PRAVO:

THE NORTH AMERICAN JOURNAL FOR CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES

Negotiating Identities in a Host Society: A Case of Refugees from Turkey

Secil Erdogan
Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario

ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ

This paper is an analysis on ethnic and cultural identity negotiations of asylum seekers and refugees in a host society; based on material gathered from a series of interviews with refugees from Turkey, undertaken as a part of an exploratory study completed in England. It is argued that ethnic and cultural identities are neither essentially given nor fixed in the global world; people make claims in different contexts and at different times. Modern human-beings constantly construct and re-construct their identities. Despite ethnic groups share 'common' ties and attachments, members of the groups engage in different interactions which affect their perceptions of identities. This is a negotiation process; people negotiate their belongings in response to their social contexts. In this process ethnic language, community networks, ghettos, religion and mass media form an "identity protective circle" creating living areas for the communal culture and identities.

Introduction

Increasing population movements have implications on ethnic group relations. One important feature of globalization has been the greater ability of people to move to the other parts of the world offering better prospects for economic success or freedom. However, those population movements have implications on race and ethnic group relations. Migrating populations are likely to find ghettoization, segregation and cultural antipathies in their new settings. Ethnic identities are neither fixed nor unchangeable in the late modern world (as primordialist theory envisages). When different ethnic groups contact and live together, processes -such as competition, assimilation, adaptation- emerges. Experiencing these processes, modern human-beings re-think their attachments and belongings; construct and re-construct their own identities according to the circumstances they are living in.

In this paper, we are going to examine ethnic and cultural identity negotiations of a refugee group, originated from Turkey and settled in England showing how they re-construct their identities in a different, new social environment. We will argue how different generations adapt, assimilate and/or resist the culture of the host society. We will use the empirical data derived from a field work and interviews made with the Turkish refugees living in London and Surrey regions of England (Great Britain).

Theories of Ethnic Identity

The primordialist approach to ethnic identity is one of the oldest ethnicity theories in the literature. Geertz (1973) specifically focused on the relation between primordial ties and ethnic identification speaking of "a corporate sentiment of oneness which could stem from the sharing of a common culture, language, and religion" (p.387). In *Idols of the Tribe*, Harold Isaacs (1975) discussed notions of 'basic group identity' and 'primordial attachments'. According to him, there are eight elements that contribute to a person's basic group identity: the physical body; a person's name, the history and origins of group one is born into; one's nationality or other group affiliation; the language one first learns to speak; the religion one is born into; the culture; and the geography and topography of the place of birth. One's ethnic identity is created by these elements, so it is resilient and enduring (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998, p.48). Primordialism argues that ethnicity is something given, ascribed at unchangeable circumstances of birth, deriving from the kin and clan structure of human society. Ethnicity is taken as fundamental, fixed and unchangeable (Isajiw, 1999).

A major approach responding to primordialism is 'constructionism'. According to this approach, ethnic identities are not simply products of primordial ties or a set of historical cultural goods. People are active agents in negotiating their identities; they pick up some of the elements from the past and present to construct their identities (Isajiw, 1999). According to Cornell and Hartmann (1998), the constructionist approach focuses on the ways ethnic and racial identities are built, rebuilt and dismantled over time. It adds activism to primordialism, it assumes that ethnic identities vary across space and change over time. Identities are created in the interaction of human actions and circumstances.

This paper locates constructionist approach to studies of ethnic and cultural identity in the literature, and presents evidence for these assertions from a study conducted in England (UK) with refugee groups. This approach is seen more adequate to examine the identity struggle of the transnational groups in the global world. Primordialism is still noteworthy as primordial attachments are still of importance for many people. However, this theory is inadequate to define various identity assertions within a group. Some elements of the 'basic group identity' change by time and circumstances while some are preserved.

Weber's writings on ethnic groups and identities in some extent support our approach. He defined ethnic groups as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common decent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists" (2004, p.109). According to Weber, ethnic membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the kinship group by being a 'presumed identity', not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In this definition, he isolates the fundamental characteristics of the phenomenon that centres on a set of beliefs and not on any objective features of group membership such as shared language, religion, and especially biological traits associated with the everyday understanding of race. It is this sense of common ancestry that is vital, but the identification with shared origins is largely, if not wholly, fictitious (Stone 2003, p.32).

