

# Re-Reading Nasreddin Hodja as an Opportunity for “Intercultural Contact”

Özlem Oğuzhan\*

## Abstract

This study proposes the concept of “intercultural contact” with reference to the discussion regarding the “predominant way of comprehending cultural diversities” in the social sciences. This new concept that is introduced in this paper through a case study, refers to the obsession of scientism based on objectivity that is a product of Eurocentric universalism, and it comprises an opportunity for understanding cultures in their own particularities. This aforementioned case consists of two texts, published consecutively: An article on Nasreddin Hodja by Kathleen R.F. Burrell, and a critical note on this article by Çiğdem Erkal İpek, the translator of the article. These texts were published in the special issue of *Gül Diken*, a journal of humor culture. Re-reading these two texts, this study aims to question the predominant way of thinking in social sciences and argues for an approach that grasps cultural diversities in an age of globalization.

## Keywords

Eurocentric universalism, objectivity, orientalism, Nasreddin Hodja, intercultural contact, Sufism

---

\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Sakarya University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema – Sakarya/Turkey  
ozlemoguzhan@sakarya.edu.tr

## INTRODUCTION

This study is constructed upon a re-reading process in which an intercultural character of humor, Nasreddin Hodja, is re-read through two consecutive texts that represent different approaches to him. In this re-reading process the study underlines the significance of “intercultural contact”<sup>1</sup> that gives the opportunity of grasping Nasreddin Hodja within his cultural particularity which emerged in its own milieu. Intercultural contact can be considered as a dialogical ground for overcoming the obstacle of the objective, and thus the positivist point of view on cultural diversities; in other words, it provides an opportunity for the contextualized understanding of cultures.

The re-reading process, applied to two written texts that discuss Nasreddin Hodja and his anecdotes, has three steps. The first reading step is an article, which is written by Kathleen R. F. Burril on Nasreddin Hodja titled “The Humor and the Personality of Nasreddin Hodja,” published in the humor culture journal in Turkish, *Gül Diken*, in 1996. The second is a note written by Çiğdem Erkal Ipek who is the translator of this article by Burril into Turkish for *Gül Diken*. This note can be grasped both as the re-reading and as the reaction to assumptions of Burril on Nasreddin Hodja. The third is the one you are reading here, and it takes the previous two steps and also the texts on Nasreddin Hodja into consideration. These three steps of the re-reading process not only provide a dialogical ground for discussing different mentalities, but also emphasize the need for the concept of “intercultural contact” which gives the opportunity of grasping Hodja in his own cultural milieu, thereby revealing his particularity. Thus, the concept of “intercultural contact” implies a dialogical ground not framed by the dominant rules of Eurocentric scientism, but on the contrary, by focusing on understanding the cultural diversities.

The aim of this study is to distract from the common perspective of cultural comparison, which can be grasped in parallel with “the progress line of the West” that is also grounded on the discrimination of cultures. This perspective can be named as “lack of intercultural contact” as it excludes the diversities and disregards the particularities of cultures. The dialogical ground which is assumed here through the re-reading process should be taken into consideration as a way of accepting and celebrating the diversities which support the assumption of “intercultural contact”. Through this concept it is pointed out

that the dominant mentality underlying the notion of evaluating different cultures must be changed. It is proposed that different ways of understanding these cultures should be constructed without debarring them from their own particularities.

According to many written sources, Nasreddin Hodja, the intercultural character of humor, was born and lived in Anatolia in the 13th century. He was one of the leading scholars of his time. He remains in between social classes, such that in some of his anecdotes, he works as an imam or a judge directly representing the State, while in the others he is a mere villager, living with his wife, neighbors and owning a donkey and a cow. Thus, he is able to represent and criticize both classes –the ruler and the ruled- of the society. His interpretation of life and his assumptions in his anecdotes are grasped and accepted easily by every age group in the public because the criticisms in his anecdotes are oriented to both the power and the public (Başgöz 2005: 19). Thus, his in-between position provides the opportunity of covering the different mentalities and the cultural practices of the social classes in his anecdotes.

