

Revisiting Diasporic Condition: New Patterns of Nostalgia Among Turks in Sweden

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One of the defining principles about diaspora populations is accepted as “they have a strong sense of collective memory which relates to the distant *Homeland*”. However, migrant experiences of our epoch provide a range of evidences to challenge some of the widespread assumptions about nostalgia of homeland which is supposed to be dominating diasporic condition.

On one hand, increasing synchronization between homeland and diaspora by means of contemporary communication technologies has led the migrant populations to update the rusty collective myths about the homeland. On the other hand, immigrant groups which have spent enough time in country of settlement to qualify as “early-comers”, such as the Turks in Sweden, tend to replace the “nostalgia of homeland” with a brand new nostalgia: “nostalgia of the early years of settlement in the country of migration”.

In this paper I will present the experiences of Turks in Sweden in order to reflect on the two-folded transformation re-shaping the nature of nostalgia in diaspora. Their story since 1966 will be utilized to illustrate these effects which necessitate a reconsideration of existing comprehension of the relationship between diaspora populations and nostalgia.

Introduction

A brief anecdote will help to provide the broader context, in which my findings regarding changing patterns of nostalgia among migrant populations can be located. It originates from my hometown Izmir, the third largest city of Turkey, situated on the west coast of country. Basmane is one of the major districts of Izmir, where considerable amount of trade and transportation related activities of the city take place. Throughout the last year, several dramatic stories originating from Basmane found place in both local and national media (NTVMSNBC.com, Milliyet.com.tr, Rohani.net). These stories were about the refugees predominantly from Somali (but also from Palestine and Ivory Coast) and their deprived life conditions in the despicable hotels of Basmane. Having left their homelands due to different reasons such as warfare, economic or political crisis, these people have arrived to Izmir by and large via illegal migration paths, acquired temporary residence permits and are hopelessly waiting for their final journey to their ultimate destinations, either Europe or North America. Not knowing if their stay is temporary or permanent, these migrants of ranging numbers from 300 to 1500, have formed a new community in the back streets of Basmane, a new culture, a new way of living, most probably not a desired one but one that arises out of obligation.

This anecdote raises several questions about new residents of Izmir, in the context of memory and nostalgia as observed in “mobile” populations: What kind of mental relationship do they have with Somalia, which they left behind? How do these migrants remember their homelands? And particularly, do they already idealize and miss Somalia, in a nostalgic sense? No answers regarding particular condition of so-called “Yeni Izmirliiler”, “new residents of Izmir” will be provided in this paper, although their case deserves to rank high on the research agenda. In the scope of my research, I want to contextualize their condition to a macro frame that is “increasing human mobility in the global scale.”

Human mobility phenomenon has been studied in detail by various disciplines of social sciences, from sociology to economy, from ethnology to media studies. Although their focuses, theoretical basis and methods vary to a large extent, what’s common in the findings of these researches is that increasing human mobility is one of the defining and underlying characteristics of our epoch.

Historically speaking, at first, mobilization of populations was studied as it occurred within *national* boundaries both as a supporting force and a result of industrial revolution and urbanization. Then from early 20th century on, both legal and illegal *trans-national* mobility was on the agenda of social scientific inquiry. Particularly this second array of human mobility, transnational migration and its consequences has been receiving growing attention not only from academic circles but also from policy making institutions and from “common people”. In short, the phenomenon of transnational migration and its assorted consequences has been and will be on the agenda of contemporary societies, regardless of their geographical, social or economic position.

In this paper, the focus will be on a particular dimension of trans-national condition that has to do with *memory and nostalgia*. The changing patterns of nostalgia will be presented, as they are observed among populations living in a trans-national setting, say *migrants*. By reflecting on the emerging ways of perceiving, thinking, remembering about the homeland among the members of Turkish community in Europe, particularly among Turks in Sweden, I aim to delve further into continuously evolving trans-national condition. In other words, I want to be able to understand what kind of a mental relationship the new residents of Izmir, the migrants from Somalia, have with their homelands.

Two questions may arise in this point: 1) How members of Turkish community in Sweden and the Somalian refugees in Izmir can be classified in the same category? 2) Don’t

these two groups have more differences than commonalities? Notion of *diaspora* may provide a theoretical basis for the answers to these questions.

