

Migration and Labour in Europe

Views from Turkey and Sweden

Editors

Emrehan Zeybekođlu Bo Johansson

Marmara University Research Center for International Relations (MURCIR)
Swedish National Institute for Working Life (NIWL)

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MOVING TOWARDS EUROPEAN TRANSNATIONALISM: A TURKISH VIEW

Nermin Abadan-Unat

Whereas in the past most migrants to European countries abandoned all but symbolic ties with their place of origin, became citizens and took on the local culture, spoke the local language, today more and more migrants retain significant, continuing ties with some groups of their countries of origin. This tendency can be explained, to a large extent, within the framework of the growing importance of the concept of diaspora. The impact of various diasporas on their communities as well as their countries of origin has been accelerated by modern systems of communication and the low cost and speed of international mass tourism. But it is also the result of economic and political insecurity and the different forms of discrimination – racism included – that migrants encounter in their new countries of residence. Simultaneously, many states actively encourage their migrant populations to maintain close ties with their country of origin for political and economic reasons. This dual attachment appears to have become a permanent structural feature of European societies. In fact, one could perhaps more accurately claim that it is becoming a global feature, as the weather report on TV in Turkey indicates also the temperatures in Melbourne, Perth, Australia. Thus, a new interpretation of nationalism is in the offing.

The most distinctive characteristic of this new form of nationalism, which often presents itself in local patriotism, flourishes with the support of the electronic revolution and the Internet. It is closely related to the concept of “deterritorialization.” Migration has severed the ties between time and space, and has eliminated the relevance of attachment to the soil. It can be called a globalizing communitarianism beyond boundaries.

Riva Kastoryano argues that transnationalism represents a paradox: it challenges older historical notions of territory and national boundaries

– but at the same time it situates itself toward and over states, to what the media experts now call “the international community” (Kastoryano 2001, 1). Who are its main actors? Immigrants who suffered from exclusion or deliberately opted for self-isolation, refugees and asylum seekers.

The ongoing process of this new type of migration called “transmigration” has deep economic, cultural and political impacts on contemporary nation-states. It involves a massive flow of remittances, strong marriage alliances, religion activities, media diffusion, and commodity exchange across borders. The intensification of diaspora-home relations at times also leads to the globalization of domestic politics, what has been called “long distance nationalism,” noticeable among Bosnians, Kosovar Albanians, Algerians, Kurds, Chechens, etc.

Joanna Breidenbach, while discussing the changing nature of relations between migrants and their new home country, refers to three theses that are applicable in the German case. According to the first thesis, Germany is witnessing a new discourse about migration and multiculturalism. A striking example is the creation and functioning of the Department for Multicultural Affairs created by the municipality of Frankfurt/M. Although the author confirms the validity of this approach, she reminds us that this new discourse is still firmly locked in old essentialistic assumptions concerning the cultural dynamics between migrants and mainstream. It tends to lock culture in a box and ignore important cultural dynamics of contemporary migration and cultural change.

This takes us to the second thesis according to which people’s lives and identity are more fluid in reality than the mosaic image presumes. It produces what the social scientists refer to cultural *mélanges* defined as “creolization” or “hybridization.” It can easily be detected in Turkish-German cultural productions, such as “Kanak Attak” by Feridun Zaimoğlu or the rap of Aziza A. This explains why Breidenbach complains, rightly so, that current migration studies are not sufficiently focused on the increasing number of migrants living in transnational communities. The intensification of diaspora-home relations at times leads to the globalization of domestic politics. Activism in Germany crossed the border when, within 24 hours of Abdullah Öcalan’s arrest, Kurdish demonstrations were orchestrated in twenty-five cities around the world. Another result of this emerging form of dual existence is the effects of remittances. It has been estimated that 80 % of the money spent by political parties during the election in Croatia came from Croatian

emigrants (Breidenbach 2-3). The unfinished story of Ireland can equally only be explained by the strong Irish diaspora in the United States.

The Turkish diaspora is another example of a transnational community that is based on a common experience of migration, common historical and territorial references and interests. These transnational networks are maintained through familial economic activities, political and voluntary associations in different Western countries. With new media development, satellite connections, Turks are able to watch Turkish TV and read Turkish newspapers on a daily basis, not to mention the growing number of Internet links and Web sites. On one hand, the increasing consumption of the Turkish media can be seen as an index of their Turkishness and failed integration into European nation-states. On the other hand, it is a criterion with which to gauge the prevailing cultural attachment to the home country. However, it might instead be more appropriate to refer to it as a third kind of loyalty. This is because a binary view implies a zero-sum game, an either/or logic, limiting Turkish identities either to Turkey or to a country of residence. But this view does not take people's multiple identification into account. Transnationalization per se is neither good nor bad. It requires further analysis.