Nasreddin Hodja is not notable just in Anatolia but also in the wider geographical region of the Balkans, the Middle East and Asia beyond. As the culture has evolved, along with history and geography, his name has been differentiated as, for instance, “Ependi” in East Turkistan, “Kojanasır” in Kazakhstan, “Aphendi” in Kyrgyzstan, “Afandi” in Uzbekistan, “Nasreddin Hodsa” in Hungary, “Afanti” in China, and “Molla Nasreddin” in India (Akkuş 2003: 57; Özdemir 2011: 11). This variation is not only in the names but also in some of his images, stories and anecdotes. Hence it can be assumed that Nasreddin Hodja is a pot of different understandings of cultures in which he has been living. This intercultural pot, which provides a common contact point, gives us an opportunity of understanding how cultural diversities can coexist with their own particularities. In each of these cultures Nasreddin Hodja has been recognized because he has become a part of the collective unconscious which appears via a smile on the faces. Thus, Nasreddin Hodja and his anecdotes cannot be grasped with the questions of “who” and “what”. They should be taken into consideration through the question of “how”: How could Hodja survive for centuries and how can his wisdom still make sense for the people of these cultures? (Özünel 2009: 648-649) Also, Hodja represents the individuals of a society in various situations and questions these situations

through his anecdotes with the critiques of power, traditions, and personality characteristics (e.g. being greedy, ignorant, or selfish). So his anecdotes can also be taken into consideration within ethics.

In the re-reading process Burrell's article represents the dominant way of thinking on cultures but through the case of Nasreddin Hodja it can be easily seen that this attempt to understand Nasreddin Hodja according to only the rules of the scientific, in other words, the objective, and hence the positivist point of view, reflects the "lack of intercultural contact". Rather than scientism, another contact point is needed for re-reading Nasreddin Hodja. He was a Sufi and, that is why beyond the objective rules of positivism, he must be considered in the frame of Sufism which is an esoteric point of view. This perspective gives the opportunity of understanding Hodja within the particularity of his own time and milieu, and this is the point where the concept of "intercultural contact" is revealed. Instead of adapting or "installing" Nasreddin Hodja in the rules of positivism, this study is proposing Sufism as a frame/approach for understanding him and his anecdotes.

Framing the discussion which covers this re-reading as a process, this study is constructed in two parts. In the first part, the predominating scientific point of view in social sciences that is established upon Eurocentric universalism and objectivism, depending on both generalization and distance to construct available ground for universal knowledge, will be questioned. In the second part, the article by Burrell and the related note of Ipek are re-read through the concept of "intercultural contact", which can be understood both as the critique of the predominant way of thinking about cultural diversity.

### **THE NEVER-ENDING CRISIS OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Since Renaissance, religion which had a significant impact in western way of thinking, started to leave its unique place to a different way of knowledge production that depends on the observation, explanation and the experience. In the 17th century philosophy attempted to draw its own line, starting its separation from religion. Later in the 18th century, philosophy and science had been "divorced" such that the formation of the universities had been divided into departments of humanities (literature and philosophy) and sciences. Wallerstein (2005: 39), through citing "The Two Cultures" by Charles Persy Snow, has named this transformation as "two cultures". This separation

gave the opportunity of taking refuge in the sciences from the darkness of subjective and uncertain “knowledge” of the humanities. Nevertheless, the factor of “man” still appeared as a problem within these cultures. Indeed this divorcing of philosophy from science also implied another separation, namely, that of “the good” and “the true”, which had been integrated in traditional knowledge. In the process of modernization of the sciences, Wallerstein points out that searching for the good came to be the problem of humanities and searching for the true was taken to be the responsibility of sciences. This separation a consequence of the modern world system or in other words, capitalist world-economy. He implies a new and integrated epistemology, which holds the true and the good together, is needed. (Wallerstein 2010: 228).

As the faith and even the obligation of the Western cultures came to be the responsibility of the Non-Western cultures, progress should have followed the rules of Eurocentric universalism in the 19th century, and should have been lead and applied to all over the world by the West (Wallerstein 2005: 19). Thus “progression” and “development” are the tools which Europe has been using for justifying its intervention and expansion by declaring its particular values as “universal” (Wallerstein 2007: 15). It is hard to justify these tools since they always encounter resistance in different cultures. At this point Wallerstein asks “Who has the right to intervene?” and replies to this question as “the ones who have the political/military power”. The basis of this justification and intervention of the West was Christianity in the 16th century, the mission of civilization in the 19th century, and the arguments of human rights and democracy at the end of the 20th and in the beginning of the 21st centuries” (Wallerstein 2007: 39).

Social sciences started to appear consecutively in order to dominate the societal and its knowledge in the 19th century. Instead of constructing their epistemologies and methodologies in a unique way, they adapted themselves in one of the “two cultures”, either in the idiographic or the nomothetic epistemology. On the contrary, Wallerstein assumes that this “Methodenste-it” division between nomothetic and idiographic epistemologies should be questioned because it will go out of existence in the 21st century. (Wallerstein 2010: 227).

