‘EURO-TURKS’ RETURN: THE COUNTERDIASPORIC MIGRATION OF GERMAN-BORN TURKS TO TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Turkish migration to Germany is the third largest international migration in the world, and the biggest in Europe. It started in the 1960s as ‘guestworker’ migration but soon matured to a situation of more-or-less permanent settlement. We can now speak of the establishment of a Turkish labour diaspora in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, with the second and third generations of the so-called ‘Euro-Turks’ in place. This paper looks at the transnational experiences and ‘return’ orientations of the Euro-Turk second generation. It focuses especially on those who have relocated to Turkey in early adulthood. The empirical evidence comes from in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out with a non-random sample of 34 German-Turks, interviewed in and around Istanbul in 2012. The ‘results’ sections of the paper are built around answers and insights into two main sets of research questions. First, what are the circumstances and motivations for the ‘return’ to the parental homeland? For instance, to what extent is it an ‘independent’ migration decision, as opposed to being part of a family return decision? What is the balance between personal, cultural, and economic reasoning for the relocation? Second, what are the ‘post-return’ experiences of these second-generation German-Turks? How do they develop careers in Turkey? What form do their social networks take? Do they feel they ‘belong’ in Turkey or do they reappraise their ‘German’ upbringing and identity, and look back to the country of their birth in a new light? The paper contributes new insights, and especially a new case-study, to the growing literature on the transnational identity, migration behaviour and career pathways of an important cohort of the European migrant-origin population.

Keywords: Turkish migration, Germany, Euro-Turks, second generation, identity, economic and career aspects of migration.
Introduction

According to the World Bank’s *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011*, Turkish migration to Germany is the third largest international migration in the world, after Mexican migration to the United States and Bangladeshi migration to India. There is an estimated ‘stock’ of 2.7 million Turks in Germany, where they are the largest foreign-origin group; Germany is also by far the most important destination for Turkish migration.

In terms of world migration history, the Turkish migration to Germany (and to other European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and France) is relatively recent, a product of the 1960s and early 1970s, when bilateral recruitment schemes brought hundreds of thousands of Turkish workers, mainly young men at first, to work in German factories and construction sites. Along with Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavians and Spaniards, the Turks were hired as ‘guestworkers’ (*Gastarbeiter*), the assumption being that they would return home when their labour contracts expired. Whilst some did return, most did not and they were subsequently joined by other family members, especially spouses, and thus the so-called ‘second-generation’ – German-born Turks, or very young children brought over as part of family reunion migration – was formed. Now, more than fifty years after Germany’s first labour recruitment agreement with Turkey in 1961, the third generation is reaching maturity, adding their numbers to a Turkish-heritage population in Germany which is increasingly difficult to enumerate because of the complications of birthplaces, naturalisations, and problematic definitions of who, exactly, is a ‘Turk’.

The above brief contextual sketch, which we will enlarge upon presently, is the background to the research which we report on in this paper. Our study is about the ‘return’ of the descendants, mostly second-generation, of the original migrants who went to Germany in the 1960, and after. We put the word ‘return’ in quote marks because, statistically speaking, this is not true return migration; the migrants are moving to a country they have never lived in (with a few exceptions). Nevertheless, because of their Turkish heritage and (in most cases) nationality, they feel a strong link to their Turkish ‘homeland’; so, in a more ontological sense, there is a feeling of a ‘return home’ even if, as we shall see presently, their return brings with it a series of practical, emotional and identificatory complications.

This paper follows in the footsteps of an earlier programme of research into the Greek case of second-generation ‘return’ migration (Christou and King 2010, 2011; King and Christou 2010; King et al. 2011), and deploys some of the terminology and research design of
this earlier study. We call the ‘return’ of the descendants of the original migrants to their parental/ancestral homeland *counterdiasporic migration*. Whilst the long-term emigration of Greeks to many parts of the world (North America, Australia, and several European countries) undoubtedly warrants the term ‘diaspora’, for the Turkish case this is not so obvious, and in fact the word ‘diaspora’ is not yet so often applied to the Turkish migration. We suggest that, after more than fifty years of migratory experience and the spanning now across three generations, the Turkish migration has evolved into a diaspora, not least because it satisfies what most diaspora scholars (eg. Brubaker 2005; Esman 2008) argue are the essential criteria for a diaspora, namely:

- a shared sense of ethno-national identity;
- dispersion from an original homeland, either through forced exile or voluntary migration for work, trade or settlement;
- the maintenance of ethnic boundaries, partly through the shared identity referred to above, and partly because of a sense of separation or exclusion from the host society;
- homeland orientation, either through the maintenance of transnational ties to the country or community of origin, and/or thorough a desire to return there some day;
- historical maturity, so that to the original migrants have been added subsequent generations who share their parents’ or ancestors’ diasporic identity.