Weber remarks a difference between ethnic group membership and kinship (2004, p.110) "wherever the memory of the origin of the community from a mother community remains alive, there undoubtedly exists a sense of ethnic identity, which is determined by several factors; shared political memories, persistent ties with the old cult, or the strengthening of kinship and other groups, both in the old and the new community or other persistent relationships. Where these ties are lacking, the sense of ethnic group membership is absent, regardless of how close the kinship may be".

Refugees from Turkey

"*In a secular and contingent world, home is always provisional*" E. Said (1984: 54).

The conflicts in the world caused an ever growing stream of refugees. At the start of the seventies, there were five million refugees while that number is currently eleven million five hundred refugees and asylum seekers. If we include internally displaced persons, the number of the people in need of protection and assistance comes to approximately twenty-one million (UNHCR, 2006). According to the UNHCR statistics by the end of the year 2005, 181.488 asylum seekers and refugees in the world were originated from Turkey (UNHCR, 2006). The number of asylum seekers from Turkey has decreased sharply by 61 percent since year 2000. This is related to the changing socio-politic conditions of the country. Refugees from Turkey are the fourth biggest group of the people seeking asylum in the industrialised countries, mostly applying to France, Germany, Great Britain (UK), Austria and Switzerland (UNHCR, 2006). However, these numbers do not include the illegal people who are living beyond the information of the authorities.

Migration and asylum movements originated from Turkey have been sourced by unstable periods the country survived; ideological conflicts followed by military coups, ethnic conflicts in the East, economic recessions, etc. Asylum seekers who flee from Turkey can be analyzed in three different groups. The first group is the Kurdish ethnic groups who leave the country because of the conflicts with state authorities. The second group is the left-wing political refugees oppose to the Western type economic and political regime. The last group is of economic refugees, namely immigrants migrating in order to improve their economic standards of living, but apply to the receiving countries for refugee status. Therefore, we see a significant increase in the number of immigrants and refugees from Turkey when the country heads into a period of economic recession. The rise of economic refugees is a central issue because refugees are legally defined in

1951 Geneva Refugee Convention as “people who are outside their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, and who cannot or do not want to return home” (United Nations General Assembly and UNHCR, 1996, p.16). This definition does not include all of the reasons why someone might become a refugee for example; internally displaced persons and economic refugees. With the growing gap between rich and poor countries, larger numbers of people are now forced to leave their homelands to seek jobs, usually by entering wealthier nations illegally. Today, most of the countries agree to provide sanctuary to political refugees, but not eager to open their doors to the economic refugees. This tendency caused to the emergence of ‘*bogus refugees*’ who act as political refugees while all they need is better economical conditions. The last group in our research is composed of ‘bogus refugees’.

Obviously, these three groups have different social backgrounds and life experiences. Even their lives and reasons for seeking asylum differ, the process of applying and arriving to a host country is very similar as they both apply as political refugees and they are offered similar socio-economic conditions when starting a new life in the host country.

Methods and Sample Characteristics

This study focuses on a number of asylum seekers and refugees from Turkey and utilizes qualitative methodology based upon oral interviews with the target group. The pilot study conducted in the field showed us that a quantitative, survey-type study was inadequate as asylum seekers and refugees were very sensitive and unwilling to take a part in a survey that requires detailed information about their personal experiences and immigration status. Most asylum seekers we interviewed had spent time in refugee camps located on the border of France and England (UK), for on average one year. Not having been able to prove their case, they were screened out as "illegal immigrants" or "economic migrants". Denied refugee status, they were de facto kept on hold for an indefinite sojourn which means to enter a new period of waiting and screening. When we approached to potential interviewees, they were suspicious of outsiders who enquired about their past and present; they suspected that we would pass on the information to the immigration or security authorities, therefore, some held back information on their refugee status or ethnic heritages in order to be exempt from the research. Some interviewees have chosen to prevaricate about their ethnic identity or personal life history. ‘Fear’ can be the possible underlying reason for the refugees' denying or hiding their identity. In asylum, ‘fear’ can shape social actions and relationships (Malkki, 1995, Kibreab 1999). The asylum seekers feared that they may loose their right to refuge and be sent back to Turkey. This is notably the case for the bogus refugees striving for refugee status by pretending as a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that fights for independence from Turkey.