In the beginning the number of the branches of social sciences was only six: history, economy, political sciences, sociology, anthropology and orientalism.

Economists, political scientists and sociologists were following nomothetic epistemology because measurable data was empowering their geographical prejudice and, therefore, the assumption of being universal. Nomothetic epistemology was the only way of justifying the universality of any data despite the limitations of its references. This epistemology presumed that social behavior depends on rules, but it does not matter where these rules will be applied (Wallerstein 2005: 22). Knowledge should be objective to be generalized and could provide the rules of the universal. Thus, social sciences, by pertaining to the civilized culture, were encouraged to intervene not just physically but also culturally.

Orientalism, which follows idiographic epistemology, is a geographical determination of the West that determines the cultures through a dualism: "the west" and "the non-western". Indeed non-western was the issue of both anthropology and orientalism but the fundamental difference between these two fields was the objects and the objectives of their researches: Anthropology was working on the savages and Orientalism was working on "high cultures" which were under the control of bureaucratic empires in a time in history (Wallerstein 2005: 16-18). So orientalism was researching "high cultures" which had complex technologies, unifying languages, and widespread religions; and was rather different from 'the savage', but high cultures could not be modern by pertaining to a bureaucratic empire (Wallerstein 2005: 24). This statement of "high cultures" clarifies the proposed assumption of "lack of intercultural contact" because it determines progress as an obligation of any culture on earth without considering the diversities. The Western way of thinking comprehends "the different" as just the object of its universal knowledge. In line with obsession with objective knowledge, every object of thought is explained from a distance, which provides a universal frame and prevents contact with the object and its values.

Although oriental studies were interested in the texts produced by these cultures instead of their practices of living, nomothetic epistemology formed the fundamental basis of the knowledge. In general, these texts were about religion and it was hard to grasp their wisdom. So they needed to be analyzed philologically. This is the point where the concept of "intercultural contact" can be reflected. Intercultural contact and oriental studies can be both grasped as re-reading processes but the significant difference between them is their

ways of comprehending the cultural diversities, in other words, the hierarchy of the cultures. In contrast with intercultural contact, for oriental studies the connoisseur and so the dominant culture was the West. That is why oriental studies, which reveal a western way of thinking, were adapting any knowledge that they could gain from different cultures into their scientific criteria. The accent of oriental readings was on the reasons for preventing being modern and they could be involved in the process of modernization/westernization by clearing the way. These cultures were also symbolizing the stages of the progress of European culture which had already left these steps behind in the pages of history. Faced with the plurality of the histories of the orient, orientalism had no chance but to follow the idiographic epistemology (Wallerstein 2005: 24). But this epistemology should not be grasped so far from the nomothetic epistemology because, as Wallerstein explained in the example of historians' humanistic idiographic epistemology, the studies were also avoiding speculation, and thereby, philosophy and its comprehension of social facts. They were by positivist historians whose way was tightly dependant on the data received from the archives (Wallerstein 2005: 60). In his notable work, Edward Said asserted that orientalism was "a system of representations framed by a whole of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later Western empire" and added that "Orientalism was itself a product of certain political forces and activities" (Said 1979: 202-203). This system, which depended on representations of the West, was also an issue of "comparison" which causes lack of intercultural contact. Therefore, literature took its place in the era of this comparison. Comparative literature which was dependant on the differences of the clans, generated effective examples to this negative comparison in the 18th and 19th century (Bulut 2006: 113).

In the second half of the 20th century, not only the name 'orientalism' but also the imagination of the East changed. For the very first time the East was reluctantly accepted by the West not just as the object but as a subject of thinking and demanding. This statement of the East can be taken as the result of decolonization and the requirement of a new way of evaluating the East. This process was not about the independencies of the colonies but the new ways of colonialism (Bulut 2006: 122-142).

