‘Euro-Turks’ return: the counter-diasporic migration of German-born Turks to Turkey

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Outline of Seminar

• Turkish migration to Europe and Germany, and the ‘Euro-Turk’ phenomenon
• Theoretical and contextual background: the second generation, counter-diaspora, transnationalism, and return migration
• Three main research questions: pre-return, return, and post-return
• Research methods and sites: Istanbul and Black Sea coast, 35 participant interviews
• Findings: growing up ‘Turkish’ in Germany
• Findings: five narratives of return
• Findings: post-return experiences, achievements, and disappointments
• Conclusion
Introducing Turkish migration to Europe

- Turkey is the largest single source country for immigration into Europe, mainly to Germany, but also substantial numbers in the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as the UK, France, Austria, Sweden, Denmark and elsewhere.
- Turkish migration to Germany is the third largest in the world (after Mexico → US and Bangladesh → India). Estimated ‘stock’ of 2.7 million Turks in Germany, where they are the largest group.
- Turkish migration to Germany was classic labour migration, managed by bilateral recruitment agreements 1961-64. Following Robin Cohen’s (1997) typology of diasporas, it is a labour diaspora.
- Labour migration Turkey → Germany heavily concentrated in years 1961-73, but with a qualitative change within those years: initially from urban areas of Turkey, people with above-average education and skills; later, lower-educated unskilled workers from rural Turkey.
Guestworkers, Settlers, ‘Euro-Turks’

• Turks in Germany are classic case of ‘guests who stayed for good’ as the 
  Gastarbeiter soon became (semi-)permanent settled community. Less likely to 
  return after 1973 crisis than Italians, Greeks, Spaniards etc.
• Rapid process of family reunion, family formation and birth of second generation 
  (and, in recent years, of third generation)
• Following the guestworkers, a second wave in 1980s of more politically motivated 
  exiles, fleeing the 1980 coup and the installation of a military government. Plus 
  some migrants who came as students, researchers, teachers etc.
• Early 1980s: German government promoted the ‘incentive to return’ scheme, a 
  bonus of DM 10,500 (around €5,000) to returnees
• During 1990s Germany accepted the reality that it was a country of immigration, 
  and offered possibility of German citizenship to German-born offspring of 
  immigrants and to longer-term foreign-born residents
• 2000s: various authors (Sirkeci, Østergaard-Nielsen, Kaya) coin the term ‘Euro-Turk’ 
  to connote the large cohort of European-born, especially German-born Turks with 
  dual, mixed or ambivalent loyalties and identities.
Counter-diaspora: a new migration chronotope

• Terms introduced by King and Christou (2010) in their work on Greek second-generation ‘return’ migration. Refers to the ‘return’ of the 2G and subsequent generations to the parental/ancestral homeland

• Turkish migration has now ‘matured’ into a diaspora, satisfying all the ‘modern’ criteria for diaspora definition:
  – dispersal from a homeland to multiple locations over multiple generations
  – shared sense of ethno-national identity, maintained by ‘ethnic boundaries’
  – homeland orientation, either via transnational links, and/or an aspiration to return

• Yet studies of diaspora – and there is a boom in diaspora scholarship in recent years – rarely examine return migration/mobilities to the ‘homeland’

• Other terms for counter-diaspora: ‘ethnic return’ (Tsuda 2003); ‘roots migration’ (Wessendorf 2007)
The Second Generation, Transnationalism, and Return Migration

• Problems of definition of 2G: ‘narrow’ vs. ‘broader’ definitions
• Most studies of the 2G are focused on their ‘integration’ in the host society (education, employment, religiosity, identity etc.) and pay little attention to their transnational links. Yet most have led ‘transnational lives’ since they are raised within transnational families/households (Levitt and Waters 2002)
• Likewise, existing studies of transnationalism, which has been perhaps the dominant paradigm in migration studies over the past 20 years, ignore the 2G and remain focused on the 1G
• Same goes for the scholarship on return migration, which has been rejuvenated as a topic for research in recent years: this too tends to be resolutely focused on the return of the 1G
• Is ‘return’ migration the best way of defining and looking at counter-diasporic movements? Distinction between statistical and ontological return. Return mobilities vs. return migration. And how to define ‘return from the return’, i.e. when the 2G counter-diasporans return to the land of their birth
Three main Research Questions

RQ1 PRE-RETURN: How does the Turkish 2G experience ‘ethnic’ and ‘transnational’ life whilst growing up in Germany?

RQ2 RETURN: What are the circumstances and motivations for the ‘return’ to the parental homeland? What, in other words, are the main ‘return narratives’?

RQ3 POST-RETURN: What are the post-return experiences of these 2G ‘German-Turks’?
RQ 1 Pre-Return: Ethnic and Transnational Life in Germany

• Were 2G ‘returnee’ interviewees brought up in an environment of strongly ethnic ‘Turkish’ families, enclaves and culture; or were they drawn from a different subset of the Turkish immigrant population in Germany?

