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Identity Belonging Changes through Migration

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Abstract

Abstract The concept of identity has been changing rapidly today. New dimensions are added to the ties dating from the past. The dimensions are the learnt concept of identity, the extended mentality of male dominance and transmission of sense of belonging down to next generations. Identity means symbolising one's way of perceiving the self, and making the individual visible. The concept of identity played pioneering roles in determining communities, and today it also plays pioneering roles in describing individual identifies due to the fact that borders become indistinct with globalisation. This transformation experienced in belonging of identity is re-shaped with the efforts to protect the heritage left by ancestors. A part of Muslims living in the Balkans in the Ottoman period migrated to Anatolia for various reasons. People living in the areas migrated to give such nicknames as "new comers in the ninety threes", and thus turned the migration into a symbolic system of meanings in the society. Dikili district of İzmir was an area of such intensive migration. Immigrants coming from the Balkans settled in in the city centres as well as in some villages. This study was conducted in 2016 in the district of Dikili and in its villages. This research investigated those immigrants identity belonging. Thus, it focussed on how they identified themselves. The research used the technique of in-depth face to face interviews. Conversations on migration stories are also included in the research. Audio and video recordings were made in the research, and the recordings were then decoded and interpreted.

Key words: Identity, Migration, Albanian, Nomadic, Dikili

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1. Introduction

For over two centuries Turkey has been a popular place for “massive” migrations from the surrounding regions. Such migrations started with the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 signed by the Ottoman Empire. In a sense, it can be seen that the migration process was reversed with the defeat of the Empire. The migrations, which occurred mainly from the Balkans and Caucasia in that period, also continued in the Republican era (Doganay, 1997). Immigrants coming from the Balkans settled almost everywhere throughout the country, but mainly in western Anatolia. The districts of Izmir were also among the places where Balkan immigrants settled intensively (Unal, 2012).

The Balkan/Rumelian immigrants, who are called “muhajirs” in Turkey, are those Turks who settled in the Balkans in the Ottoman period, and who returned to Anatolia prior to that (Sait, 2010). According to Akture (1985), immigration, which began in 1785, continued until the end of World War I, and the majority of the immigrants were placed in lands belonging to the state or to the foundations. The vacant areas at that time were the plain basins, coastal areas and areas where malaria was widespread. For this reason, some of the immigrants died of malaria, and some of them had to migrate to other areas (cited in Cavusoglu, 2007).

Albanians were also among the Muslim immigrants who came to Turkey from Macedonia (Popovic, 1995 cited in Cavusoglu, 2007).

The “Muslim” identity of the immigrants who arrived from the Balkans came into prominence, just like that of the Albanians. This migration into Anatolia was a return to the lands known as the motherland from an environment of chaos and conflict. Anatolia was the homeland to take shelter in, and which remained in the memories of Turks who had been formerly sent to other places for banishment, inhabiting or for other reasons. The expression “they said ‘you are going’, and we set out with our luggage” was carved in their minds and indicated that the refugees had accepted the obligatory immigration (Erdal, 2009).

Immigrants, like other segments of society, express themselves with group belonging and with their cultural identity. The place where they have come from is a point of differentiation for them, requiring socio-cultural and psychological changes in mentality, attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, immigrants attract attention due to the values they bring with them to their new country, and issues such as identity, culture and belonging become the focus of interest.

2. The scope and restrictions of the study

The study was conducted in the Dikili district of Izmir and in the surrounding villages. The research problem is the identity to which Balkan immigrants associate themselves. This research uses a face-to-face, in-depth interview technique with those immigrants who describe themselves as having come from the Balkans. In line with our purposes, interviews were conducted with participants aged fifty or above, at homes or in coffee houses, and participants were asked to tell their stories of immigration. Subsequently, the audio and visual data of the recordings were decoded and interpreted.

3. Identity and belonging of immigrants

The concept of identity, which has left its mark on the 20th century, and thus played a pioneering role in the change of society’s dynamics, has gained a place in every part of society both as a cliché of culture and as a technical term. Identity is an individual’s point of reference. It sets up ties between the past and the future and thus it ensures the progress of relations within the system of diverse meanings. Identity identifies individuals in the most special way, and it also makes it possible for individuals to be accepted into communities. Due to the ties it establishes with the past, it gives individuals a sense of belonging. Immigration is passed down to the next generations by adding new meanings to identity and belonging (Chambairs, 2005). For a number of reasons during the Ottoman period, various names were given to immigrants who came from the Balkans to Anatolia, and immigration was turned into a system of symbolic meanings within the society.

Anxiety about losing identity is felt more by minority groups than by majority groups. There are a number of components that constitute the basic dynamics of minority identity, and language and religion are the most important. Since migrating groups are afraid of the assimilation of these two components, they become introverted while trying to integrate in small imaginary communities. Due

to the fact that it is difficult for minority languages to resist against majority languages in bilingual environments, such small imaginary communities function as a shelter (Akgonul, 2008). Languages can be assimilated through time, but beliefs are defended with great resistance. Those who live in Dikili, for instance, have forgotten their own language, and they attribute this to being isolated in large groups. Immigrants who come to Dikili have arrived here in illegal ways almost individually, and thus settled in the area; and they have found very little people to communicate in their own language. As individuals, mostly illegally, and while subsequently settling in the area, they have found few people to communicate with in their own language.

