

The Role of the Atatürkverein in Providing a Bridge Between Germany and Turkey: A Plot Study in Siegen

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ABSTRACT: Turkish refugees who moved to Germany to provide economic labor after the Second World War have been living in Germany for more than half a century. The Kemalist Thought Association has an important function in terms of the social solidarity of the Turkish refugees living in Germany. Turkish refugees with a virtual bridge between these organizations on occasion, continue their transnational ties with the motherland Turkey. As the result of the work carried out with the President and Secretary General of the Kemalist Thought Association (Atatürkverein) located in Siegen Germany, it is observed that the association performs an important sociological function among refugees living in Germany and Turkey and has been identified as necessary for maintenance of identities. The study is an interview-based qualitative analysis.

Keywords: Atatürkverein, Kemalist Thought Association, migration, Siegen, transnationalism

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important issues of the last century was the understanding of the importance of transnational movements in the economic, social and cultural spheres. The notion of the concept of transnationalism has become widespread in providing a broad and productive perspective for understanding the increasing permeability between borders in the world and the increasing linkages from economics to emotional domain. International migration is one of the driving forces behind the concept of transnationalism with the social change experienced in recent years in the world. In the world today, the official figures show that more than 200 million people, including displaced persons, refugees, stateless persons and refugees, have been relocated in a way. However, it is not difficult to predict that the number of people affected due to migratory mobility is more than that. The traditional migration phenomenon is now replaced by transnational migration.

In the traditional sense, the borders of countries are decreasing and their permeability are increasing, and this situation shows its' social impact in everywhere sphere such as; social, economic, cultural, etc. It is important for the social sciences to understand the concept of transnationalism in terms of the characteristics and consequences of the changing migration phenomenon. In transnational migration, the networks of the migrant relations are the fundamental agent and the reason in the process. Associations and relatives are important elements of the network of migrant relations that establish and maintain links between countries. Relatives present in the target country provides transnational immigration due to the obvious impact of communication and means of transport (Waldinger, [1]). In this way, individuals or groups who migrate continue their lives without breaking the links with both countries through transnational migration. Associations, which are another network of migrants, play an important role in reshaping the boundaries, both supporting life in the target country and maintaining the memory in the country of origin (Caglar, [2]). Institutions that construct memory play an active role in transforming nation-state nationalism into a postmodern national representation. Globalization increases migration movements and, as a result, it changes the nation-state boundaries we memorize. The fact that the principle of indeterminacy of postmodern thought becomes visible at the borders meets the concept of transnational migration (Caglar, [2]). Therefore, in order to understand the concept of transnational migration, it is very important to understand the associations that govern the relations between migrants and their ties with homeland. An association "Atatürkverein" operating by the Turkish refugee group in Germany was established for this purpose. Atatürkverein (*ing:Ataturkist Thought Association, tur:Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği*), was founded in 1989 by Turkey's three respected professors; Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu,

Bahriye Üçok and Muammer Aksoy.¹ In this study, the relationship between Atatürkist Thought Association with the concept of transnationalism is analyzed and how the association acts as a bridge between Turkey and the Turkish population living in Germany is investigated.

II. TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE ROLE OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

The association process developed many years ago in the West (mainly in Europe and USA), especially after the industrialization period. They are formed by a combination of certain aims and wishes. Together with industrialization, large industrial cities have been centers of attraction both for domestic and regional as well as for international migration. However, groups coming from different centers and socio-economic structures went towards unionization and association. In the globalizing world, transportation facilities have developed rapidly. People have access to different regions of the world in a very short time (Çataloğlu et al., [3]).