• What specifically ‘Turkish’ influences were they exposed to? Use of Turkish language in and outside of home, Turkish school, religion, food, music, TV, Turkish community events (Bayram, and/or Christmas?)

• What were their material circumstances? Links to their parents’ pre-migration socio-economic background, and to their parents’ and their own occupations in Germany

• What were their transnational links, with special reference to homeland visits during childhood and adolescence? How were such visits evaluated?
RQ 2 Return: Circumstances, Motivations and Narratives of Return

- To what extent is the return an independently-taken decision, or embedded within, or even ‘forced’, as part of a family return project?
- Is there a relationship between the upbringing experience within a strong Turkish ethnic community poorly integrated within German society, and the propensity and narrativisation of return?
- Or is the return seen as some kind of rupture or escape from the Turkish-German ethnic/patriarchal family and community?
- Is there a link between high transnational activity in early life (e.g. frequent and long return visits) and a subsequent more definitive return?
- What are the roles of the ‘pull factors’ of the ‘return to roots’ or the attraction of the ‘Turkish way of life’?
RQ 3 Post-return: Experiences, Achievements, and Disappointments

• What were the participants’ initial reactions to their relocation to Turkey? How did they cope with the initial challenges?
• To what extent did they deploy their ‘German’ upbringing, educational qualifications and work experience in furthering their lives and careers in Turkey?
• What are the main positive and negative aspects of their post-return experiences?
• In particular, how do they react to challenges and conflicts relating to social hierarchies, gender roles, and lifestyles in Turkey, as compared to how these were lived and experienced in Germany?
• Do they mainly associate with other German-Turks or ‘Euro-Turks’?
• Do they intend to remain in Turkey, ‘return’ to Germany, or envision other future mobilities?
Research Methods and Sites

- Fieldwork in Turkey October-November 2012 preceded by scoping visit to test interview schedule in summer 2012.
- Interviews were semi-structured, to reflect the RQs, and open-ended. All were recorded, translated and transcribed, subject to usual consent. Interviewees given pseudonyms.
- Istanbul main field location (27 interviews), plus 8 interviews in various small towns and villages to the west (Tekirdağ) and to the east in the Black Sea coast region (Düzce, Ereğli and Devrek).
- Interviewees’ ages range 23-51 years; 21 females, 14 males.
Family Backgrounds

• Most of the parental immigration took place in the early 1960s
• Most of the family members are from Istanbul, some with prior migration history
  – Coming from the Balkans
  – Coming from Anatolia
• Most common destinations in Germany were industrial towns, often smaller ones rather than the big cities; hence moving from a big city (Istanbul) to small towns and even villages in Germany
• Working as factory employees, it was common for the mothers to work. Others (minority) went to Germany to undertake advanced studies
• 1983 was a common return date for the older 2G returnees; German government’s grant for the returnees.
RQ1: Growing up ‘Turkish’ in Germany

- Narratives expressed how Turkish way of life was practised every day through
  - Family interactions (speaking Turkish at home, eating Turkish food, obeying father)
  - Institutions (attending the Turkish school, Quran courses)
  - Cultural events (Turkish dinners and picnics, Bayram celebrations, circumcision day)

- Contrary to the main trend of ghettoisations in big cities, these families lived in small German towns where the Turkish immigrant population was quite low. This resulted in full integration with the German society through
  - School (being the ‘only Turk in the class’ or one of the very few)
  - Neighbourhood (having German neighbours and German nannies)
  - Shopping (no Turkish shops in these towns in the 1960s)

- Most of the interviewees did not have relatives in Germany and therefore social celebrations such as Bayram festivities weren’t practised fully

- Istanbul identity is stronger than the Turkish identity; repeated narrative ‘we’ and ‘them’ in terms of:
  - ‘We’: seen as integrated Turks because from Istanbul, associated with ‘high culture’
  - ‘Them’: Turks coming from rural Turkey, they are the ones to be ashamed of because they don’t integrate and they create a bad image of Turkey
‘I had many German friends’… ‘I was raised within the Turkish culture’

We lived in a neighbourhood where there were mostly Germans... There are of course many Turks in Munich... there is a district like a Turkish town, with Turkish coffee-houses where guys sit and play cards... In high school there was only one other Turk apart from me... So I was mainly with Germans whilst growing up... I had many German friends. There were a few Turkish kids I knew but I wasn’t close to them.

[...] I was raised within the Turkish culture. My mother is a Kemalist, she taught us Turkish history, Atatürk’s life... She cooked Turkish food, I love Turkish food... We always spoke Turkish at home, since my mother believes that a child must be able to speak his/her mother-tongue... As you can see, I don’t have any problem speaking Turkish, even though I came here only three years ago.