Research has shown that being a minority increases adherence to imaginary communities and it also makes the sense of partnership stronger. Such partnership, the sense of belonging with the feeling of solidarity and instincts to maintain the minority, builds up imaginary communities and their position is built within the society in this way (Akgonul, 2008). This situation was also true for those living in Dikili, where this research was performed.

4. Adjustment of immigrants

Many concessions were granted to the immigrants to facilitate their settlement and integration into Turkey. Major concessions included economic and social rights to easily acquire citizenship, agricultural land for economic adaptation, and housing (İcduygu & Biehl, 2012). Some of the immigrants moved into houses deserted by Anatolian Greeks immigrating from Turkey. One of the participants said *“during the population exchange, at the time of Russian invasion, my grandfather fled to Sarajevo. Before the war of Turkish Independence, they didn’t have their own house. When Greeks escaped from here, they gave this house. They settled in Dikili”*.

Cohen (1999) considers ethnicity as a process where inclusion and exclusion are mingled, and points out that including people in, and isolating them from, a group are both subjective and objective. An exclusionist group is divided by means of relations set up with the other, and thus discrimination is made between “we” and “they” (Cohen, 1999). In our field survey in Dikili, we encountered stories of separation. While immigrants were called “Europeans” by residents in Dikili, the residents were called “natives” by the immigrants, thus the two sides symbolised the differentiation. *“I came to this village when I was 7 years old. Down the village is the place where immigrants live. This part of the village was the district of natives. The young in the natives’ neighbourhood could not pass into the other part of the village. In the same way, they could not pass into our part of the village. We used to make such discrimination even in weddings”* (interviews in February 2016). According to Cohen (1999), a community means the group in which an individual is included, and the group is bigger than kinship. The borders of a community are determined culturally in minds by meanings’ individuals load rather than by physical validity; they are built symbolically (Cohen, 1999). People in Dikili also symbolised themselves as *“Bosnian, islander, and Albanian”*, and thus they marked their borders.

Barth (2001) states that division between ethnic groups is not cultural but social, and that group members themselves describe the groups. Yet, contrary to this, some people also say that great social-historical events are determined on borders (Eriksen, 2002). Barth’s approach towards ethnicity is relational and processual; ethnic groups’ culture and social organisation can change, but borders are preserved (Barth, 2001). However, they are not clear because borders are preserved even though interactions between groups continue (Eriksen, 2002).

5. Describing Themselves

According to Demirtas (2003), individuals describe their identity in accordance with the group they belong to. This identification involves comparing and contrasting the group one belongs to with other groups; and thus the comparison contains certain properties related with criteria, qualities and physical appearance (Demirtas, 2003). Ethnicity expresses the relationships between groups whose members consider themselves different (Eriksen, 2002). They demonstrate their characteristics and they mention their distinctive features attributed to them by others when a participant said *“My father escaped on his own when he was 14 or 15 years old. Then he found his parents. We are Albanian. Albanians are typically stubborn.”* It is evident that individuals bring into prominence the positive attributions made to their group while making inter-group comparisons. Comparison with other groups and the status of the group are important in attributing positive properties to a group by

a group member. On the other hand, if a group has a low status compared to other groups, other ways are pursued to get rid of negativity.

The reason why we believe that we have unique and consistent identity is because of what is narrated to us. According to Hall (1996), there is not a fully consistent and absolute identity. As the cultural representations and meanings we encounter all through our life change and increase, the probabilities for different identities can emerge. Hall (1996) interprets such cases as the "disintegration" or "multiplication" of identities. Identities never remain constant. They display subjective and process-related features. It would perhaps be more appropriate to describe such a process as acquiring identity. Identity acquisition is always dynamic (Hall, 1997). The 70-year old participant S living in the village expressed the self by saying *"when I live in the village I regard myself as a nomadic Turk, but when I am with my uncle or my Albanian relatives, I introduce myself as Albanian. In fact, because my father is a nomadic Turk, I am also a nomadic Turk. Because if you plant leek, you grow leek. But when I am with my uncle's family, I cannot say nomadic Turk. They live in Izmir in a neighbourhood of Albanians. Everybody is an acquaintance."* Ethnic identity is a structure involving external and internal processes and individuals' identification, as well as properties attributed externally. Ethnicity, which also depends on situations, can change according to places or people interacted "the interaction of places or people and it can become more or less evident." Individuals can have preferences of ethnic identity according to the audience (Nagel, 1994).