Following Robin Cohen’s (1997) well-known typology of diasporas (victim, colonial, trading, labour and cultural), the Turkish case is a clear example of a labour-migration diaspora, although there were also political exiles, and hence more of a ‘victim’ diaspora, who left as a result of the military coup of 1980.

In terms of research questions and methodology, this study follows the Greek research cited earlier in that we are mainly interested in the phenomenon of second-generation ‘return’ to Turkey. We focus on two main issues: the motivations and migration processes which ‘produce’ this particular migratory form; and the ‘post-return’ experiences of these mostly young-to-middle-age men and women who have relocated to Turkey, either independently of their parents and other family members, or as part of a wider process of family return. To this end, a sample of ‘returnees’ was interviewed in Turkey via a semi-structured interview guide which was similar, but not identical to, the one used in the Greek research.
The Greek example is not only an instance of previous research on counterdiasporic migration. Previous studies have focused on three main geographical areas. First, there are other studies set in southern Europe: notably Wessendorf's pioneering research on what she calls 'roots migration' of second-generation Swiss-Italians to southern Italy (2007, 2009); Teerling's research on Cyprus, which included a separate sub-sample on Turkish Cypriots in the northern sector of the island (2011a, 2011b), and Sardinha's ongoing research on Portuguese-Canadians and Portuguese-French who return to Portugal (2011). The second broad geographical context is the Caribbean, where a considerable volume of papers has been published by a research team headed by Robert Potter, mainly on the return from the UK of 'Bajan-Brits' to Barbados (see, e.g., Phillips and Potter 2009; Potter 2005; Potter and Phillips 2006, 2008). Another author who has worked on Caribbean second-generation 'return' is Tracey Reynolds (2008, 2011), in her case to Jamaica.

The southern European and Caribbean counterdiasporic settings are broadly comparable to the Turkish case in that both evolved from early postwar labour migrations to Europe and (less so) to North America. Hence, in our analysis in this paper, some comparative references to these two migratory domains will be made. The third geographical context of prior research is less comparable to the Turkish case. This is the body of work on 'return' of the nikkeijin or overseas-born Japanese to Japan, called by Takeuchi Tsuda, the leading author on the topic, 'ethnic return' (2003). Nikkeijin research is overwhelmingly about the ‘return’ of second- and third-generation Japanese Brazilians to Japan, where, since the 1980s, they were contract-recruited as preferential labour migrants to work in Japanese factories. As such they have more in common with the first-generation Turkish guestworkers who were drawn to Germany in the early postwar decades rather than the second-generation descendants of these Turkish migrant workers. The nikkeijin phenomenon has been much studied (in addition to Tsuda 2003 see de Carvalho 2003; Roth 2002; Sellek 1997; Yamanaka 1996), but will not be referred to further in this paper except in passing.

Our paper now develops as follows. First we delve a little more deeply into the history and phenomenology of Turkish migration to Germany and the formation of Turkish ethnic communities there. Then we outline the research questions and methodology that underpin our empirical study of Turkish counterdiasporic migration. Our ‘results’ sections are twofold: first an analysis of the motivations and modalities of the ‘return to Turkey’ phenomenon as recounted through the voices of our interviewees; and secondly a synthesis of their ‘post-return’ narratives of survival, (non-)integration and settlement in Turkey. The conclusion
draws out the main findings of the Turkish case and compares them to the existing literature on second-generation relocation to the parental homeland.