The Concept of Diaspora

Majority of studies in the last decade regarding immigrant/migrant/ethnic minority groups, center their theoretical basis on the notion of diaspora, although it is an extensively contested term. The word diaspora originates from the Greek *speiro* (to spread) and *dia* (over). With the broadest definition of the word, it signifies symbolic connection between 'subject' and 'land which subject left behind' (Binark 2005). Although the word diaspora has generally connoted traditional displaced groups like Jews, Armenians, Romans, it is deployed in recent discussions in a broader fashion "as a metaphoric designation to describe different categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities tout court" (Georgiou 2003).

Rather than going into the details of diaspora notion as a separate theoretical section here, necessary theoretical discussions are conducted in the following parts of this paper. At this point, the subjects of my research are introduced: a part of Turkish diaspora that is the *Turks in Sweden*.

Turks in Sweden

Migration of Turks to Sweden is a part of Turkish migration to Western Europe which dates back to the beginning of sixties when the economic and social situation in Turkey was highly complicated. Regional income inequalities were substantial, distribution of personal incomes was extremely imbalanced and unemployment rates in countryside were high. After the military take-over in 1960, the new government willingly embraced the opportunity to export man-power to West European countries which were already demanding labor, and facilitated labor emigration by explicitly granting citizens the right to travel abroad, according to article 18 of new constitution (Engelbrektsson 1995). As a result, in 1974, 650.000 workers were employed abroad while the economically active population in Turkey was 15.5 million (Paine 1974). At present about 3.5 million Turkish citizens are living abroad, partly naturalized in the country of settlement. About 3.2 million of these are residing in Europe (Abadan-Unat 2004).

Sweden, from which the data of this research originates, has not been a key destination for Turkish migrants, compared to others like Germany and Netherlands where immigrants from Turkey represent the biggest group within overall immigrant population. All in all there was about half a decade of immigration of Turkish workers to Sweden, between 1966 and 1973 (Engelbrektsson 1995). Yet, since then there have been a small but constant inflow of family members, mainly spouses and also aged parents, on average an annual arrival of 1100 persons (Theolin 2000). By 2003, this number reached to 63.000. Of this group 54 per cent were born in Turkey and 46 per cent were born in Sweden, members of so called second generation (Westin 2003). Today Turkish community constitutes to the 10th biggest ethnic minority group in Sweden which is a highly multicultural population where residents with foreign background sums up to 21% of whole population.

In the early years of migration most of the Turkish immigrants in Sweden originating from rural parts of Turkey, were employed in service sector, such as construction work, cleaning, serving, and driving. Despite their general satisfaction with living conditions in the early years of migration, most of the Turks felt that they were not respected and not socially well accepted in Swedish society. According to Westin, Turks are perceived by the majority in Sweden as ethnically distant, they are considered as the "other" which becomes the basis of the xenophobic discourse where the phrase "Turk" refers to almost all non-European migrants

(Westin 2003). The representation of Turks as a problem generating group displaying strong attachment to their background cultural identity continues (Akpınar 2004).

However, there are indications of change in economical conditions of Turks in Sweden in last decade, as well as the social ones. According to a research conducted by Turkish Youth Federation in Sweden (Ikiz 2005), by 2000, total number of Turkish employers reached to 3095, which constitutes to 0.5% of overall small-medium companies in Sweden. Number of persons employed in Turkish businesses in Sweden is 49.500, while half of these businesses are in hotel and restaurant sector (Ikiz 2005). Furthermore, there is a relative increase in the university attendance among the second generation members of Turkish community, although Turks still rank quite low among other immigrant groups in Sweden in education criteria.

After this panorama of Turkish community in Sweden, a particular focus will be devoted to a particular sphere in which the transforming patterns of nostalgia among Turkish community can be examined, that is media and communication environment of Turks in Sweden.