As a result, cities are moving towards a multi-ethnic, multinational and multicultural structure. However, various groups may conflict with each other, be excluded or marginalized (Schiller et al., [4]). They can feel vulnerable in certain structures such as; political, economic, social and cultural. As a result, they can form a resistance against these structures. For instance, due to limited economic opportunities, Turks gathered around ethnic associations and this situation negatively affected the integration into German society (Tol, [5]). This ethnic settlement has enabled Turkish immigrants to survive without using the institutions of the host community, which means that immigrant Turks do not have to learn German language (Tol, [5]). Most of the time, this resistance presents the “Associations”. These associations are generally non-profit organizations, operated by volunteers to maintain their identical entities. In this context, associations are institutions that provide integration with the target country by binding them to their native land with a virtual network bridge. The experience of migration of Turkish workers to Germany, which is close to half century, has already problematized by many different social scientists. According to Başkurt, most studies on this subject have been about the traces of the communities, restricted only in the sending or receiving country (Başkurt, [6]). Turkish workers, who are essentially the subject of immigration experience, have been exposed to many material-nonmaterial (more as spiritual, religious) distress, conflicts and dramas in this process, but have also demonstrated the specific practices of dealing with the difficulties of meeting and encountering a foreign culture and building a new life here. In doing so, they encountered problems that could be raised in certain subjects such as identity, family, youth and religion, and most of the time these issues were tried to be solved by the institutions of both communities which were the sides of migration (Çelik, [7]).

In this adaptational process, certain foundations, associations, and non-governmental organizations play a very important role. The main elements of conflict in the position of immigration are intercultural encounters and interactions, xenophobia and discrimination, assimilation and exclusion, ineffectiveness in institutional relations, distrust and ghettoization (Vertovec, [8]). Of course, all of these are problems that are caused by the fact that immigration, which is defined by its temporality characteristic, is gained a permanent character in time and the Turks are included in Germany as an important social group in social, cultural and economic spheres. Although there are researchers who stated that about one fifth of the associations are religious associations and the rest of the associations working in other fields, there is no current information about the distribution of associations by their field of activity. How much of the Turkish population in Germany is a member of these associations or exactly how many of these associations are represented is a separate issue and it is difficult to reach a clear figure in this regard. However, a widespread survey commissioned in 2005, by the The Ministry of Germany Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend) with the collaboration of Turkey Research Center (TAM), it is estimated at a rate such that 64% of Turks have been demonstrated to be involved in civil society associations and activities (TAM, [9]). Therefore, it can be said that more than one million Turks are actively involved in associations, meaning that when the ratio in this study is roughly adapted to the Turkish population, it approaches to 3 million Turks (TAM, [9]).

III. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this applied study, the definition of the concept of transnationalism is tried to be determined. The relationship of this term with the association is investigated. The information about the duties of the association and the Turkish people living in Germany was obtained from the Chairman of the “Atatürkverein” association Mr.Kadir Kocyyigit and the Secretary General Mr.Tufan Bozdogan. The chairman of the association Koçyigit was asked to make an appointment with the help of e-mail and social media account of the association. It is a qualitative study. The questions were prepared in Turkish and the interview was done in Turkish. The interview was then transcribed into English. An in-depth interview was held on 04.12.2018 with the Atatürkist Thought

¹ Genel Başkanlarımız. Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği Web Sitesi. 28.02.2009. url: <https://add.org.tr/genelba%C5%9Fkanlarimiz/>

Association, located in Interkulturelles Zentrum der AWO Am Sohlbach 18, 57078 Siegen. Interview questions are designed to inquire following research question;

- *What is the role of Atatürkverein in providing bridge between Turkish people living in Germany and Turkey?*

A hypothesis for this research question can be constructed as follows and its validity can be tested based on the data, gathered from interview;

- *The Turkish community living in Siegen maintains ties with Turkey through Atatürkverein.*

The interview lasted approximately 1 hour. Although recorded with the sound recorder, important points are noted. Then the coding was done according to the main themes. 5 themes that determine the main skeleton of the interview have been identified and the analysis has been done under these headings. The questions consist of a structure that starts from the basic questions about the organization and goes to the complex ones such as; the aim of the association, the missions, the target group, social and cultural activities they perform and finally the established ties with Turkey.

IV. DATA AND ANALYSIS

i. Why Atatürk?

In the interview, the president of the association stated that they do not consider themselves a political organization. They defined Atatürk as a leader rather than a political personality, who gathered all ideas in a common denominator. Therefore, he wanted the organization to be founded on Atatürk's ideas and to unite the Turks living in Germany over the world view of Atatürk.

