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Production and Articulation of Identities among the Bulgarian Turks: Bursa”

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THE PRODUCTION AND ARTICULATION OF IDENTITIES AMONG TURKISH IMMIGRANTS FROM BULGARIA: THE CASE OF BURSA

The recent transnational studies started to see the contemporary social phenomena not always within the territorial boundaries of nation-states, but instead they conceptualize movements in societies with spatio-temporal frames (Gray, 2011: 1). The framework of transnationalism is to recognize the duality or multiplicity of locations which experienced or imagined by immigrants (Parla, 2006: 544). Through that perspective migration studies have turned towards multi-directional flows of persons, objects, information and symbols. This can be explained through the linkages or in other words transnational practices of immigrants which can be observed in their daily activities, developing of new experiences and social relations. Hence, these practices reflect how migrants build and rebuild their lives in terms of roots and connections developed and maintained in more than one society (Parella and Cavalcanti, 2008: 717).

Faist (2000: 23-25) states five types of migration, 1) territory: domestic- international 2) time: temporary- permanent, 3) size of flow: individual, group, mass migration 4) cause: voluntary labour migration - involuntary or forced refugee flight and 5) legal status: illegal-legal. The distinction of voluntary and forced migration is quite complicated to understand because it shouldn't be analyzed just based on absence or presence of physical coercion. Other forms of violence may also be possible such as ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities allowed or supported by nation-state authorities with some policies or regulations to persuade a sort of quasi - voluntary departure. On the other hand, he stresses that decision of immigration to another country has strong relationship with the people's web of ties especially if migrants faced with death in their present place of residence.

Faist (2000: 7-8) uses the term which called meso analysis is fruitful to understand migration process. According to him, micro theories concentrate on mostly rational choice and value-expectancy theories that emphasize the values, desires of people and how these desires translate into decisions to stay or go so basically it can be said more individual-level approach. On the other hand, macro theories concentrate on structural constraints and opportunities, such as income differences between countries of emigration and immigration and the legal-institutional regulation of exit and entry. As he states a few studies look at the process of migration itself and dynamics of international movement especially the functions of migrant networks. That is the reason meso-level approach is important to understand migrant networks.

Today, if we look at international migration, it is not just permanent move from one nation-state to another but has also multi-dimensional flows such as economic, political, cultural, and demographic process that expresses various links between two or more settings in various nation-states and manifold ties of movers and stayers between them so immigration countries highly engage in border-crossing activities. Thus, the connections to both countries of origin not vanish instead emigration and immigration countries include not only migrants but also material goods, information, symbols and cultural practices. (Faist, 2000: 9-10).

The new linkages between societies based on migration lead to emergence of new theories as “transnationalism” and “transnational communities”. It is a fact that globalization has strong effects on them because of rapid improvement in technologies of transport and communication, makes it easier for migrants to maintain their links with their country of origin (Castles and Miller, 2003: 29). Similarly, Schuerkens (2005: 535) states that the decreasing the real cost of transportation and communication leads expanding of international movements. Moreover, the construction of railways and roads and the establishing of phone, radio and television communications bring an integration of developing countries into international markets. The development of economies, surely affects the people’s personal networks in terms of providing easier and cheaper communication system. Similarly, Appadurai (2003: 25) states that communities are forged transnationally, across nation-states through networks of diaspora, migration, technology, electronic media, ideologies and global capital. In other words, they contribute to the multi-level practices and identities as regards to be transmigrant. Schiller et al. (1995: 48) explain the term “transmigrant” as people who are rooted in their new country permanently but maintaining multiple linkages to their homeland.

When the communities emigrated from their homeland for several reasons voluntarily or involuntarily, they make an effort for adaptation to their new country of settlement in many ways and also they construct their identities according to the segments of both home and host country. From such a perspective, identity can be considered as an unstable aspect. Hall (2003: 233-236) explains that on the one hand, identity can be understood as a collective, shared history among individuals associated by race or ethnicity; and on the other hand, identity can also be explained as unstable, metamorphic and even contradictory. According to him, instead of thinking identity as an already completed fact, identity issue should be thought as a “production” which is never complete; instead it is always in a process, and always established within, not outside, representation.

The migration studies became more popular in Turkey in recent years. Most of the studies are related to Turkish diaspora in Europe, internal migration which mostly focus on Kurdish issue in Turkey and also, more recently, transit migration issue in Turkey has started to be examined more. However, it is seen that there is no adequate studies related to migrant groups in Turkey who have Turkish ethnic identity. The questions like what kind of problems Turkish ethnic minorities in Turkey have experienced, if they have constructed their identities only based on ethnic lines or if they have produced some strategies to live in that society, if they have created some transnational space and multiple identities have not been addressed enough in sociological researches.