Media and Communication: Environment of Turks in Sweden

Diasporas are located in the midst of diverse circulations. Borrowing Appadurai's notions, it can be argued that "diaspora is the intersection point of ethno-scapes, finance-scapes, ideoscapes, techno-scapes and media-scapes" (Appadurai 1996). For the particular purpose of this research the media-scape of diaspora or so called diasporic media is of immense importance. In order explain this significance it is reasonable to refer back to the definition of the concept of diaspora. Three essential characteristics of diasporic condition can be stated as follows:

- *Myth and memory of a common homeland*: "Diasporas, these people who have been dispersed to more than one country from an original homeland, share certain assumptions, ideologies and imagination around homeland",
- *Ever-present desire to affirm, and often idealize, the culture of the homeland*
- *Centrality of images and imagination in sustaining a sense of belonging in a diaspora and in shaping shared diasporic cultures*: A shared re-construction of homeland, migration history and community, has always been very central in formation of diasporic identities.

Therefore, the role of the media and communication, either as "a bridge to homeland" or more recently as "a link between the diaspora communities in local, national and transnational levels", has been increasingly vital in the diaspora experiences. As pointed out by Georgiou and Silverstone (2005), these media are contributing to the creation of symbolic community spaces in which identities can be re-constructed.

Five major types of diasporic media cultures which have been developed among residents with Turkish background in Sweden, have run through following channels, in the chronological fashion:

1) Sweden-originated print media (Euro Turk, Yeni Birlik, Prizma)

Mostly functioning as the publications of the Turkish community associations or federations in Sweden, these media have long historical traditions. Yeni Birlik (New Union), newspaper of Federation of Turkish Workers' Associations in Sweden, for instance, has been published since 1976 on a changing period base, currently on a monthly basis.

2) Broadcasts in Turkish, in Swedish Public Service Radio (Merhaba)

Within Swedish Public Service Radio, programs in Turkish have been broadcasted from 1976 until 2006. In January 2006, Turkish broadcasts in Swedish Radio are suspended, by a managerial decision.

3) Turkey-originated print media (Hurriyet, Zaman etc.)

Except Hurriyet, which is sold in Sweden on a daily basis, Turkey-originated print media could be accessed by subscription. Almost all of the newspapers have special European editions or pages, which specifically focuses on European countries inhabiting Turkish populations. Varying in degree, the content is a combination of news from Turkey and news about Turkish immigrant communities in various European countries, including Sweden.

4) Turkey-originated TV channels (Euro D, NTV Int etc.)

Similar to Turkey-originated print media, TV channels owned by Turkish media conglomerates have their specific channels targeting the Turks abroad. These channels have correspondents in various countries and they reserve quite limited time of their broadcasts to certain countries where the correspondents are located.

5) Web based media (Web pages, forums, e-mail lists, file sharing hubs etc.)

Especially popular amongst second and third generation immigrants, web-based media is relatively new in the realm. Similar to Turkey originated TV channels, web-based media have provided the unique opportunity of having an immediate synchronization with Turkey.

Out of this 5-fold diasporic media space *access to Turkey originated TV channels* had significant implications on how migrants experience their lives, and for how they think, feel about their experiences, and not least imagine about homeland, Turkey.

Access to Turkey-Originated TV Channels

In 1989 the first satellite dishes accessing Turkish TV channels appeared in Sweden. Around the same time, some of the Turkish TV channels were included in Swedish cable TV packages, such as TRT International which was international channel of TRT, Turkish public service TV, targeting the Turkish immigrants all over the world. From early-nineties on, all across the European space, Turkish-speaking populations began to tune in to the numerous satellite channels that were broadcasting programmes from Ankara and Istanbul.

By 1993, the introduction of commercial TV channels in Turkish media landscape which could also be accessed with satellite dishes from Europe, was *the* key innovation in the lives of Turkish migrants. What it inferred was the ability to routinely watch television from Turkey, and thereby to be in synchronised contact with everyday life and events in Turkey. The final complementary step to increase the synchronization of immigrants abroad, with Turkey was Internet. High penetration rate of Internet in Sweden from 1995's on, initiated another communication channel through which even faster bidirectional information flow between homeland and diaspora could be conducted.

In parallel to increasing media access, physical access of Turkish people living in Sweden to Turkey rose due to developments in tourism sector in Sweden by early nineties. Swedish travel agencies began to sell regular holiday packages in different parts of Turkey, which increased the number of charter flights to Turkey. Around the same years Turkish Airlines (THY) launched its regular flights to Stockholm, capital city of Sweden.