**Turkish migration to Germany and the ‘Euro-Turk’ phenomenon**

Turkish migration to Germany in the postwar decades of reconstruction and industrial prosperity can be regarded as the exemplary case of European labour migration. Turkey soon overtook Italy as the main ‘supply’ country for migrant workers to Germany; and Germany was by some measure the principle destination for Turkish migration. Bilateral recruitment agreements between the two countries were signed in 1961 and 1964. Migrants were recruited for work in a construction and industrial employment, in both cases filling the low-skill jobs that native Germans chose not to do, thereby plugging manpower gaps that otherwise would have held up economic growth. The guestworker model involved allocating migrant workers temporary work and residence permits, housing them in single-sex workers’ hostels. In the early stages of this migration regime, the Turkish migrants were mainly men aged 20-40, relatively skilled and educated compared to the average working population in Turkey, and mainly from urban and more developed areas of the country. Towards the later years of the 1960s and through the years of maximum recruitment flow during the early 1970s, the labour migrants came mostly from rural areas and had lower levels of formal education (Abadan-Unat 1976; Martin 1991). By this time, European and German social legislation favoured the immigration of family members, and the hostels emptied out as reunited and nascent families sought rented accommodation in towns near their factories and construction sites.

The end of 1973 brought a turning-point. The first oil crisis, and the sharp economic downturn that it provoked, meant that Germany, along with most other industrialised countries in North-West Europe, halted the recruitment of migrant workers from outside the European Community. It was perhaps ironic that it was the first-ever Social-Democrat-led coalition government in Germany under Willy Brandt that took the decision to ban the immigration of non-EEC guestworkers. Whereas most other guestworker nationalities in Germany (notably Italians, Greeks and Spaniards) saw their numbers decline by up to a half due to return migration most, Turkish workers and their families stayed on; they preferred to remain in Germany rather than return to the backward and uncertain economic conditions in Turkey.

Between 1974 and the early 1980s, three principles of migration policy were implemented during the Social Democratic government under Helmut Schmidt. These were:
(i) the continuation of the November 1973 ban on the recruitment of non-EEC workers; (ii) measures to promote the ‘integration’ of those foreigners who had the right to live in Germany; and (iii) financial incentives to encourage migrant workers to return to their countries of origin (Bade and Münz 2000). Under this ‘promotion of return law’ (Rückkehrförderungsgesetz) voluntary returns received a bonus payment equivalent to €5250. Some 250,000 migrant workers (of all nationalities, including some Turks) took the payment and returned to their home countries, a smaller number than the policy aimed for.

After the migrant-worker and family-reunion phases, a new inflow of Turkish migrants entered Germany (and other countries) in the 1980s: these were refugees and asylum seekers escaping from the regime imposed by the 1980 military intervention in Turkey. Family-reunion migration continued, alongside clandestine migration (Euwals et al. 2007). At the same time, the German-born second generation reached maturity presenting, along with second-generation Italians, Greeks etc., a new sociological group in German society – an increasingly numerous cohort of young people with ambivalent identities and loyalties. Sirkeci had initially called them ‘European Turks’ (2002); Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) abbreviated this to ‘Euro-Turks’, a term also used by Kaya (2004) to refer to Turkish immigrants and especially the second and third generation in European countries.

The 1990s brought a new phase in the nature of the ambiguous and contradictory relationship between Germany and its now-large immigrant and immigrant-heritage population. Up until then, German citizenship law had been based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, which excluded immigrants from the ‘national’ population and the political community by virtue of their not sharing the ethno-cultural background of the host society. Whilst this principle was treated as sacrosanct particularly by conservative politicians, during the 1990s more progressive politicians, institutions of civil society such as grassroots citizens’ initiatives, and the liberal media increasingly contested this stance (Ehrkamp and Leitner 2003). The victory of the Social Democrats and the Greens in the 1998 German national elections brought this controversy centre-stage. One of the first actions of the new government was to break with the forty-year-old yet increasingly untenable claim that ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’ by acknowledging the reality of the presence of millions of so-called guestworkers as permanent immigrants (Ehrkamp and Leitner 2003).

A landmark initiative introduced at this time was the right of foreigners to obtain German citizenship. Since January 2000, immigrants’ children born in Germany, who had at least one
parent who has been continuously resident in Germany for at least eight years, can gain automatic citizenship according to the *jus soli* principle. They hold dual citizenship until the age of 23, when they must decide between German citizenship and that of the country of their parents’ origin. The new provisions also include an easier access to citizenship for first-generation immigrants, reducing the residency requirement from 15 to eight years.

