opposed them and how they viewed themselves as a collectivity and their mobilization. Of course, I gleaned some of this information from the texts and images in the movements' publicly available documents, such as leaflets and posters. However, interviews particularly allowed me to gain insights into the initial and ongoing collective processes of deliberation, disagreements, hesitancies, compromise and consensus on projects' harms, the possibility and necessity of resisting, and movement goals, strategies, symbols and slogans. Furthermore, interviews conveyed verbal and non-verbal expressions of the shared feelings evoked by the projects and struggles - such as disbelief, anger, resentment (but also) hope, anticipation and solidarity. As some of the movements lasted for years (such as the one in

Fındıklı which had entered its 10th year, when I was there in 2017), I also found life history interviews helpful in making sense of how individual biographies and subjectivities converge with the collective identity and trajectory of the movements (see Blee & Taylor 2002; della Porta 2014b).

Additionally, interviews unpacked the power of collective memories of past struggles or other relevant, historical events in the subjective construction of the present-day mobilization (see Zamponi 2013 on collective memory). For instance, some locals in the Ödük Valley likened the hydropower generation processes to the early 20th century Russian invasion of Erzurum, while for many in the Munzur Valley, theirs was a continuation of past resistance to the age-old state policy of banishing Kurdish *Alevi*s from Dersim. The interview design will be ultimately shaped by the research questions. However, a preliminary documentary research on the political economy and history of the place, its political and cultural traditions and fault lines, and past or ongoing contention or mobilization around place-specific and other social identities is very useful in deciding what lines of inquiry to pursue. Finally, keeping in mind the heterogeneity of any community and that not everyone is impacted by the projects in the same manner, it is crucial to achieve some balance in terms of interviewees' age, gender, class and other social divides, as well as to make a conscious effort to uncover the dissenting voices or silenced narratives in relation to the proposed projects.

Participant observation and ethnography are essentially about understanding 'people's lives… within the context of their own lived experience' (O'Reilly 2005, p. 84). While all ethnographic research involves immersing oneself in everyday lives, this is even more so in place-based struggles. In their discussion of ethnographic research in social movements, Balsiger and Lambelet rightly point out that 'movements are usually not active 24/7…Fields are thus…non-continuous. We see the activists at a meeting, maybe have a drink with them afterwards, but then everyone goes home and we do not see them until the next event' (2014, p. 153). However, in place-based struggles, where mobilization is at the community level for the defense of a place that hosts the very community and its everyday lives, the line separating activism and daily routines is less clear. This does not mean that the movement is 'active 24/7'. Rather, the movement collective identity is rooted in and constructed through the cultural routines observable in everyday life - in weddings and funerals, when neighbours pay each other visits or farmers meet at the village teahouse, during small talk in the grocery store or in the queues to see the doctor. Thus, alongside the occasional formal meetings to discuss movement strategy or protests and rallies where movements 'perform' (Juris 2014) to communicate their identities - which are the natural sites for an ethnography of any social movement - everyday life in its entirety was the focus of participant observation in my research.

Practicalities of Access in the Field

Immersion in everyday life as part of participant observation discussed above can also be a key way to ensure access, especially in fieldwork-based research. As Feldman, Bell & Berger stress, access is 'often liken[ed]…to opening a door' with the researcher 'having the right key or the right combination' to open it (2003, p. ix). But access is far from being unidirectional and one-off: It is

rather a 'relational' and 'continuous and dynamic process' in which 'building rapport with individuals is as much a part of access as the initial contact' (Feldman, Bell & Berger 2003, p. x). It is in this sense that immersing oneself in everyday life enables establishing interpersonal relations and trust in a way that enhances access. This is particularly relevant for place-based struggles which are facilitated by dense social networks and ties based on kinship, neighbourship or other place- or community-specific identities. Once I was in the field, I soon discovered that participating in the daily lives of the resisting locals and the mundane routines of community life allowed me to deepen the initial relationships and forge new links. Therefore, I hung out in village teahouses and small businesses in the town centre for random chats; accompanied women taking their children to the playground; helped out with the planning of an engagement ceremony; distributed flyers for the concert of a local singer; attended neighbourhood social gatherings and shared gossip; participated in tea harvesting and went for a swim with the others afterwards as was customarily done.