For those reasons stated, a period of knowing the researcher and building a “trust” was needed. After building a trust with the researcher, asylum seekers did not refuse to take a part in the research; even some confessed how they created their life stories when they applied for refugee status. As Knudsen (1999:22) states “a carefully crafted life history is a ticket” for grant of refugee status while a mismanaged one could be a cause of rejection. “Inconsistencies must, therefore, be minimized, not only in the personal data reported but also in the life history presented…Problems arise, however, when the borderline between fiction and fact is erased and when one has invested so much in the official version that one starts to believe one ‘is’ the story presented. Thus two battles are fought at the same time; one for recognition as a refugee and one for recognition as a person.” (p.22)

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared and revised following the pilot interviews. To obtain our sample, a purposive snowball technique was used in which participants were selected through references provided by the other participants. London was selected as the research site at first, because the majority of asylum seekers and refugees from Turkey were residing in the city. Hence, applying a snowball technique and limiting the research by one city would create more bias. So, an attempt to reduce bias was to expand the research to different locations; London, Guildford, Aldershot and Farnham, instead of interviewing only refugees from one own. The interviews were administered both in Turkish and English by the researcher. The interviewers were free to reply either in Turkish or English although there is a predominance of Turkish in dialogues. The interviews were not auto-taped as the respondents did not feel comfortable. Interviews were analysed using a comparative method; the narratives were sorted according to emerging themes and compared to each other. However, in this paper only the findings regarding the identity questions are presented. Other research findings related to the asylum seeking process and problems faced in the host society will be examined in a separate paper.

The number of asylum seekers and refugees interviewed includes 75 individuals who made long trips to seek asylum and applied to the receiving country, and 25 individuals who were born in England, representing the second generation. The group consists of both Kurdish (more than a half) and Turkish ethnic groups, who were relatively young (20-45 years old), educated (mostly high school), and used to live in the eastern regions of Turkey. Consequently, the results of this research are not representative of the situation of all refugees originating from Turkish Republic. These qualitative interviews offer us an exploratory view, not generalized statements about more general conditions of all the refugees from Turkey.

Identity in Question

There is a direct link between identity and asylum seeking; refugees are essentially people who leave their home countries because of their real or imaginary particular aspect of identities; ethnic, racial, political, religious, or social class. Also refugees are people not only whose identity is a source of danger for them, but people who take the risk of abandoning the numerous ties of identity that links them to their country of origin, home, family, friends, culture, language and work and searching for a new identity in their host countries (Hieronymi, 2005).

Identity is also linked with the "land" one lives on. For Kibreab (1999), today spaces are more territorialized than ever before. The nation states have the right to exclude or deny entry to outsiders; impose conditions of entry, residence, as well as resource use. People derive their identity from a natural geographical area, because this provides them rights of access to resources and protection by a virtue of being a member or citizen of this territory. By identifying themselves with territories, people gain a sense of '*belonging*'. Outside that physical context, they are treated as strangers or as non-members of the host society with conditions that attend otherness. Therefore, displacing people from their places of origin constitutes "gross deprivation and loss of some part of one's identity and very humanity" (p.407).

According to Habib (1996) home can be reduced to an island within the country and linked to only a few people, not the whole population on that geographical area. Following the usual alignment attaching one's identity to a place; it makes sense to attach Kurdish identity to the land which is within the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In our case, this is the eastern region of Turkey where Kurdish refugees in our group were born and grown up. For the Turkish refugees we interviewed, it is the same land; they are rooted in the same region, they have been living together in the same land with their Kurdish counterparts. 'Home' is associated with the same land for both groups. Turkish refugees had a national identity whereas the Kurdish has never had an official Kurdish nation; they have a Turkish nationality and have been in search of a coherent national identity as well as the ethnic one.