All these developments, both in communication and transportation sectors, lead to novel access channels for Turkish diaspora to get informed and consequently think about Turkey.

How does it relate to the memory and nostalgia, then? How did such changes impacted on the mental relationship between Turkish populations abroad and the homeland?

How “Synchronization with Turkey” Works Against the Nostalgia for a Homeland?

First of all, as put out by Robins and Aksoy, access to Turkey-originated media was important for overcoming the migrant’s experience of cultural separation (Robins, Aksoy 2002). Secondly, the new media systems worked to bridge global distances.

Thirdly, and most importantly regarding the topic of this paper, such trans-national media enabled a sense of greater proximity to the *actuality* of Turkey. Television and web-based media brought the *ordinary, banal reality* of Turkish life to the migrants living abroad. Two of the informants of Robins and Aksoy (2002) and how they perceive the role of TV puts out clearly, how Turks living abroad, including Turks in Sweden, are affected by instant access to the reality, actuality and banality of everyday life in Turkey:

In many ways, you become almost frozen in your understanding of where your community is. The longer you are here (London) the more you are likely to have views and attitudes that are more conservative and out of date. I’ve seen people my age and even younger, expecting things of their children that they have rebelled against.’ I wish they would watch more Turkish television. Some of their attitudes are far behind what the messages are. You turn on the Turkish television, and some of it is refreshingly modern. (Interview, Camden, London, 20 April 2000).

It is very good to be able to watch satellite television because you too can see what’s been going on in Turkey, the news... I used to think that Turkey was a different kind of place. It’s bringing it [Turkey] closer. (Focus group, Islington, London, 29 March 1999).

What is emphasized here by Robins and Aksoy is the capacity of the reality dimension of television to undercut the abstract nostalgia of the diasporic imagination. Turkish viewers come to participate in the mundane and banal world of everyday television. Television is used as a kind of reality-testing device (Robins, Aksoy 2002).

How it relates to notion of nostalgia? Jankelevitch correctly points out how migrants imagine they are living double lives, carrying around within them “inner voices... the voices of the past and of the distant city”, while at the same time submitting to “the banal and turbulent life of everyday action” (Jankelevitch 1974). As Robins and Aksoy argues “this is precisely the mechanism of splitting – where the banality of the *here and now* provides the stimulus for nostalgic dreams and fantasies about the *there and then*” (Robins, Aksoy 2002). What is significant about trans-national television and web-based services is that, as a consequence of bringing the mundane, everyday reality of Turkey *closer*, they are undermining this false polarising logic or sentiment. The *here and now* reality of Turkish media culture disturbs the imagination of a *there and then* Turkey. Thus it works against the romance of diaspora, against the tendency to false idealisation of the “homeland”. Therefore it can be argued that trans-national Turkish television together with real-time, web-based access to actuality of Turkey is an “agent of cultural de-mythologisation” (Robins, Aksoy 2002) or “a nostalgia transformer”.

A “Brand-New” of Nostalgia(?)

The label “nostalgia transformer” was chosen deliberately to connote “the real-time access to Turkey’s actualities by the means of communication and transportation”. What is observed throughout the research among the members of Turkish community in Sweden is, a

substitution of the nostalgia for Turkey with another kind of *nostalgia*: namely “nostalgia for the early years of arrival to Sweden”. In other words, nostalgia for Turkey seems to have transformed into a nostalgia for early days of arrival, a brand new nostalgia. In order to understand this new version of nostalgia among diasporic populations, the nature of earlier version, say *conventional nostalgia* among diasporic populations, must be clarified.

The definition of nostalgia, in Oxford English Dictionary, is presented as follows:

Nostalgia: *n.* **1** sentimental yearning for a period of the past. **2** regretful or wishful memory of an early time. **3** severe homesickness.

What can be inferred from these definitions is that nostalgic sentiments embody in two forms: temporal and spatial. As the first two definitions present “yearning” and “regretful/wishful memories” are directed to “a period of the past” or “an early time”, which are spatial units. On the other hand the third definition emphasizes “homesickness”, a consequence of dislocation, a temporal change.