Access is always a negotiated process in the field and an important aspect of this negotiation is researcher flexibility and seeing the real-life 'messiness' of research in a new light (Billo & Hiemstra 2013). In my fieldwork, this meant accepting that the interview locations - such as interviewees' homes or small businesses - were rarely suitable for uninterrupted conversations: Children at home demanded attention and customers came into the store. In the interviews conducted in the village teahouses, others sporadically sat on the table to join the conversation. On the other hand, such experiences enabled rich observations regarding the culturally organized practices of social interaction in each locality. Furthermore, some interviews had to take place outdoors, as farmers worked in the fields or they and others headed to the riverside to relax after a long day's work. These instances of 'talking whilst walking' (Anderson 2004) were particularly useful for two reasons. First, I was able to grasp the geography of a place as a material force, i.e. how the contested stream/river was central to a landscape. Secondly, these conversations evoked various emotions - which might have been otherwise hidden to me: I saw the interviewees' joy as they watched the flow of water or reminisced about their first kisses by the stream. I heard their anger as they explained that the river was holy in the syncretic religion of Dersim or the streams had been the source of agricultural productivity in the Ödük Valley and Fındıklı across generations. These emotions expressed the spatially constituted collective identities of resistance against the proposed hydropower projects.

One other issue vis-à-vis access is the relations with public authorities. All three struggles I studied took place in conflictual contexts: Locals resisted state-sanctioned projects by openly opposing policies, plans and official statements of relevant public bodies through litigation, protests, rallies and sometimes by direct action such as sit-ins and road blockades, some of which led to physical clashes with the police or the gendarmerie and arrests. For the locals of Ödük Valley this was a novel experience, while in the Munzur Valley state-society relations have been historically tense. In Fındıklı, a decade-long solidarity built at the community level in actively opposing the projects also made the locals very suspicious of any outsider with a 'purpose', including a non-local researcher like me. Thus, in order to maintain trust and access, I made a conscious decision not to interview the representatives of local public bodies, although these might have yielded additional data on the local cultural and political dynamics. On the other hand, movements also

had allies among elected officials - such as mayors and village heads (*mukhtar*s) - or low-rank civil servants who occasionally provided insider information or logistical support. In such cases, I looked for cues indicating how movements established boundaries vis-à-vis such allies and aligned myself accordingly (see also Malthaner 2014).

Finally, some thought should be given to the issue of language. Language is a significant marker of individual and social identities, and a key component of culture. Communicating with research participants in their languages is ideal in enhancing interpersonal relationships and understanding of cultural meanings (Watson 2004). As a national of Turkey, I was able to communicate with the research participants in the official language (Turkish), which was either the daily spoken language or the native language in the places I studied. When one does not speak the local language(s), using interpreters is an option. However, it should be kept in mind that the positionality of the interpreter matters as much as that of the researcher in the generation of data (Temple & Edwards 2002). Additionally, in nation-states such as Turkey where there is only one official language despite the existence of many native languages some of which have been suppressed (see Bayar 2011), it is important to reflect on the ethical-political implications of relying on the official language in fieldwork. The fact that my native language was Turkish and that I did not speak the non-official native languages in Dersim and Fındıklı conferred on me a (partial) outsider status in these places. While this was inevitable, I tried to express my political solidarity such as by asking about the original names of local landmarks and villages or learning the most common phrases in the local languages to use in daily encounters.