Access to naturalisation has made the statistics on the number of Turks in Germany, which are recorded on the basis of citizenship, increasingly problematic. During the early 2000s, Turks applying for naturalisation as German citizens ran at between 50,000 and 100,000 per year, compared to fewer than 10,000 per annum in the early 1990s. However since 2003 there has been a marked decrease in the number of Turks being naturalised. According to Kaya (2004) this is because German Turks are already content with their ‘denizenship’ status, which gives them civil, social and cultural rights (but not political rights), and because they were hoping for a more open ruling on dual citizenship. Nonetheless, naturalisations have continued, and are thought to be the main reason for the 9 per cent drop in the number of Turks recorded in the German Central Register of Foreigners between 2005 and 2011 (Sirkeci et al. 2012).

Return migration is another element which has a bearing on the evolution of the ‘stock’ of Turks in Germany. Return has been a continuous process throughout the half-century of Turkish migration to Germany – first as part and parcel of the ‘rotation’ policy of short-term guestworker contracts, then as a result of the ‘return incentive’ scheme implemented in the 1980s, and subsequently as families have started to return upon the retirement of the first-generation immigrants. Earlier studies of return migration during the 1970s and 1980s looked at the potential developmental impact of returnees, who were supposed to bring back new ideas and investment funds, but such hopes for a significant regional development stimulus were largely disappointed (see Abadan-Unat et al. 1974; Keles 1985; Toepfer 1985; and King 1986 for the wider debate). No study, however, to the best of our knowledge, has been made of those German-born Turks who return, either with their returning families or as independent migrants. Given the scale of the Turkish migration to Germany and Europe, we find this surprising.

Meantime, a combination of ambiguity and stereotype characterises the perception of Turkish migrants and their families in Germany, both on the part of the ‘homeland’, Turkey, and the ‘hostland’, Germany. One might add that this ambivalence is part of the self-
perception of the ‘Euro-Turks’ themselves. It is still commonly believed in Turkey that migrants of Turkish origin and their descendants in Europe are *gurbetçi*, with a strong orientation to the homeland that will one day bring them back. On the other hand, they are also called *Almançı*, a term that depicts such individuals as being rich, eating pork, having a comfortable life abroad, losing their Turkish identity and becoming increasingly ‘Germanised’ (or Anglicised etc.). Yet they are resolutely regarded as ‘foreigners’, ‘Turks’ and ‘Muslims’ in their countries of settlement, where their lack of integration is lamented. This ‘between two worlds’ feeling, which is especially strong, it could be argued, amongst the second generation, has been powerfully, and also playfully, exhibited through different genres of art – for example in cinema, literature, music and comedy. As we shall see in the rest of this paper, sometimes this ambiguity is resolved, and in other cases it is heightened, when the second and subsequent generations return ‘home’ to Turkey.

**Research questions and methods**

With the above contextual background on Turkish migration and ethnic community formation in Germany in mind, and bearing in mind also the existing studies on second-generation ‘return’, especially those in roughly comparable settings such as other southern European countries, we specify two groups of research questions, one concerning the relocation itself, and the second regarding the experiences of living and working in Turkey. In more detail, then:

1. **What are the circumstances and motivations which lead members of the second generation to move to Turkey in their young adult lives?**

To what extent is this an independently-taken decision, or ‘forced’ as part of a ‘family return’ project in which parents (the first-generation immigrants) and possibly other family members are moving back to Turkey? How can this relocation be conceptualised in terms of the balance between ‘push factors’ from the host society (economic hardship, unemployment, social marginalisation, racism etc.) and pull factors from the home country (economic opportunities, cultural and religious factors, perceived attractiveness of the Turkish lifestyle, marriage to a non-migrant Turk etc.)? What is the relationship between the research participants’ experience of being raised as a second-generation Turk in Germany, probably within a ‘Turkish community’ which retained close links with the Turkish homeland through frequent visits and other transnational connections, and the ‘return’ decision? Put somewhat differently, is social marginalisation and lack of integration within German society a causal
factor for return? What are the returnees’ basic socio-demographic characteristics in terms of parental social-class background, social mobility within and across generations, educational qualifications etc.?

2. What are the second-generation research participants’ experiences of living and working in their Turkish parental homeland?