The second period of the modernization process of the sciences appeared in 1945 for several reasons that also determined the world policy, such as, for

instance, the cold war and the economy, the population increase and the production capacity with implications of the present and the further studies. In this second period of social sciences, which this study is concerned with, the borderline between the nomothetic and the idiographic epistemology has been crossed over comparably to the extension of the concept of "the West". The United States has come to be the super power of the world. The significant reason for the merger of these epistemologies has been the appearance of regional studies: In the previous period, nomothetic epistemologies (economics, political sciences and sociology) had been just working on "the present" and "the West". In the second period, however, with the motivation of regional studies, which required researching "the past" and "the East" by assuming the validity of the rules of the West, could be applied to non-western cultures, and so the certainty in the borders of sciences started to blur. In time, orientalism, which can be defined with idiographic epistemology, even abandoned this name and participated in the departments of regional cultural research which required a multidisciplinary point of view. Their motivation was too clear to be seen with naked eyes: The super power of the world, the United States, needed more specialists to satisfy the need of knowledge in different regions of the world to maintain its power (Gulbenkian Commission 2011: 38-42). The change that Wallerstein stated at this period of the history of social sciences can just be defined as being "formal". However, according to the oriental studies the purpose stayed the same. From 19th century till World War II the Orient World was dominated by France and Britain, after the second war it was United States which has been setting up the rules for orientalism. (Said 1979: 4)

There are two critical assertions about the dualistic stance of the West. One is the dualism that takes its roots from Descartes: "The modern world has been for most of its history a prisoner of Aristotle's doctrine of the excluded middle. Something is either A or not A. There is no third possibility" (Wallerstein 2000: 3). Wallerstein points out the need for writing history from the beginning, a process that does not depend on dualities like Orientalism and Occidentalism, the West and the East, the good and the true etc. He names the occidental point of view as "Anti-Eurocentric Eurocentrism" and asserts that to accept these dualisms and the terminology is also to accept the insistence in the definitions of the West (Wallerstein 2007: 58). The second assertion can be comprehended through the suggestion of Prigogine and Stengers'

“giving the enchantment of the world back” which is discussed in reference to Weber’s aphorism “disenchantment of the world”. This suggestion should not be grasped as calling back the mythologies of the past, and is not a call for mystification. On the contrary, the call for “giving the enchantment of the world back” is a way for breaking the limitations between nature and man in the name of consecrating freedom. Obsession of objectivism causes externalization of the scientists even from their own physical and social environment: and it is substantially impossible in any case (Gulbenkian Commission 2011: 72). Objective knowledge, both with its epistemology and methodology, which is a construction of the values of the West, cannot make available the ground for understanding cultural diversities. Objectivism, which stands at a distance to the facts, is on the contrary excluding the differences while justifying the uniqueness of Western values. Intercultural contact, which can be grasped as a dialogical ground, is an opportunity for crossing this cultural distance and understanding cultures within their own particularities.

### **RE-READING NASREDDIN HODJA THROUGH INTERCULTURAL CONTACT**

Kathleen R. F. Burrell, the author of the article, was born in England and lived in the USA; the translator of the article and the writer of the note, Ipek lives in Turkey. While re-reading an intercultural character like Nasreddin Hodja through these two texts, I try here to analyze the two different understandings from different cultures, and then state another third and personal one.

Burrell, a professor in *The Center of Turkish Research in the Middle East Languages and Cultures Department of Colombia University*, was doubtlessly a specialist in the field of Turkish culture. Not only the name of the department Burrell worked in for years in the second half of the 20th century, but also her way of thinking in her article affirm the criticisms of Wallerstein who describes the second period of social sciences as regional studies. Regarding to these critiques Burrell’s article is taken into consideration as an instance for this process in the study and her objective point of view is questioned. Thus this study should be considered as an effort for understanding these two texts within their contexts.

The two pages of notes on Burrell’s article by Ipek the translator, published just after Burrell’s article, has enriched the re-reading process as a continuation of the case. Here Ipek changes her invisible role as the translator to the

counter position of the critic by disagreeing with the explanations of Burril on Nasreddin Hodja. A footnote has been added by the publisher, explaining the reason for publishing the note of the translator which reads "The note of Gül Diken": "We have requested the translation of Burril's text from Ipek. In the course of the translation, Ipek stated in a phone call that she had reservations about the text and mentioned giving up the translation. Thereupon, we told her to continue translating the article and that we would also publish the note on her reservations"<sup>2</sup>.

Burril began her article by discussing two observations of D. H. Munro (1951) on 'laughter'. She stated that in contrast with 'fear', laughter does not have any common characteristics or features of itself and she described laughter as a personal reaction which depends on more than one motive. Accordingly, she was asserting these two observations as the universal codes of humor and thereby giving credence to realizing the assumption of "universalism" of the West.