The refugees interviewed were seeking to accomplish a consistent identity; consisted with their past and present situation. When defining themselves in terms of identities, in the entire group, forty-two percent identified themselves as "Turkish", twenty-six percent "Kurdish", the same ratio "European" and six percent used terms "mixed" or "world citizen". Even the Kurdish ethnic group consisted of more than half of our sample; only a quarter asserted their Kurdish ethnic identities when defining "who they are". Some defined themselves by attaching to the land they were born, and some by considering different locations of their lifetime. There are some refugees in the interviewed group who in fact had Turkish ancestors, pretended as they were "Kurdish" in order to guarantee the refugee status and after spending a period of time in the host country started to feel “European” or “mix”….

It is significant that even some interviewees had lived in the host country for long time and gained the British status, none identified themselves as “British”. Similar to the Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg’s (1996) observations on *Franco-Maghrebi* ethnic groups in France, refugees in England do not define themselves in terms of hyphenated identities such as Turkish-British or Kurdish-British as this is the case for Turkish-Americans or Turkish-Canadians. In England, ethnic groups are expected to be assimilated which can be an issue for the next generations, but specifically the first comers are segregated from the “British” society. It is particularly problematic for refugees from Turkey, because their religion makes them inassimilable. Citizens or not, people from Turkey tend to be regarded as foreigners.

No significant correlation is found between the time spent in England and identity assertions, whereas the time spent in home country (Turkey) and age are highly correlated. The older people tend to preserve their ethnic identities remarking “*it is who we are and where we belong to*”. The younger the people are, the more likely they question and reconstruct their identities and belongings.

While most of the refugees mentioned that they had a desire to retain their ethnic and cultural features, they were aware that it was not totally possible to “*be the same person*”; they were reshaping some aspects of their identities in the new foreign context. Refugees select elements of their own traditions and history while selecting some new elements from the new environment in order to recreate new identities. As Stuart Hall states; the experience is defined, “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*” (1989:80). Naila Habib (1996) sees that process as an eclectic one that would allow keeping the best of both cultures; but it means to be “between cultures and into none” (p.100).

“Each generation *constructs* its own form of ethnicity so that the ethnic identity of second generation is different from that of the first, and that of the third is different from that of the second” (Isajiw 1999, p.33). The second generation goes through a double process of socialization; in the cultures of the traditional community and the broader society. Those born in host country have sought ways of reconciling their ethnic identity with their sense of being in England and of being British (Fenton, 1999). They have a loyalty to both England and Turkey, but very rarely think about returning to the motherland. They are involved in inter-ethnic activities, more willing to integrate and accept the host population's culture. They seek to negotiate integration and hybrid identities. It is, however, important to note that although the second generation tends towards adaptation to the British society; it is still preserving ethnic culture of own community. This preservation of ethnic culture is an important part of its identity.

There are also members of "one and a half generation" (Rumbaut 1991, Zhou 1999) in our sample who were born in Turkey and brought to England between age of five and adolescence. The migration scholars agree that this group would have different experiences than the second generation in terms of socialization and orientation toward homeland. This group have spent varying amounts of time in both countries, and seem to be familiar and comfortable with both cultures and social systems. On the other hand, such persons particularly mentioned the sense of "*not belonging solely to either of the two cultures*" and "*feeling different within both cultures".*

Language

> "*Language is the ultimate measure of human society. More than any other of life's faculties, it is language that tell us who we are, what we mean and where we are going*"
> (Fischer, 1999, p.203).

Language is one of the most basic bodily expressions of the self and it is critical to the maintenance of culture across generations (Miyares and Airries, 2006). As Fishman (1999) puts it; "language is the culture and neither law nor education nor religion nor government nor politics nor social organization would be possible without it" (p.445). Ethnic language is seen as an important part, a marker of a consistent ethnic and cultural identity. Ethnic language indeed has a "solidarity-creating effect" (Spoelders et al. 1987, p.89) and it refers to a criterion for distinguishing between in-group and out-group. Although it functions as a critical ethnic marker from the majority population perspective, it is also one of the first markers to disappear in the process of acculturation (Miyares and Airries, 2006).