Bozdoğan : Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the gathering of all ideas, all factions, all ideologies under one roof. We respect everyone's views. Atatürk is the symbol of secularism. Our organization is so.

ii. Prejudices

Mr. Bozdoğan, the president of the association, stated that the main notion of the association is tolerance, and the primary goal is to break prejudices. German society against the Turks living in Germany still holds too much prejudices. The president stated that there are mistakes in both sides in acquiring these prejudices, and he emphasized that common cultural activities will be beneficial in this regard.

Bozdoğan: We have too many troubles. For example, one of the most difficult one is "being dirty" prejudice. When we do joint activities with the Germans, we insistly emphasize.

Kocyyigit: The aim of our association is to make cultural social and scientific studies and to break prejudices. This is our main goal.

Not only the German society, but also the refugee Turks have too much prejudice against the Germans. He stated that the inclusion of the two communities is the main target.

Bozdoğan : Our biggest problem is prejudice. We cannot save German society from prejudice. We have a prejudice against German society. Both groups have to come together.

iii. Adaptational Problems

President Bozdoğan emphasized the importance of the Turk workers living in Germany. He argued that there was an important solidarity between the workers. Bozdoğan stated that Turkish families who came with the migrations of 1960 and 1970 were somehow integrated into the German culture, but there are still problems for the new arriving refugees. Thanks to their associations, important relations were established with Turkish workers. He even stated that they had a say in the political arena.

Bozdoğan : The incoming Turkish mass was very foreign to the German society. They worked in the factory all day and stayed in camps 2 meters away. They had no interaction with the German society.

iv. Germanic Turks Compared to Other Minorities

Turkish population living in Germany were in a very low position compared to other refugees. Especially since the Spanish and Italians carry a common European culture, their integration is not very difficult. But for Turks, the situation is different. Through this association, Bozdoğan claimed that Germany has learned that they should recognize the identities of Turks.

Bozdoğan : For example, the Italian community, the Spanish community, is in a better position. But Turkish society is far below. We wanted to show Germany that we exist.

He stated that Germany should know more about Atatürk. The identification of the Turks with "Döner" (traditional Turkish food) is not enough and that the name of Atatürk should be given to a street in Siegen. They also stated that political ties were established and that this would happen soon.

Bozdoğan: For example, here in Siegen we want to name a street "Atatürk". We founded the location. We consulted. But they are very opposed. If you don't have party power, you can't do anything. That's why we moved our work to the political direction. We are committed. Either this year, or the next year, we'll make it.

v. Providing the Bridge Between Siegen and Turkey

President of the association, Mr. Bozdoğan stated that they are in a very close communication with associations in Turkey. They are not just restricted to Germany, partnership agreements with social associations

in different cities in Turkey were signed. For example, during the holidays declared by Atatürk, they visit Turkey in these days. He stated that they think it is more important to celebrate the holidays in Turkey.

Bozdogan : We went to Çanakkale (Turkish city, located in Northwest Turkey). We have links with associations in Turkey. I am from Bandırma. We proclaimed the Bandırma as a partner association. We're always going back there and organizing joint activities. For example, we went there this year. The president of that association was here. We met in Çanakkale in the same way. Next year, it will be the 100th anniversary of Atatürk's departure to Samsun. We will go to Samsun next year and we will have a collective activity there.

Kocyyigit emphasized that he was in contact with the Turkish consul in Cologne. Consulate of a state on another state is considered a piece of land. Therefore, the Turkish consulate in Cologne, is a piece of Turkish land. Bridges, on this occasion, is established thru the association, consular and Turkey.

Kocyyigit: For example, we work with the Turkish Consulate here. We always work together. We're always invite the consul here. He's coming. The consulate gives us a lot of support. But they are all psychological supports. We do not receive any material support. For example, we invite academics from the university here. We called a teacher who studied about Turks. He made a presentation to us here. It was beautiful. We also know that there are many people against Atatürk. They provoked the masses who do not know us as an association in Turkey. They think it's a secret organization. But we are trying to destroy this perception through these consuls.