As Ayhan Kaya argues, the dimensions along which the cultural identification of the German-Turkish youth in Germany can be made are at least three:

- a) "Authenticity," which is the expression of an "imagined" Anatolian culture;
- b) German culture, which refers to the life styles of German peer groups upon which German-Turkish youth would like to model themselves; and
- c) Global culture, which is mainly the imitation of urban American symbols (Kaya 2002, 39). This state of "inbetweenness" is best expressed by a poem of Zafer Şenocak called "Doppelmann:"

I carry two worlds within me
 but neither one whole
 they're constantly bleeding
 the border runs
 right across my tongue.

As Ayhan Kaya reminds us, this choice of learning to walk on both banks of the river is a deliberately chosen survival strategy in response

to a structural outsiderism produced by the legal, political and economic limitations of the German state (Kaya 2001, 174-75).

Portes defines transnational activities as “those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants. Such activities may be conducted by relatively powerful actors such as national governments and multinational corporations, or initiated by more modest individuals such as immigrants and their home country kin and relations. These activities are not limited to economic enterprises but include political, cultural and religious institutions as well” (Portes, et al. 1999, 217).

This definition indicates the close relationship between transnationalism, globalization and refers to the expansion of networks. In the context of globalization, transnationalism can extend face-to-face communication based on kinship, neighborhoods or workplaces into far-flung communities that communicate at a distance.

Transnational communities do not consist only of migrants, but the ones that do are the most typical. They are not only important in terms of business, but also in terms of political and cultural communication.

Portes makes the useful distinction between transnationalism from above and transnationalism from below in the form of grassroots initiatives.

The second normally represent the disadvantaged and discriminated. They usually function as informal network. Arjun Appadurai speaks about creating “diasporic spaces.” What he means is the creation of different “spaces,” each embracing different people. He speaks of five different global cultural flows that influence communities all over the world (Appadurai 1997, 32-36). By *ethnoscape* he means persons, such as immigrants, tourists, refugees, and exiles, who live in a shifting world. Their imagination fluctuates all the time, for instance, between a village in Kulu and Rinkeby in Stockholm. The term *technospace* refers to new technologies that create new interdependences between the ordinary person and highly skilled labour. The world is currently witnessing a regular flow of computer experts from India to the USA. Germany’s new immigration law is another example of the present trend of bringing certain groups of highly trained professionals and concomitantly, some of their ideas to economically advanced countries. In addition, Appadurai mentions the incredible important role of *financescape*, the role global capital is playing. Let’s think for a moment about the impact a decision to freeze all assets thought to be associated with Osama bin Ladin or the Latin American mafia, for example, would have. Similar profound

influence is exercised by the *mediascape*, an influence aggrandized by a vast and complex repertoire of print and broadcast media, and billboards. They all serve to create imaginary worlds. Most probably, the idea to crash into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center had been planted in the minds of the terrorists of September 11 by the scenario writers of Hollywood. And finally we are all confronted with *ideoscapes*, the collection of all major notions constituting what we understand to be democracy. Again, this produces a variety of interpretations of democracy.

In the light of these ideas we have to turn our attention to the impact of migrants networks and the question why some official migration policies fail.

There has been effort on the part of public administrations in different European countries to implement a policy of multiculturalism as a democratic means through which the right to be different can be recognized. However, these attempts have not produced any relevant results because in the public imagination, multiculturalism consists of the existence of numerous cultures side by side. According to the defenders of multiculturalism, these cultures are delimited and static entities whose authenticity must be preserved and protected. The prevailing slogan is "One culture meets another." In other words, for a number of administrators, a multicultural society represents a mosaic of distinct cultures.

At this point, it is useful to make a distinction between weak and strong multiculturalism. Weak multiculturalism refers to the ideal that ethnic minorities share the same fundamental values and norms, employment patterns, health care, welfare and education system with the mainstream population. Cultural differences, distinct beliefs and practices, religious traditions, language are permitted in the private sphere. Strong multiculturalism, on the other hand, recognizes cultural differences in the public sphere, providing for separate institutions, such as schools or hospitals for Muslims. France is an example of weak, while Great Britain and the Netherlands are examples of strong multiculturalism.

Actually, multiculturalism tends to lock culture in a box and to ignore important cultural dynamics of contemporary migration and cultural change. When does such an approach become a real obstacle to integration? When public administration, through subsidies and a lack of proper understanding about the "Other," contributes to a reinforcement of enclaves (Abadan-Unat 1997, 247-48; Gosh 1991, 46-49). Where do we encounter such enclaves?

They are encountered in transnational communities that accept as ideology the spread of universal values pertaining to a given religion. This is particularly relevant for those Muslims who deny the concept of nation and whose ultimate goal is to forge a universal community of true believers, the “*umma*.”