Our findings show that the refugees from Turkey are not willing to give up their home language, which is a main aspect of their identity. 60 percent of the refugees' said that their mother tongue was Turkish and forty percent said Kurdish. When we examine the language they mostly speak; we see that only four percent speaks English at home. 82 percent prefers to speak Turkish; thirteen percent chooses to speak Kurdish. Some Kurds prefer Turkish rather than their ethnic language. This is caused by two different reasons; firstly Turkish is the official language back home; they used to communicate in Turkish (attending schools, engaging job markets, following media etc. require knowing Turkish) and also it is a direct result of the fact that in the new host society, Turkish and Kurdish refugees live and work together.

The families state that the choice of spoken language at home is a common source of conflict between them and their offspring. Most parents want to their children to integrate to the host society quickly which requires mastery in English, but on the other hand they want their children to know their home language. This might be related to the idea of returning; when parents decide to turn back to Turkey, they want their children to have mastery in Turkish. “The first generation retains language use in a very high degree; the second and third generations lose both rather quickly” (Isajiw 1999, p.188). The strategy followed by the second generation can be defined as “optimal cultural and language maintenance combined with optimal acquisition and use of new languages and cultures, hence peaceful coexistence” (p.333) as Vedder and Virta state (2005). However, we can estimate that language itself will not be a sufficient marker of their ethnic identity for the next generations.

Community Networks and Middleman Minorities

> *“In exile, with very little to possess, you hold on to what you have with aggressive defensiveness. What you achieve in exile is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being an exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity”* (Said 1984, p.51).

Moving to a strange land, refugees generally draw upon the existing ties of kinship to share the problems of their lives. Shared understandings develop a new type and set of ‘community networks’ which can be seen as “expended forms of mutual aid” (Collatrella, 2001, p.166). Communities provide help to their members in housing, healthcare, employment and also organize religious and cultural practices.

Refugees from Turkey spontaneously formed networks in the host society which serve as an alternative assistance system dealing with their most pressing needs, such as finding accommodation and work. For many Turkish and Kurdish refugees, the networking enabled them to cope better with their day-to-day problems in meeting their immediate needs, which were common to all regardless of their ethnic background. As a community sharing common roots, they needed each other to mediate their acculturation. According to Light, even the solidarity does not exist before migration; the experience of migration produces a reactive solidarity (in Mobasher, 2004).

Community networks have an ability to determine placement of individuals and groups within certain sectors of local labour markets (Collatrella, 2001). This population of Turkish and Kurdish refugees constitutes an example for this formation. Most of the refugees and migrants from Turkey are engaged in a common small trade business; running ‘kebab’ restaurants or grocery stores. In addition, the new comers who do not have enough capital to set up their own business usually are employed by those artisans. They are “middleman minorities” (Bonacich 1973, p.583), namely ethnic groups occupying similar, low-status positions-notably trade and commerce- in the host countries’ social structure; “they are the middlemen between the producer and the consumer, employer and the employee, elite and masses” (Bonacich 1973, p.583).

According to Bonacich (1973), communal solidarity plays an important role in the economic position of middleman groups; the “primordial tie of blood” provides the basis for trust. The typical business of this group in England is a family store which relies on family labour. If more labour is needed, it is chosen from own community who work for long hours and loyal to the owners. Most of the labour working in the Turkish restaurants and groceries are Turkish/Kurdish. The asylum seekers who have not yet taken the refugee status or resident status do not have work permit according to the British laws, so employing a Turk or Kurd has more aims than trust for the employer; while he pays much less than he has to pay to a British citizen and do not to pay the insurance he is reducing the labour costs significantly. For the illegal worker, it is a place to live, to earn money which provides the feeling of *security* by knowing nobody in the community would report the authorities that he is “illegal”. According to Fenton (1999, p.161) migrant workers are less likely to protest about their working conditions when they are worried about their right to stay and more willing to do work which is dirty or evades safety regulations.

Although Bonacich linked the success of middleman minorities to their social solidarity, our study found out that the social solidarity helped to establish success in the first generation was eroding in the second generation as many move into high professions by taking the advantage of their fluent English and high educations. Ethnic solidarity in this case can be seen as situational and valid for the first comers.