Under the Ottoman Empire, there were Turks in several different territories such as Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, these Turks who were settled in different territories experienced the pressure from the new political authorities (Nichols and Sugur, 2004: 64). Turkish Muslims from Bulgaria is one of the significant communities who lived under the high pressure of Bulgarian government. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, it seen the several immigration waves of Turkish Muslims that can be counted as 1912-1920, 1950-51, 1968-1978 and 1989 (Çetin, 2009: 395). The Bulgarian national state was founded in 1878 in a land which has multi-racial and multi-national characteristics. In order to create a Unitarian Bulgarian state in an area where half of the population was Turkish, they started to use assimilative and repressive regulations. The 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian war destroyed the demographic structure in Balkans (Şimşir, 1990: 161). Beginning from those years, Bulgaria tried to assimilate Turkish minorities and adopt Bulgarian identities by using social, economic, political and psychological pressures (Mengü, 2008: 104). Turkish schools were destroyed, hundreds of Turkish teachers were dispersed or forced to immigrate to Anatolia. All of the Turkish language newspapers closed, Turkish associations and social clubs were banned (Şimşir, 1990: 163-165). According to Eminov (1990: 203), during the winter of 1984-1985 the Bulgarian government brought a campaign which called “Revival Process” to force Turks in Bulgaria to replace their Turkish-Muslim names with Bulgarian ones. It is known that the name-changing campaign was met with violent resistance so hundreds of Turkish Muslims were killed, thousands were arrested and sent to hard labor camps and some of them banished to different parts of Bulgaria. According to Doğan, during 1989 immigration wave, from June 3 to August 21 1989, 311.862 Bulgarian-origin Turks immigrated to Turkey (in Dimitrova, 1998). However, Gruev and Kalyonski states that 40.000 migrant people came back to Bulgaria before the ending of their

three month valid visa. On the other hand, at the same period 400.000 people applied for a passport to immigrate to Turkey (in Hacısalihoğlu, 2012: 39). According to Zürcher (2010: 467), the main for repatriation was the insufficiency of Turkish State about responding migrants' demands. In spite of the fact that the immigration of Bulgarian-origin Turkish population was met with a nationalist enthusiasm in Turkey, migrants experienced many difficulties to find jobs and places to settle, and they started to return back in the following years to Bulgaria.

Kirişçi indicates that the Turkish Republic aimed at creating a homogeneous population from the ethnically and culturally heterogeneous Ottoman population. That is the reason; new administrators gave priority to immigrants having a Muslim and/or Turkish background (in Kirişçi and İçduygu, 2009: 460). Castles and Miller (2003: 42) states that being a citizen depends on membership in a certain national community, mostly depends on the dominant ethnic group of the territory concerned. Thus, people who have Turkish ethnicity have been privileged in acquiring citizenship since the early years of the nation building. From that point, historically the most privileged migrant group in Turkey is the Bulgarian-origin Turkish immigrants because of their 'Turkish origin' (Parla, 2011: 65).

Through that point, this study focuses on the production and articulation of identities of the 1989 Turkish immigrants who had to move from Bulgaria to Turkey and settled in Bursa. During this immigration wave, approximately 200,000 Bulgarian-origin Turks immigrated to Turkey and settled permanently. It is known that most of them immigrated to the Marmara region. Within that region 'Bursa' is one of the important cities that have high intensity of immigrants. To scrutinize their identity construction I conducted a field research which was based on semi-structured in-depth interviews and I interviewed with 10 people from different districts in Bursa (Görükle, Hürriyet, Akpınar, Yunuseli, Kestel). I have three main reasons to choose Bursa as a fieldwork of this study. Firstly, the intense immigration of Turks from Bulgaria to Bursa in 1950s made the Bursa specific city which has strong relations with Bulgaria. In 17th of January 1985, Culture and Solidarity Association of Balkan Immigrants was founded in Bursa. Especially, in 1980s it is seen that Bursa was always the head of the demonstrations and protests against Bulgaria's repressive and assimilationist policies and attitudes. The best known big demonstration was done in 20th of April 1985. It shows us Bursa is not just the immigration city for Bulgarian-origin Turks but also is the city which always has strong relations with Bulgaria in terms of emphasizing the rights of Turks in Bulgaria. Furthermore, their immigration to the specific places made me to choose Bursa as

the site of my fieldwork due to easy accessibility to the data. Moreover, compared to bigger cities such as İstanbul and İzmir, in my opinion smaller cities have more advantage to observe economic, social and cultural aspects of migrant groups and their mobility. During the field research, I had three focus points: Firstly, their way of adaptation to the new settlement; secondly, their transmigrant identities which are based on multiple times and spaces that go back and forth between Bulgaria and Turkey; and finally how Bulgaria's EU membership affect their identities.