On the contrary, the history of humor contains many approaches that depend on different points of view. For instance, Henri Bergson (2006) has stated three basic observations on laughter. The first is that laughter is particular to man, the reason for laughing at an animal being possible because of the similarities it bears with man. The second is "insensitivity", because laughter needs a calm situation and reveals indifference, such that excitement is the worst enemy of it. The third is that laughter can be defined for a group. Comprehension of laughter requires grasping it in its natural milieu, in the group or society (Bergson 2006: 11-13). When we compare these two points of views it is clear that Burril's point of view, which is derived from that of Munro (1951), is emphasizing individualism, whereas Bergson is implying the societal characteristics of laughter. Through the assumptions of Bergson, it can easily be grasped that humor has common points in different cultures which we can call "the contact" points.

However, besides these individual and societal views there is another perspective which must be discussed in line with the issue of lack of contact and which can be named the "excluding political view". The issue of contact between entities is not only valid for the characters -that is the content- but also valid for the form of the anecdotes. In the greater part of Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotes, dialogue contours the form of communication between him and

the other characters. Özdemir (2010: 32) complains about dismissive manner of the West. Although critical thinking in these cultures uses and questions dialog as a method of producing knowledge, they have never included Hodja into the discussion. No wonder from Socrates until today this method, "maieutics" is used by many philosophers and characters in literature, and definitely one of them was/is Nasreddin Hodja.

"Amusement" and "tolerance" are the origins of humor as a general attitude. Almost in every culture, humor takes its shape and continues its progress through these two components. Doubtlessly, every culture has its own manners of humor which are based upon its traditions, life style and values. As cultures change or the representations of humor move between cultures, the social meaning of humor and the functions of the characters that bear it can change, as in the examples of Santa Claus and Aesop, who, like Nasreddin Hodja, despite being born and having lived in Anatolia, are still travelling all around the world as humor characters (Yardımcı 2010: 2-3). There are no constant/universal rules or characteristics for determining or defining a cultural character. Because of their phenomenological features nobody can categorize the components of a culture as 'A' or 'not A'.

Burril continued her article by describing the relation between Nasreddin Hodja as a cultural character and its representation in the collective memory of Turks. It is true, as she mentioned, that even spelling out his name makes Turks smile. Also the anecdotes are not only about laughter, but also about morals. The closing sentences of the anecdotes are usually used as proverbs as a reference to dilemmas, causes and consequences of certain acts and situations. For instance, "cutting the branch one is sitting on", which is the closing remark of one of his anecdotes, became the proverb in time that corresponds to "cutting one's own throat" in English. Burril pointed out that this remembrance originates not only from written texts but simply from drawn images. She gave the prevailing image of Nasreddin Hodja from a book cover where Nasreddin Hodja is depicted as being mounted backwards on his donkey (Burril 1996: 17). This image is so popular that it indicates more than one anecdote. One of these anecdotes is "When Hodja mounted his donkey backwards people asked him the reason of this unusual act. He replied that it was not himself but the donkey facing the wrong way". In his other anecdote his answer for this question was "I'm interested in where I have been coming

from more than where I'm going". A lack of cultural contact leads to reading this image "literally". Burril explains the reason of his act functionally that the purpose of riding his donkey by sitting backwards was to continue to see and talk to his students who were following them. The actual purpose of mounting the donkey reversely was to give a cultural message about self in Sufism, but Burril, although a specialist in Turkish culture failed to notice this and dis/misread the message of this act. The lack of cultural contact at this point should be specified: Firstly, Anatolian public culture has been depending on oral heritage so there is no need for any common image to remember Hodja; his manner or his anecdotes. Thus it can be asserted that the traditional remembrance way of Anatolian culture is not images but oral repetition. Secondly, as also asserted by Ipek in her note, this prevailing image which is discussed by Burril in her article, is not of Nasreddin Hodja the person, but rather the depiction of his philosophy. Ipek explained in her note that Nasreddin Hodja was a Sufi. According to Sufi symbolism, the donkey represents the spirit (*psuke/nefs*) which a Sufi should overcome in every manner at every stage of his/her journey through life (Ipek 1996: 23). It also can be annotated through this popular image of him that his turban signifies his relation with the central authority and his donkey indicates that he is a villager. These are the permanent features of the Hodja in most situations (Başgöz 2005:19). Certainly, in this study personal assumptions on the Anatolian perception and tradition of Nasreddin Hodja are being expressed just as in the writings of Burrill and Ipek. Nasreddin Hodja, mounting on his donkey reversely is considered here as a symbol created by Turkish public philosophy and it implies an interpretation of life from a different point of view (Özdemir 2010: 31). These characteristics of Nasreddin Hodja are subject to probable alterations in other cultures that he has passed into.