What are the interviewees’ initial reactions to life in the Turkish homeland? How do they resolve (or not) these initial reactions, if they are negative or problematic? To what extent are they able to utilise their ‘German’ upbringing (language skills, educational qualifications, professional and vocational experiences etc.) in accessing employment and career opportunities in Turkey? How important is where they relocate to in Turkey (e.g. in a large metropolis – Istanbul – compared to smaller places) for their progress in career and other spheres of life? How do they compare their new ‘Turkish lifestyle’ with the way of life they left behind in Germany? Do they reappraise their erstwhile ‘German’ lifestyles and identities as a result of the experience of living in Turkey? How do they react to any constraints or conflicts arising over gender relations and power structures in Turkey compared to the generally more gender-equal German society? Are there marked differences between male and female participants’ narratives of their ‘post-return’ experiences? What are the characteristics of their social circles in Turkey: do they mainly associate with other German Turks or Euro-Turks? How happy are they about their ‘new lives’ in Turkey; or are there strong feelings of disappointment, frustration and disillusionment? Finally, do they intend to remain in Turkey, move back to Germany, or perhaps move elsewhere?

In order to answer, or at least shed light on, these two sets of questions, a research design based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews to a target-sample of 30 second-generation ‘returnees’ was implemented in October-November 2012, preceded by a summer scoping visit during which the interview schedule and interviewing strategy and technique were tested on a pilot sample of five interviewees. Subsequently, one of the interviewees withdrew his permission to use his interview. Hence the full sample, including the pilot, consists of 34, roughly equally divided by gender. Of these, 31 were face-to-face, and the remainder by Skype or Gmail. Most ‘live’ interviews lasted about an hour although a few were much longer – up to three hours. For logistical reasons, and given the geographical size of Turkey, the interviews were clustered in and around Istanbul: 26 were located in this major Turkish metropolis, and the remainder were conducted in a group of small towns some distance to the
west of Istanbulı, Tekirdağ and east of Istanbul along the Black Sea coastal region – Düzce, Devrek, and Ereğli. Most interviewees were in their 20s and 30s; the oldest was 51 years old.

The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. Our aim was to give the interlocutors as much as freedom as possible to narrate their ‘stories’ as they saw fit, highlighting what was important for them. However in order to give them some initial guidance, the interviewer (Nilay Kılınç) told them beforehand about the broad nature of the project – not giving too much away, however, for fear that this might shape their responses and accounts. The interviewer also stressed the ethical principles of informed consent, agreement to have the interview recorded, the respondent’s freedom to have the interview terminated at any point, and their right to see and check the transcript. No particular problems or obstacles arouse in this regard, save the withdrawal noted above.

We wanted to collect data on the full multi-generation migration life-cycle; hence we encouraged the interviewees to start their account with their parents’ (sometimes their grandparents’) migration to Germany, including both their pre-migration background in Turkey and their working, family and ‘ethnic’ lives in Germany. This usually set the scene for the participants then to recount their own childhood growing up, usually in an industrial town/city in Germany, and their relationships, both in and out of school, with their German peers, other young German-Turks, and sometimes with children of other immigrant backgrounds. Following usually a chronological sequence (but not always, since some interviewees preferred to work backward from the present), the narratives then moved to cover material which is more directly relevant to the two main research questions set out above, as well as shedding light on the long list of sub-components to the two key research themes.

The taped recordings were then transcribed and translated at the same time into English, in order to yield the roughly … pages of narrative text which are the raw material for our analysis in the rest of this paper. Rather than subject the textual material to standard software package analysis, we preferred what narrative expert Ivor Goodson (2006) has termed ‘bathing in the data’: that is, reading and re-reading over and again the interview transcripts in order to qualitatively understand the main narrative themes. In the ‘results’ sections which follow, we build our analysis upon the wider discourses and ‘narrative confluences’ as well as other themes which emerged from the interviews which were not specified in the detailed research questions listed above.
Notes

1 There are 11.6 million Mexicans in the US and 3.3 million Bangladeshis in India. Excluded from the ranking of Turks in Germany (2.7 million) as third are Russians in Ukraine (3.7 million) and Ukrainians in Russia (3.6 million) as these took place as internal migration within the Former Soviet Union (World Bank 2011: 5-6).

2 The other southern European countries, meanwhile, had seen some growth in industry, tourism and other services so that returning migrants faced better prospects than when they originally left their home countries (see King 1986 for an overview).

3 One implication of the current German naturalisation law is that Turks who have German citizenship cannot vote in Turkey and cannot be elected to political office there.

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5 The term gurbetçi derives from gurbet, which refers to the historic practice of going away, or being absent in another country, usually for reasons of work to sustain the family back home.
References