As a beginning, all the interviewees stated that they always see Turkey as their homeland because of historical connections in terms of sharing common ethnic identity and geographical connections. On the other hand, although they see Turkey as a homeland, they are faced with several difficulties in adapting to a new environment and differentiating themselves from indigenous Turks in one way or another. Most of the interviewees reflect that they came to Turkey with high expectations and then they met with several difficulties in terms of adapting to new settlement. Their hardworking characteristics that they gained under the influence of the communist regime and being more educated compared to the locals in Turkey caused to change attitudes of locals and they started to see immigrants as rivals and their feeling of compassion and sympathy turned into anger. Moreover, their unexpected linguistic problems brought the biggest problem for communicating with locals. Another important point is that they were faced with different political, economic and cultural conditions and especially they all stated the gender role difference in terms of placing women in working life. Also respondents' disapproved of the locals calling them 'Bulgarian' so immigrants complained about being misrecognized by the majority of the society. Thus, some of Bulgarian-origin Turks prefer living together with their own community or their marriage preference become within their own kinship. Therefore, it is illustrated that they produce sense of belonging to Turkish ethnicity historically but not through society as a whole thus differentiating themselves from locals socially and culturally.

Secondly, I have attempted to show Bulgarian-origin Turks' transmigrant identities which include practices and ties which cross political borders and maintaining multiple ties through familial, social, cultural and political relationships with both their country of birth and the country of immigration. 'Place-making' process is one of the significant characteristics of the transmigrant groups through which they reshape their neighborhoods with regard to their own cultures and values. The usage of Bulgarian language in some places (cafes, restaurants, names, name of foods etc.) or maintaining their cultural activities in public areas as they were

performing in Bulgaria are the examples of the 'place-making' process. They also keep their deep emotional affiliation to their former country because of having family-ties and friendships, the peaceful environment and stress-free characteristics of Bulgaria. That is the reason most of the respondents stated that they want to go to Bulgaria at least once a year. Easy transportation also feeds having strong connections with Bulgaria (especially bus companies). Another specific characteristic of their transmigrant identity is using technology and communication tools for providing attachment to their former country such as watching Bulgarian channels, using internet for reading some news related to Bulgaria. The associations are also the important indicator of transnational practices. For instance, *Culture and Solidarity Association of Balkan Immigrants*' have a strong role for maintaining ties in terms of providing awareness of Turks in Bulgaria, organizing some cultural and political events both in Bulgaria and Turkey.

Finally, I claimed that Bulgaria's EU membership also affected the immigrants' identity construction. In my interviews I saw that most of the respondents stressed the advantages of EU citizenship. According to them Bulgarian passport is not just advantageous because of easy travelling and job opportunities but also they keep themselves as opposed to European countries' prejudices towards Turkish people, even some of them prefer using their Bulgarian names because of this reason. Furthermore, it was really interesting to find out perception changes of the immigrants about Turkey. In the past when they see Turkey as a country which can save them, now they think Bulgaria as a European Union gives opportunity to protect themselves as opposed to Turkey's politics and regulations. Thus, as Elchinova (2011) stated, the most of the 1989 settlers have dual citizenship and regularly cross the border in both directions for holidays, political elections, to visit relatives, on vacation, to study or to develop trans-border business and occupations. Thus, people who were expelled from their country of origin and suffered from Bulgarian authorities' repressive and assimilative regulations for long years under the communist regime, today enjoy the benefits of a transnational lifestyle.

In conclusion, with regards to these three focus points I posed for this study, there is neither one definite answer nor one profile of Bulgarian-origin Turkish immigrants in Turkey in terms of understanding their production and articulation of identities. Identity is 'becoming' and it is 'producing' itself within history. Through this point, what should become clear from this study is that Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria can be considered as transmigrants which have diverse and dynamic characteristics shaped by both country of origin and country of settlement. Bulgarian-origin Turkish minority in Turkey still requires deeper examination,

especially perception changes through generations, way of practicing transnational practices and their transnational identities as regards to be a citizen of Turkey, Bulgaria and the European Union.

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