Burril could understand neither the personality nor the anecdotes of Nasreddin Hodja. Yet, she continued her article by trying to adapt the stories into the outline of the ten categories of 'ridiculous situations'. She derived these categories from D. H. Munro (1951), just like her barren observations on 'laughter'. Without taking the responsibility of her opinions, by relying on Munro's classifications in her article, she tried to analyze Nasreddin Hodja (Burril 1996: 18-20). These classifications were expected to "secure" Burril's observations in the objective stance of the scientific-universal framework. Although none of these categories matched with Nasreddin Hodja, she tried

to place him in a recipe. This is an example typically reflecting Eurocentric universalism that was discussed above by giving reference to Wallerstein. The intercultural character of Hodja provides a space for potential multi-readings. There is no categorization that can define his intercultural characteristics in any dimension and culture. Thus, besides this dis/misreading of his profundity, Nasreddin Hodja cannot be crammed into a one dimensional reading.

Anyone could feel Ipek's annoyance at and refusal to take Burril's assumptions seriously. For instance, Ipek advised the reader not to laugh at what was not determined by Burril's scientific categorization and that involuntary laughs should be overcome. She also described Burril's stance of not owning the responsibility for her assumptions as "pusillanimity" and insisted that memorizing "the rules of laughter" does not benefit anyone (Ipek 1996: 23-24). Just like Wallerstein (2000), Ipek assumed that everything could be analyzed or understood just through dualistic epistemology. In the conclusion of her note Ipek wrote the crucial dis/misunderstandings of Burril item by item and insisted that cultural diversities cannot be grasped through this "objective and measurable" apprehension. As Ipek pointed out several times in her note, the reason for Burril's dis/mis-understandings is her intentional disregard for the cultures in which Hodja continues to live. Consequently Ipek (1996: 23) summarized her critique as: "Everything must comply with the standards of the era".

As I stated in the beginning, this study is established upon two texts which are comprehended as the defining cases of this study. It has been also emphasized that these texts are read within their contexts for understanding different point of views. Among these texts, this study is aiming to establish a wider point of view. Hence, the study is not the adherent of any of these two point of views which must be taken into consideration only as the cases of a re-reading process. Consequently, this study accentuated the need for constructing a different way of understanding cultural diversities through the concept of intercultural contact that embraces cultural diversities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study, through the re-reading process of Nasreddin Hodja, the significance of "intercultural contact" is emphasized. This concept signifies a dialogical ground for understanding cultural diversities and particularities of

their own. If the knowledge of a culture is "explained" through the "objective" i.e., the "universal" codes of the West, or, in other words, if it is adapted to the dominant way of thinking, this will doubtlessly result in "lack of intercultural contact" which has its roots in the common perception of cultural comparison making up the progress of the West.

The crucial determinant of objectivism is "explanation" which requires generalization by generating the gap between the discourse and the object of the research in the name of being universal. While analyzing a culture, the re-reader and researcher doubtlessly need not only the data, which orientalism has racked up in the past from nonwestern cultures, but also the approach and the method should embrace particularity of cultures where contact is sought. Hence, it is asserted here that there cannot be any approach or methodology that is sufficient to embrace all cultural diversities. The discourse should focus on the culture itself in relation to its heritage and milieu. This awareness requires the knowledge of diversity which is gained through the study of the particularities of cultures. Thus, intercultural contact is an opportunity for recognizing and understanding the diversities of cultures.

Making a case of Burriel's article for the purposes of this study was useful for discussing the subject in reverse through the counter concept of "lack of intercultural contact". This lack has two aspects which cannot be separated from each other, and which empower the assumptions made here. In her article, Burriel could not construct contact with Nasreddin Hodja and the reader who reads both Nasreddin Hodja and her article. Being one of these readers, and also a "re-reader," I had to call attention to Burriel's dis/mis-reading. To explain "intercultural contact" more clearly, one should "give the enchantment of the discourse back" and continue with diversity: modern thought depends on Descartes' best known aphorism "I think therefore I am". This sentence should be grasped as the conclusion of a thinking process which had reached an end by excluding everything but Descartes himself as the evidence of his existence. On the contrary, a Sufi states his/her thinking on "the absence of the self". While modern thought depends on the separation of the heart and reason; Sufism depends on the "reasoning heart". In his article on the wisdom of Nasreddin Hodja, Özdemir (2010, 38) questions the harmony between heart and reason in Sufism and in Anatolian Culture. In this culture reason is not only about seriousness. Humor is a part of reason because it mirrors life just like Sufism.