When immigrants describe themselves, they describe themselves with the differences or similarities they bring with them from where they have come. Perhaps, exhibiting both their differences and similarities is a way of gaining acceptance in the country they go to. *"A part of Albanians is known as 'Gega'. Some are known as 'Toska'. Gegas are closer to Gypsies; Toskas are closer to alawis"*. According to Atsız (1999), Albanians living in the north are called Gegas, whereas those living in the south are called Toskas. Just as individuals describe themselves with reference to the other, communities also describe themselves with reference to others (Cohen, 1985). People's perception of the self, by comparing their group with other groups, is also influential in marking the borders.

The identity of a community cannot be found in what the community members say about it, and by means of narrations concerning its starting point - that is to say, its origins (Leichter, 2012). The community we interviewed pass narrations of their starting point in Turkey from generation to generation, thus they preserve them in their memory. Although a participant was the third generation, he/she could share his/her great grandfather's story in all its vividness: *"My great grandfather managed to arrive in Turkey after a journey of days on his own. He tried to eat his shoes because of hunger."* This story and other such stories perhaps indicate where people belong.

Eyerman (2003), who says that collective memory creates solidarity at present, states that memory is always above individuals. Individual memory is comprehended in relation to a certain group, identity awareness occurs by thinking about collective memory, and individual identities are associated with a shared past (Eyerman, 2003). Immigration stories have topics in common when relatives, especially those who cross borders are met. In this way, collective memory remains alive. Most of the immigrants say that their great grandfathers brought gold with them: *"He flees to Greece. He hides in the lazaret of a ship. They said he came at the age of 18. At that time he had a lot of gold."* Perhaps they brought a lot of gold with them; perhaps they like to keep telling a story claiming that they were rich in the past. This situation is emphasized as an indication of status.

Turkish immigrants saying that they came to Turkey from Rumelia have stuck to the gains of the young Republic in the mood of returning to the motherland, and have accepted their position (Erdal, 2009). They stress that they express themselves in their sub-identity as integrated into the nation state, and that they are in fact citizens of the Republic of Turkey. According to Eriksen (2002), there is a tendency to associate ethnicity with nation states and with national identity in most of the studies concerning ethno-cultural identity. Such a tendency is undoubtedly related to the time when nation states first appeared in history; but building a nation need not be parallel to, or supportive of, ethno-cultural identity (Eriksen, 2002). The participants stated that even though they described themselves as Albanian, they used this situation in their close environment in a special way, and that they considered themselves as citizens of the Republic of Turkey.

6. Instead of conclusion

The concept of identity has been rapidly changing, and new dimensions have been added to the ties dating from the past. With new dimensions, the newly learnt concept of identity is expanded within kinship ties and is transmitted down to the next generations in a male-dominant mentality. This transformation in identity belonging has been re-shaped within the framework of protecting a heritage inherited from ancestors as a consequence of immigration. The Balkan immigrants we interviewed in Dikili also associated themselves with their roots. It was understood that identity was the point of reference for humans. Identity enables people to set up ties between the past and the present, and to advance relations within the framework of a system of different meanings. Identity not only identifies individuals but also ensures that individuals are accepted into various groups. It provides a sense of belonging due to ties dating back to the past.

Cohen (1999) points out that ethnicity is both subjective and objective in including people in and excluding them from groups. Sample stories for disintegration were also encountered in the field study conducted in Dikili. The community marks its borders with symbols. The cultural identities with which they identify themselves can change when necessary. They identify themselves with similarities and differences available in the places where they have come from. By exhibiting similarities and differences, they both mark the symbolic borders and demonstrate that they are not very remote or the other one. Bringing similarities into prominence means identifying oneself according to the other, and it is also a way of gaining acceptance in the country in which they arrive.

Communities have narrations to express themselves; they exist with those narrations, and they base their identities on those narrations. They symbolize the way they are perceived by means of those narrations, and thus they make themselves visible. The identity with which they describe themselves plays a leading role in individuals' determining their community. On the other hand, whereas communities expressed themselves with ethnic identity, they did not express themselves with religious identity.

Despite being married to individuals of a separate ethno-cultural identity for a few generations, the participants associated themselves with the identity to which their father belonged. Since it is believed that ancestry is based on the father, they describe their identity with their fathers' identity.

On the other hand, although they expressed themselves with ethnic identity, they did not give a strict definition of identity. On the contrary, it was found that the community's definition of identity changed depending on the situation, the setting and people of interaction. Ethnic identity in which they felt belonging could change according to the setting. Therefore, it can be said that statements about identity were subjective and differed in the process rather than remaining constant.

They gained settlement through illegal ways, almost mostly individually, and they met very few people to communicate with in their own language. Therefore, the individuals who I interviewed, of second and third generations, could not speak their native language.

Narrations concerning their beginnings in Turkey are transmitted down from generation to generation, and they are kept in memories. Collective memory is kept alive through such narrations. Relationships, especially with relatives living in remote countries and across borders, are sustained with those narrations.

Even though they label themselves as Albanian and nomadic, they emphasize that they are integrated into the Republic of Turkey and call themselves citizens of the Republic of Turkey.

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