Ghettoization

Research on immigrants and refugees in the host societies has long been dominated by the paradigms of Chicago School. The Chicago school studied urban sociology and community by including the study of race and ethnic relations. Robert Park (1921; 1950), the best known Chicago school sociologist, looked on the dynamics between new settled ethnic groups and host mainstream society. He anticipated that minority ethnic groups would finally assimilate into the mainstream culture and society. Park elaborated an assimilation cycle which has two routes: a) least resistance (contact, accommodation, fusion); b) resistance (conflict, competition, accommodation, fusion). For Park, whichever route the immigrant takes, the end result would be the same; loss of a distinctive ethnic identity. Park's idea was that regardless of origin, immigrants wished to participate in the new society, enjoying its freedoms and benefits, and abandon their old cultural practices and ideas (1921; 1950).

While there could be certain credibility to this theoretical approach, there have been a sufficient number of minority groups in metropolitan cities who do not assimilate in the way Park predicted. On the contrary, there has been a new formation; segregation. Segregation refers to the physical and social separation of categories of people. Some minorities voluntarily segregate themselves from the majority. Migrant ethnic and racial minority groups create their own, segregated living areas that foreclose the ways for assimilation by limiting the contact between minority and majority groups.

There have been many studies examining the assimilation and segregation processes in the host societies. Maja Korac's study (2003) in Italy represented a situation that the newcomers were not spatially segregated in the city, contrarily they lived together with Italians, their neighbors were Italian, and often their flat-mates were Italian. This "helped to avoid a perception that the differences between Italian and non-Italian identity and culture are set in opposition" (p.412).

But regrettably in most of the European countries, there is still "a fear of being invaded or diluted by foreigners who want to become full members of their host communities. Integration, changing identity, let alone assimilation, were neither encouraged nor facilitated in Europe" (Hieronymi 2005, p.143). Clearly, newcomers are aware of and engage with attitudes of the host society. This directs them to construct life areas they can feel comfortable and safe away from xenophobia and open racism.

Ethnic groups try to 'transplant' the culture of their homeland to some segregated areas available. "They establish ethnic institutions based on the model of those of the home country. This is the process of building ethnic ghettos in the new country and establishing or re-establishing relations with people whose sympathy and acceptance can be taken for granted" (Isajiw, 1999, p.193).

According to Laws (2004), minority groups change the character of the places in which they settle. They establish businesses, invest in housing and other aspects of neighbourhood infrastructure, celebrate cultural festivals, and bring with them a variety of cultural practices. They modify the social and cultural geographies of the places in which they live and work. This modification can easily be seen in London, UK. Today, Green Lanes in North London which begins in Newington Green and finishes at Enfield is known as "Turkish town" by all the Londoners. Most of the refugees and immigrants from Turkey prefer to live in this region, even if they have the benefit to live in costless residences reserved for the refugees. The interviewees mentioned that they these places did not supply the feeling of '*home*'. They prefer to live with other people from Turkey in segregated areas, where they can find the feelings of '*familiarity*','*belonging*', '*comfort*' and '*security*'.

The ones living outside London do not have the same opportunity, but they mentioned that they make effort to find places close to others from Turkey and visit London regularly in order to do shopping from the stores which import goods from Turkey. Some mentioned that they go to London for the night and party at clubs where Turkish/Kurdish popular and folkloric music is performed.

This Turkish atmosphere provides immigrants and refugees to maintain the same lifestyles they are accustomed to and prevents them from assimilating in the receiving society. The host society becomes a place where they negotiate their cultural identities.

Religion

As soon as they settle in the host country, refugees built their own religious institutions which provide them a mediating or balancing function between past origin region and present region. These institutions also provide a wide range of social services during the early years of settlement and acculturation (Miyares and Airries, 2006).

The most significant distinguishing characteristic of the Turkish communities within a larger Christian dominant host society is their religion; ‘Islam’. Being a ‘Muslim’ is more then a belief, it is an important aspect of ethnic and cultural identity; it is a significant marker. Muslims in Europe have always been the ‘others’ who name the ‘God’ as ‘Allah’, fast in holy month ‘Ramadan’, do not eat pork and wear differently (Heckman, 1994).