Thus reason, which is a matter of both humor and Sufism, is not about excluding on the contrary it is about including everything related to life. The cultural mentality so differs here and it is much complicated that we cannot understand the point of views through the same epistemology and methodology.

Sufism considers not the conclusions but the process itself: "being on the road". In its own way of thinking, life is a "journey of the self". For instance; Rumi, just like Descartes, but in another mentality, expressed the state of being in one of his aphorisms as "You are what you are searching for". Searching here implies an endless process which has levels represented by shariah, religion, mystique and truth. On the other hand, Sufism never opposed Reason itself, but has criticized its inadequacy in thinking about God (Kılıç 2011). These different ways of thinking, modernity and Sufism, can only be linked by understanding each other's differences that can be best defined as intercultural contact which gives us the opportunity to understand the "different" in its unique space and history. This is the point that, as a case, Burril failed to notice or dismissed in her article.

In the context of this case, I draw on Sufism as the way of re-reading Nasreddin Hodja who is an intercultural character of humor. Indeed, it is not matter whether Nasreddin Hodja was a Sufi or not because in the era in which he had been living Sufism was the most widely spread way of thinking in Anatolia. Therefore, understanding him requires the knowledge of Sufism. Of course, this is not an absolute for the determination of Nasreddin Hodja, who can be understood through different points of view in different cultures.

### Endnotes

- 1 In literature the concept of "intercultural contact" is generally used for impling the problems of adaptation in immigration studies but in this study the concept is taken into consideration through a new context which implies cultural diversities.
- 2 The translation of this note belongs to me.

### References

- Akkuş, Metin (2003). "Doğu Kültüründe Nasreddin Hoca'nın Benzerleri" [The likes of Nasrettin Hodja in the Eastern cultures]. *Manas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7: 57-62. <http://yordam.manas.kg/ekitap/pdf/Manasdergi/sbd/sbd7/sbd-7-06.pdf> (Date accessed: 24.04.2004)

- Başgöz, İlhan (2005). *Geçmişten Günümüze Nasreddin Hoca* [From past to present Nasrettin Hodja]. İstanbul, Turkey: Pan Publishing.
- Bergson, Henry (2006). *Gülme Komiğinin Anlamı Üstüne Deneme* [Laughter - An essay on the meaning of the comic]. Çev. Y. Avunç. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yay. (Original work published 1900)
- Bulut, Y. (2006). *Oryantalizmin Kısa Tarihi* [A short story of Orientalism]. İstanbul: Küre Yay.
- Burriel, Kathleen R. F. (1996). "Nasreddin Hoca'nın Kişiliği ve Fıkraları" [The personality and anectodes of Nasrettin Hodja] . Çev. Çiğdem Erkal İpek. *Gül Diken: Mizah Kültürü Dergisi* 11 (3): 17-22.
- Gulbenkian Commission (2011). *Sosyal Bilimleri Açın: Sosyal Bilimlerin Yeniden Yapılanması Üzerine Rapor* [Open the social sciences]. Çev. Ş. Tekeli. İstanbul: Metis Yay.
- İpek, Çiğdem Erkal (1996). "Çevirmenin Notu" [Translator's note]. *Gül Diken: Mizah Kültürü Dergisi* 11 (3): 23-24.
- Kılıç, Mahmud Erol (2011). *Anadolu'nun Ruhü: Tasavvuf, Felsefe Siyaset Konuşmaları* [The spirit of Anatolia: Dialog on sufism, philosophy, and politics]. İstanbul: Sufi Book, Timaş Yay.
- Kumar, Anand and Frank Welz (2001). "Culture in the world-system: An interview with Immanuel Wallerstein". *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 7 (1): 221-231. doi: 10.1080/13504630120065293 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13504630120065293?needAccess=true> (Date accessed:15.03.2015)
- Munro, David Hector (1951). *Argument of Laughter*. Indiana: Notre Dame.
- Özdemir, N. (2011). *The Philosopher's Philosopher Nasreddin Hodja*. Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (2010). "Mizah, Eleştirel Düşünce ve Bilgelik: Nasreddin Hoja" [Humor, critical thinking and wisdom: Nasreddin Hodja]. *Milli Folklor Uluslararası Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi* 22 (87): 27-40.
- Özünel, Evrim Ölçer (2009). "Kolektif Bilinçdışında Nasreddin Hoca Fıkraları ve Bilgelik" [Nasreddin Hodja anectodes and wisdom in collective unconscious]. *21. Yüzyılı Nasreddin Hoca ile Anlamak Uluslararası Sempozyum Bildirileri Kitabı*. Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yay. 385.
- Said, Edward Wadie (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Snow, Charles Percy (2010). *İki Kültür* [The two cultures]. Çev. T. Birkan. Ankara: TÜBİTAK Yay. (Original work published 1959)

- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2007). *Avrupa Evrenselciliği: İktidarın Retoriği*. [European universalism: The rhetoric of power ]. Çev. S. Önal. İstanbul: Aram Yay. (Original work published 2006)
- \_\_\_\_\_(2000). "Cultures in conflict? Who are we? Who are others?". *Journal of Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 1 (3): 505-521.  
<http://www.iwallerstein.com/cultures-in-conflict-who-are-we-who-are-the-others/>  
(Date accessed:14.09.2015)
- \_\_\_\_\_(2005). *Yeni Bir Sosyal Bilim İçin*. [For a new social sciences] Çev. E. Abadoğlu. İstanbul: Aram Yay.
- Yardımcı, İsmail (2010). "Mizah Kavramı ve Sanattaki Yeri" [The concept of humour and its place in arts]. *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 6: 1-41. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12780/UUSBD69>  
<http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/202399> (Date accessed: 23.06.2015)

# Nasreddin Hoca'yı "Kültürlerarası Temas" İmkânı İçin Yeniden Okumak

Özlem Oğuzhan\*

## Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal bilimlerde "kültürel çeşitliği anlamının egemen biçimi" tartışmasından hareketle, "kültürlerarası temas" kavramını önermektedir. Bir örnek olay ile tartışılan bu yeni kavram, Batı-merkezli evrenselcilikten temel alan nesnellığe dayalı bilimselcilik saplantısına işaret eder ve kültürleri kendi nitelikleri içinde anlama imkânı içerir. Sözü edilen örnek olay peşpeşe yayınlanmış iki metinden oluşmaktadır: Nasreddin Hoca hakkında, Kathleen Burril tarafından yazılmış bir makale ve bu makale üzerine, makalenin çevirmeni Çiğdem Erkal İpek tarafından yazılmış bir eleştiri notu. Metinler, mizah kültürü dergisi olan Gül Diken'in özel sayısında yayınlanmıştır. Bu çalışma, bu iki metni yeniden okumak suretiyle, sosyal bilimlerde egemen olan düşünme biçimini sorgulamakta ve küreselleşme çağında kültürel çeşitlilikleri kendi özellikleri içinde anlayan bir yaklaşımı önermektedir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Batı-merkezli evrenselcilik, nesnellik, oryantalizm, Nasreddin Hoca, kültürlerarası temas, tasavvuf

\* Doç. Dr., Sakarya Üniversitesi, İletişim Fakültesi, Radyo, Televizyon ve Sinema Bölümü  
– Sakarya/Türkiye  
ozlemoguzhan@sakarya.edu.tr

# Перечитывая Ходжу Насреддина в контексте «межкультурных контактов».

Озлем Огузхан\*

## Аннотация

В настоящем исследовании в контексте обсуждения «доминирующего подхода в понимании культурного многообразия» в общественных науках предлагается концепция «межкультурного контакта». Эта новая концепция, которая рассматривается в данной работе в связи с конкретным примером, указывает на одержимость сциентизмом, основанным на объективности, являющейся продуктом европоцентристского универсализма, и предлагает возможность понимания культур в их собственных особенностях. Вышеупомянутый пример состоит из двух текстов, опубликованных последовательно: Статья о Насреддине Ходже, написанная Кэтлин Р.Ф. Бэррил, и критическая заметка на эту статью, написанная Чигдем Эркаль Ипек, переводчиком статьи. Эти тексты были опубликованы в специальном выпуске юмористического журнала *Gül Diken*. Настоящее исследование, вновь возвращающее к этим двум текстам, ставит под сомнение преобладающее мышление в социальных науках и утверждает подход, который улавливает культурные различия в эпоху глобализации.

## Ключевые слова

Европоцентристский универсализм, объективность, ориентализм, Ходжа Насреддин, межкультурный контакт, суфизм

---

\* Доц., д-р., Университет Сакарья, Факультет связи, кафедра радио, телевидения и кино. – Сакарья / Турция  
ozlemoguzhan@sakarya.edu.tr