Analysis and Reflexivity

Qualitative data analysis commonly relies on coding. A code is a 'construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum' (Saldaña, cited in Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014, ch. 4). Coding sorts, condenses and orders data by categorizing it, identifying similar, overarching themes and detecting patterns, sometimes line by line and increasingly with the help of dedicated software (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014). In this sense, coding provides a birds'-eye view map of the data in which data is broken down into small segments and re-linked. However, this also involves fragmentation of the data, making it difficult for the researcher to see and interpret it as a whole (Eakin & Gladstone 2020), or making the researcher more attuned to what is said in the interviews rather than what is not said (Eakin & Gladstone 2020) or to finding similar themes as opposed to noticing contradictions (St. Pierre & Jackson 2014). Such pitfalls may result in a limited analysis of the mobilizing identities and cultures in conflictual contexts, not fully capturing their oppositional, heterogeneous, negotiated and developmental character. In my research, I tried to avoid some of these pitfalls by combining coding with other techniques that allowed me to move back and forth between the condensed and uncondensed forms of the data. For instance, I listened to the interview recordings over and over to remember, rethink and reinterpret the emotional context of the entire interview, as well as the pauses or incomplete sentences, rather than solely relying on the interviews' transcribed, textual forms. In addition to reorganizing and writing up my field notes, I also kept the original scribbles (including single words and doodles) for comparison, as the latter reflected my initial ideas, feelings and mental associations.

It is now well-recognized that researchers' socio-cultural positioning such as age, gender, class, race/ethnicity, their personal experiences and the extent of their cultural and political 'insider'ness or 'outsider'ness vis-à-vis the communities they study impact every aspect of research - from identifying the research questions and methods to gaining access and data analysis (see e.g. Berger 2015). Accordingly, critical reflection on one's positionality in relation to her/his research practice has become fundamental in qualitative analysis. In fact, Pillow asserts that reflexivity is often 'used as a measure of legitimacy and validity'; 'a form of self-disclosure or exposure' on the part of the researcher 'to demonstrate one's awareness of the research problematics' (2003, p. 179) 'in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations' (2003, p. 186). She, instead, proposes an 'uncomfortable reflexivity…that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous' (Pillow 2003, p. 188). In this sense, beyond a reflection on researcher positionality, reflexivity also involves acknowledging the situatedness of academic knowledge - both in itself and vis-à-vis other types of knowledge. What does this entail for the study of movement collective identities and internal cultures? I find insights of Chesters (2012), Melucci (1995) and Cox (2014) helpful in answering this question. First, movements should be recognized as 'knowledge-producing subjects', rather than objects of study (Chesters 2012, p. 145). Secondly, researchers should be aware of the 'limited rationality' of both the researchers and the movements (Melucci 1995, p. 62). Thirdly, researchers *can* help movements 'to develop their capacity to learn how to learn', as they produce knowledge about them (Melucci 1995, p. 63). Finally, the way to do this is by 'asking questions' that 'encourage a greater articulation' of movement goals and strategies *by* movement actors, instead of externally-derived conclusions on what needs to be done (Cox 2014, p. 62). In the context of place-based struggles, another way can be - through one's research - providing cognitive resources which might equip individual movements to be more aware of similar struggles in other places in a way that inspires reflecting on how these may be connected.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed how to study identity and culture in place-based struggles from a practical research perspective. Drawing on my PhD research on three local, grassroots movements resisting the hydropower boom in Turkey, my aim has been to share practical advice that prospective researchers of identity and culture in social movements generally and place-based struggles specifically might find useful.

In the first two parts of the chapter that explore the relevant literature, I have drawn attention to the negotiated character and processual aspects of collective identity, as well as the plural and developmental nature of culture, and stressed that while the in-situ dense, preexisting social networks and ties facilitate place-based mobilization, places are also reconstructed as territorially bounded, cohesive communities in the course of the struggle. In the third part, based on my own research experience, I first discussed some considerations on setting the research agenda, selecting cases to study, how to define the field in fieldwork and approach sampling. I, then, reflected on what types of data to look for and how with a focus on semi-structured interviews and participant observation, followed with a discussion of the practicalities to consider

on gaining access to research participants in the context of place-based struggles. In the final sub-section, I suggested combining coding with other approaches in data analysis and thinking about reflexivity in terms of the situatedness of academic knowledge, in relation to both its limits in representing the movements and its potentials for solidarity-based engagements with them.

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