In the case of diasporic populations the spatial form of nostalgia is the dominating one. As discussed before, *distantiation from the place of origin* is the essential action which leads to familiar themes discussed so far, such as estrangement from the ‘mother’ culture, processes of splitting, idealisation of the ‘homeland’. Therefore it can be argued that the main axis of the *conventional diasporic nostalgia* is a spatial one rather than a temporal one. Homesickness sets the ground for nostalgic feelings. As put out by Hoffman, “Loss is a magical preservative. Time stops at the point of severance, and no subsequent impressions muddy the water you have in mind. The house, the garden, the country you have lost remain forever as you remember them. Nostalgia – that most lyrical of feelings – crystallises around these images like amber” (Hoffman 1991). Although the separation is not crystal clear, the object for which migrants yearn is *the Homeland*, rather than *the past*. As discussed before, increasing synchronization with the homeland and the cultural de-mythologisation function of transnational TV and web-based access have worked against the conventional nostalgia which idealizes the homeland, a space left behind.

If the disappearance of *conventional nostalgia*, the one with a spatial character is argued, what about its substitute: say *contemporary nostalgia* among migrant populations?

What I have observed during my research among Turkish community in Sweden is an increasing domination of a *temporal* nostalgia: a longing for the period in the past, wishful memories of an earlier period that is *the early days of arrival to Sweden*. Particularly among the first generation members of Turkish community in Sweden, this sentiment is vastly common. Almost all of my informants agree on one of theirs longing that “Sweden of 70s was something you should have seen”. Emphasizing how much they were welcomed during their arrival and settlement days, and how Swedish state was supporting their attempts to establish a new life, Turks I have observed in Sweden are complaining about their current situation in a clearly *comparative fashion*. What’s crucial here is the comparison is not between *Turkey* and *Sweden* but between *the past* and *the present*, both in Sweden.

As put out by Vladimir Jankélévitch (1974) “nostalgia is a melancholy brought about by awareness of a contrast between past and present, and between present and future”. Such a nostalgic melancholy is clearly observed among the first generation Turkish immigrants in Sweden. Therefore my argument is that contemporary form of nostalgic feelings among the members of Turks in Sweden and particularly among the ones who have spent enough time to be able to have a past in Sweden, is a temporal one rather than spatial one. Contradicting with the common assumption in the homeland about diasporic populations, what they are yearning is not “the home they left behind” any more, but more “the days went by”.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, two main transformations taking place among the members of the Turkish community living abroad are highlighted. The First one is about the negative effect that the increasing synchronization with daily actuality of Turkey has on the diasporic populations nostalgic feelings for the homeland they left behind. I tried to present how real-time access to banality of “there” worked against the idealization, mythologisation of homeland and nostalgic feelings for it. Secondly, I tried to reflect upon the transformation of this conventional spatial nostalgia, to a contemporary temporal one, the nostalgia for the early days of arrival to Sweden.

I argue that the sum of these two transformation signal a normalization of trans-national populations. Just like a citizen in a nation-state, who is not dislocated from his/her homeland (who is less mobile compared to migrants in that sense), members of diaspora tend to yearn for *the days went by* rather than *homeland*. That’s why I argue it’s a process of normalization that migrants are mentally disconnecting, freeing their selves from the nation-states they left behind, in the search for a new homeland or maybe multiple homelands.

If normalization is a disturbing phrase since it infers a normal and an abnormal condition, we can call this process as *emergence of transnational communities* as put out by Portes. Through a “thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel” he argues, “migrants are now routinely able to establish transnational communities that exist across two, or more, cultural spaces. A development in which a growing number of persons... live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders” (Portes *et all* 1999).

What about the nostalgia of the Somalians in Izmir, then? It was admitted at the beginning of this paper that not any answers would be provided for their particular case. However, as a pioneer group in regards of the transnational migration, the case of Turks in Sweden, and how they experience nostalgia, can offer some general insights for other diasporic populations, including the Somalians in Izmir. It seems that the more the access to the banality of the homeland increases and the more time spent in the country of settlement, the weaker becomes the mental connection between the diaspora and the land left behind, and the stronger becomes the nostalgia for good old days. This process can be named normalization or emergence of transnational communities, depending on where you stand.

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