It was stated by the president that the relations with Turkey is established most of the time via science. The importance that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gave to science has been repeatedly emphasized by Mr. Bozdogan. Therefore, the association organizes a scientific symposium at least once a week. In this symposium, academicians from different departments are invited. Turkish and German academicians working in German universities, are constantly invited to the association. Another important point is that association invites academicians from Turkish Universities to the symposium. Financial expenses are met in a collective manner. Academicians give lectures in Turkish or German. On these important days, academicians from Germany and Turkish academics are gathered. It is expected to break the prejudices on both sides. An artificial bridge is established between the two countries and the two cultures. The chairman of the association also stated that the journalists were constantly invited to the association. After the symposium, this kind of friendship is reinforced with social and cultural activities. During nature walk in forest and traditional Turkish cuisine, academicians and guests are chatting. With these conversations, two cultures are converging and a cultural exchange arises. These friendships then turn into an academic collaboration.

V. CONCLUSION

As a result of this study in Siegen Atatürkverein, Turks living in Germany are found to be in a lasting connection with Turkey, through this organization. It is found out that, migrant Turks who are living in Siegen, are in active contact with Turkey. They live two different identities together. Both cultures are practiced in a collective way. Besides the effort to adapt to German culture, it was observed that they continue their contacts with Turkey in order to protect their own cultures. However, it should be noted that the association is partly influenced by political power or political movements in Turkey, but they strictly try to be stable on the founding principles of the Republic of Turkey. It was observed that they were based on Atatürk's ideas. Therefore, adaptation with the modern German society is easily established. Thanks to this bridge established through the Ataturkist Thought Association, mutual understanding between the societies is gaining continuity.

According to the President of Atatürkverein Koçyigit, one of the most important factors that increase the continuity of transnational migration is the network of immigrant relations. The migrating networks play crucial role for Turks in the process of migrating from Turkey to Germany. Newcomers live for a while with their relatives who had already migrated to Germany, benefiting from the experience of their leading migrants. This network system both supports migrants financially and prevents them from feeling alone in the immigration country. The relationship network does not isolate the Turks from the society and, on the contrary, offers benefits in the adaptation process. This association, founded by Turkish immigrants in Siegen, is actively used in the network of relationships. Associations play an important role in keeping cultural transmission and culture alive. The association is also interested in daily life problems with these immigrants. They provide important support for adaptation to Germany, accommodation and employment and residence permits. The association creates memory in community consciousness. It protects a memory of the motherland and makes the members remember again. The association keeps the collective memory alive and strengthens the memory with the activities it holds.

However, some problems experienced in the formation of this bridge were also emphasized by the president of the association. Firstly, political power in Turkey directly affects the Turkish associations in Germany. The political Islamic government of Turkey restricts the Ataturkist Thought Association's activities. Refugees living in Germany prefer religious congregations rather than modern and secular organizations such as Atatürkverein. This bridge that is built thru religion, alienates people, marginalizes them and makes them aggressive in the target country. Secondly, Germany's exclusionary "Auslander" status attitude towards Turkish

immigrants, the latter have tended to develop strong ethnic structures (Oner, [10]). In addition, the lack of political participation and low level of representation in Germany has made them direct their political activity towards Turkey, which has also received encouragement from Turkey in the form of networks of consular services and other official religious, cultural and educational organizations.

To sum up, Turkish community organizations in Germany can play a crucial role both in integrating Germany's Turkish immigrants and contributing to solve the sociocultural and economic problems of Turkish community. Turkish community organizations in Germany are highly polarized ideologically, which makes it hard for them to act together for common goals. In order to be more influential in German politics, they have to be professionalized, and they have to cooperate more with German and Turkish associations. Turkish organizations in Germany primarily have to cooperate more with each other by overcoming their ideological rivalries in order to find solutions for their common socio-economic problems, to contribute integration of Turkish community and to increase the influence of Turkish community in German politics.

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