The interviews on everyday practices and beliefs showed that practicing religion differs for each individual who reconstructs new lives in the host society. Significantly the second generation expressed their unwillingness in maintaining strict religious practices and cultural rites. Most refugees from Turkey mentioned that they drank alcohol and about a third ate pork even these were prohibited by Islam. Nearly half of them eat only *helal* meat (slaughtered according to Islamic precepts) and less than half fast during Ramadan, a large number are strict at not drinking alcohol during the holy month.

Our findings on the celebration of religious holidays contradict with some other researches. For example, Heckmann (1994, p.191) observes that Turkish immigrant groups in Germany are still trying to have a minimum standard and way of recreating the importance and meaning of the religious holidays. Buying sweets such as *baklava*, visiting older relatives and close friends is the minimum practise of almost all families. Contradictory, refugees we interviewed in England do not assign much importance to religious holidays, reasoning lack of the atmosphere and their closest relatives’ being in Turkey. One reason might be related to the nature of our sample; the number of the asylum seekers who left their families in Turkey, and who have never been religious might have affected these findings. However, it is significant that the ones defending perpetuation of religious holidays are the ones living in the Turkish town in London within the Turkish community and were able to create the feeling of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’.

Asylum seekers and refugees from Turkey do not solely maintain their cultural practices or adapt to the practices of the host society. They define the situations, negotiate and reconstruct their practises, and their cultural identities.

Mass Media

The literature concerning refugees and the mass media deals specifically with the media constructed images and negative representations of these groups. One other aspect of the media that needs to be studied is its role in sustaining ties between migrated populations and their home countries. Media supplies the “fragments of cultural memory that constitute a person’s sense of homeland as a virtual community” (Morley, 2000, p.106). Satellite, cable and internet are important technologies which enable refugees to follow the news, popular movies, soap operas, shows, music clips etc. that are broadcasted in their home country; by doing so, these technologies bring the daily events of origin country to refugees’ homes and lives.

In most of the houses we visited, there were satellite dishes and TVs were tuned to Turkish channels. 97 percent of the refugees interviewed stated that they were following the Turkish media everyday. It was also common that these television sets in the living room were dominated by the parents, and the children did not have much choice. The young generation (second or third generation) in these houses mentioned that their preferences were British channels, but most were also interested in watching Turkish entertainment programmes and music channels.

Most of the refugees are following the Turkish daily newspapers and Kurdish press which are available in cosmopolite cities such as London. More than half of the interviews use internet for following the daily news and broadcasts of Turkey. As Erkhamp (2004) states; the experienced or imagined ‘home’ thus is no longer just a memory in immigrants’ minds and narratives; it is present and part of their everyday lives.

The availability of the media technologies allows the refugees a crucial sense of synchronisation with events from Turkey and throughout their diaspora. These technologies help to constitute new, transnational spaces of experience –the transnational space of a Turkish diaspora which stretches beyond England, right across Europe (Morley, 2000).

Conclusion

In the modern global world, changing economic and social circumstances create new forms of ethnicities. Ethnic groups share ‘given’ common ties and attachments, but members of the groups experience different circumstances which affect their perceptions of life. Two members of the same ethnic group living in different circumstances and sometimes even in the same social context do not appropriate the same ethnic identities.

Refugees originated from Turkey represent negotiating new forms of identities in a host society. As active agents, refugees construct and re-construct their identities by making individual decisions of maintaining some cultural elements of own community while discarding some others and taking new ones from the dominant host culture. This is an ongoing negotiation process; they are negotiating their belongings. Each generation and each person constructs his own identity different from the other, because each develops different socio-psychological strategies to combine different cultural perspectives. This process is more obvious in the second generations' lives that experience double socialization in distinct cultures.

Each refugee preserves their ethnic culture in some degree, which indicates us that primordial attachments still has strength, but individuals also adapt to the host society in different degrees. While creating new homes in the host society, they create new life styles and new identities. During this process; ethnic language, ghettos, community networks, religion, mass media create a protective circle around refugees; they prevent refugees from assimilating, help them deal with this conflicting process and create living areas which allow to maintain ethnic and cultural identities.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Secil Erdogan is a doctoral candidate within the Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada. serdogan@uwo.ca

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