Tibi Bassam, in one of his recent books, *Europe without Identity*, tries to point out how far a misunderstood multicultural policy can go (Tibi 1998). He considers the formation of communitarianism as particularly negative. Catherine Whithol de Wenden, who analyzed the consequences of communitarian endeavors of Muslims in France, says that wherever public authority recognizes such activities as “legitimate expression of collective identities,” Islam may easily melt into tendencies of fundamentalism and terrorism. Such a categorical statement no doubt demands additional analysis. However, under certain circumstances, it creates the basis for a negation of democratic values and the concept of a participatory citizenship.

At what point does a clash occur and do such developments eventually create serious blocks to normal integration. Part of this lies with the social network that exists within Islamic society. Not only does the society defiantly negate the merits of secularism, it holds as virtuous the segregation of men and women. The position of women in Islam, once accepted in the orthodox sense, rests upon patriarchal and authoritarian values. These values are rooted in a complete and self-sufficient social order.

After the collapse of communism and the phasing out of the American “green belt policy” in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it was thought that a number of conflict situations had been eliminated. But recent events prior to and after “9-11” demonstrate that all policies based on the strengthening of transnational communities, be they Islamic, Hindu, Jewish or Christian, lead to the politicization of religion, eventually to the revival of religious fundamentalism.

Migration is the major vehicle reinforcing diasporic worlds. Due to our present “network society,” we are unable to control the many forms of these links; they pop up in such forms as the mafia, Al Kaida, racism, and xenophobia. Are there any alternatives?

If we want to avoid further clashes, exclusion and marginalization of migrants, e.g., the new citizens of the Europe in making, the public policies of receiving nations have to be carefully assessed. Claudia Schöning Kalender has carefully analyzed the intricacy of the internal structure of a given migrant community (Kalender 1984, 163-71). Her detailed survey on the “Turkish way of life” in Mannheim has illustrated that a so-called “colony of migrants” does not have a monolithic appear-

ance but is rather a multifaceted body in which religion, though important, coexists alongside other forms of association. A recent survey carried out in Holland by C. van Lotringen and Han Entzinger confirms this pluralistic outlook. Accordingly, only five percent of young people in Rotterdam have adopted fundamentalist or extreme-right political ideas.¹

The real problem lies in offering these close or semi-closed enclaves more doors through which they can enter mainstream society. More liberal legislation in terms of dual citizenship, facilitation of residential requirements, and support for promoting second, third generations are, without a doubt, positive steps. But the most important step will be the recognition that the exercise of political rights is not related to the status of citizenship but rather to place of residence. This recognition should be accorded at least at the local level.

On the other hand, countries of origin have to facilitate the political participation of their citizens if the latter prefer to retain their original citizenship. Today, the overwhelming majority of Turkish citizens living in Europe can only be defined as “denizen,” a less than desirable term for citizens deprived of their political rights. But in order to break up the mental ghettos that have been erected and fortified by transnational communities, additional policies are necessary.

It should not be overlooked that some of the existent Islamic-oriented transnational communities are strongly inspired by thinkers such as the late Indian Maududi (d.1979), who founded the *Cemaati İslam*. Throughout his life, he defended the following thesis: “Wherever there is democracy, Islam is not possible. And where Islam prevails, there is no place for democracy.” How relevant this statement is can be better understood upon closer examination of the varying ways in which Turkish migrants are working for Turkey’s admission to the EU. Andrew Geddes, in a comprehensive article, demonstrates that the lobbying done for migrant inclusion in the European Union is partly financed by migrant organizations affiliated with religious institutions (Geddes 2002).

For me, as for quite a few Turkish scholars who have been observing the development of excessive, partly leftist, liberal policies in Europe, the enforcement of three major constitutional principles seems to be imperative: 1) The acceptance of secularism, which means unambiguous separation of politics and religion, 2) secular tolerance, and 3) democratic pluralism.

¹ Islam in the multicultural society: The views of young people in Rotterdam. Orientations and strategies of Turkish and Moroccan migrants and low schooled Dutch in Rotterdam. See <http://www.ercomer.org/publish/reports/EN-rot-Islam.html>

Transnational communities are facts of our present life. To reduce their impact seems practically impossible. But to eliminate policies which strengthen extremist views deserves substantial attention.

As long as transnational communities continue to bargain for recognition of their identities based on belief systems, the power of rational thinking will remain limited. A choice has to be taken.

The price for that decision may be limited democracy or a religious-motivated society where belief systems belong to the realm of private life. A reinforcement of community life for Islamic migrants leads inevitably to segregation based on sex. In that case no doubt the major losers are women....

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