Chapter 8
Identity and Social Peace in the Digital World

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ABSTRACT

The concept of identity is changing and developing with digitalization. Macro and national identities, which are the basis of conflicts in the world, have started to decrease and lose their importance against micro-identities introduced by digitalization. This forms the basis of re-shaping the concept of power in the world. Digital identities play a key role in sustaining conflicts and peace in this new balance of power. With digitalization, individuals get numerous identities and have the opportunity to form a joint identity with other individuals and groups at a micro level. These new identities formed in micro level against macro identities are becoming an organic structure that has horizontal and vertical components in order to establish peace in the world by creating time, place and memories. This enables the concept of peace to have multiple intelligence in digital platforms. The aim of this study is to search the power and effect of micro-identities which are formed in virtual platforms and in the process of building social peace in the digital world.

INTRODUCTION

Today, while many have anticipated that violence will decrease in proportion to the civilization of humankind, the opposite seems to be true. Violence is increasing, especially on the basis of religion, culture and nationalism which have brought war in the world. Moreover, the rapid spread of hate speech and violent content via mass media has caused the revival of circumstances like desensitization against violence, and now this is becoming accepted as normal. Within this context, it can be said that modern people experience violence firstly within their self-sphere and then within almost all segments of social life. In other words, violence, which in fact characterizes today’s lifestyle, shapes and organizes both individual and social life and surrounds our lives by affecting our choices, purposes or desires.
When we examine conflicts in today’s world, we can see especially many identity oriented conflicts. The worst side of this existent violence is that it always repeats itself. Many acts of violence take place in Africa, Middle East, Europe and in China for the sake of Islam or leading a country to freedom. These acts of violence make investments in violence officially in the name of “self-defense”, and these investments take an important place as they pretend to form a basis for peace activities. This drives us to question identities we have and will have in the future.

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IDENTITIES AND MICRO IDENTITIES

The concept of identity is addressed by many different disciplines and evaluated from its own scientific perspective. The basis for this concept’s being so interesting is that the concept is directly related to all the processes in the flow of life. The concept of identity, which forms the basis of social peace, is, of course, related to definitions of this concept by different disciplines. However, the basic study of field is social identity studies.

The history of the concept of identity, which is one of the most discussed terms all over the world in relation to post-modernist discourses in recent years, dates back to old times. The concept of identity, which started to be brought to the agenda in the 1940’s, started to be addressed within the scope of sociology, social anthropology and politics when people realized in the 1980’s that society was as effective as individuals in the formation of identity (Gandler, 2006, p. 321).

Neither the absolute autonomy of self or identity can be acceptable for sociology. The identity generally is not “stable” and “independent from external influences” but unstable/discontinuous/partial and “vulnerable to external influences” (influence of “others”). The “others” are always at the center in the uses of the identity, which has different meanings in sociology. To give an example, it is stated in Encyclopedic Dictionary of Sociology (Sharma, 1992, p. 407) that the concept has two different uses: Firstly, identity refers to how and where someone is seen and how he is categorized through attitudes from others towards him. Secondly, identity is about how someone sees and accepts himself as a person who has his own life story, who has a seat in the society and who has a special value.

Presumably, the second meaning originates from the first meaning (Sharma, 1992: 407). Similarly, Oscar Wilde (1993) refers to the others that shape identities of people by saying that most people are other people. Therefore, identity grounds on the interaction of individuals with the others in social life. Tajfel (2010) and Turner (1975) argue that social groups of which individuals are members can have an