Eda (F23, Istanbul), born in Munich, moved to Istanbul, make-up artist
Childhood visits and stays in Turkey

- Most 2G returnees have strong memories from their summer holidays in Turkey: these holidays were 5-6 weeks in summer time, rare to visit Turkey in winter time.
- While half of them enjoyed the road trips by car and felt excited to go to Turkey, half of them did not want to leave Germany mainly because they did not want to be away from their friends and therefore they were looking forward to the new school term to start whilst they were away.
- The positive narrative themes are of good weather, sunshine, the seaside, food and fun, also reuniting with siblings who had been sent to Turkey.
- The negative narrative themes are endless visiting relatives, difficulty in communicating in Turkish, having no friends, Turkey being an underdeveloped country.
‘Swimming, sunbathing, eating ice-cream’...

‘They called us Almancı’

We came here every summer. I enjoyed those holidays because the weather was great. There was no school, only swimming, sunbathing, playing with friends, eating ice-cream. This was Turkey for me – holiday and summer. I also enjoyed the road trip, it took two days. First we would come to Istanbul and to my grandparents’ place, and then we would go off to the summer seaside places. The local kids were envious of my toys, we had really cool toys from Germany, they had shitty toys. They called us Almancı, ‘Germans’. My Turkish was OK, it was enough to communicate... I would hear new words from the local kids, mostly they would be swear words. So I would create an awkward silence at the dinner-table by asking what those words meant [laughs].

Fatih (M41, Istanbul) born Istanbul, taken to Germany aged 6 months, family returned 1985, now works for a German finance company in Istanbul
RQ2: Five Narratives of ‘Return’

1. Return through family decision
2. Return as a traumatic experience
3. Return as escape for a new start
4. Return as self-realisation
5. Return and the ‘Turkish way of life’
1. Return through family decision

- Quite a lot of the return took place in 1983 because of the law for the ‘Promotion of Readiness to Return’ (Das Gesetz zur Förderung der Rückkehrbereitschaft) which offered jobless ‘guestworkers’ 10,500 DM to return to their country of origin. Hence the 2G brought back as teenagers.

- Other reasons were mostly about ‘finally returning before it is too late’ and the female interviewees mentioned that their parents wanted them to find a Turkish spouse so they needed to return before their marriage age.

- The narratives recounted that the opinions of the children weren’t asked; rather they were obliged to return to Turkey with their families. Only a few interviewees stayed in Germany even though their families returned, these were males. Some of the female interviewees mentioned that they would rather stay in Germany but their families didn’t allow it because the girls are expected to live with the family until they get married.

- Return through family decision overlaps with return as a traumatic experience because most of the trauma was experienced by those who returned through family decision.

- Return through family decision resulted in failure in school life, depression and rebellion for most of the 2G.
‘It was my father’s decision and my opinion wasn’t asked’

It was my father’s decision and my opinion wasn’t asked. The reason was that my parents had reached their goal of being able to buy a house in Tekirdağ, so they thought they had spent enough time in Germany... I don’t think it was a good decision at all... it had a bad impact on our family life. The happy family life we had in Germany became a problematic one when we returned to Turkey because we were all struggling with the new environment. Because I was living and studying in Germany and starting over again in Turkey, this was difficult for me. I wish we hadn’t returned because I would have an EU passport now and I could travel as much as I want... Since it was not my decision I don’t feel regret, but I want my father to regret.

Erhan (M43, Tekirdağ), born Germany, returned age 15, now works as car salesman
2. Return as traumatic experience

The traumatic experiences were mostly faced by those who returned to Turkey with their families. Three main narrative themes:

• *Turkish education system* appears as the main reason of traumatic experience. Military discipline, rote-based teaching system, crowded classes, intolerant and violent teachers

• ‘*Neighbour pressure*’ was an unexpected experience for 2G returnees. Being required to adapt their behaviour according to their neighbours and relatives, stricter rules, family pressure

• *Working environment*: corrupt, network-based system, loose discipline, low payment but long working hours, being excluded by colleagues
‘I cried every day for a year’

My father decided to return; it was a surprise for me and my siblings... After he retired, he just decided one day that he wanted to live in Turkey... I wasn’t prepared for this decision. I was afraid of starting from zero in Turkey... I didn’t want to leave my friends behind... and all my social environment in Germany. My older sister and brother immediately disagreed with the idea of returning; they were both working and didn’t want to ruin their careers, so they stayed in Germany. I was 16 years old when we moved to Turkey. I cried every day for a year... I was depressed, and constantly dreaming of a way to get back to Germany... So, the first year was horrible. After that, I started getting used to living in Istanbul... I slowly made friends at the high school and in time my worries were overcome.

Pınar (F44, Istanbul), born Krefeld, returned with family aged 16, works in travel agency dealing with German tourists
3. Return as ‘escape’ and a ‘new start’

- Return as escape is most common amongst female interviewees: the main reason is to be away from parents and have their own freedom. There are cases of oppressive patriarchy, not necessarily only by their fathers but also by their mothers.
- Istanbul appears as an appealing metropolitan and cosmopolitan destination, especially when contrasted with ‘small-town’ Germany.
- Rare cases of experiencing discrimination and racism in Germany were narrated as casual factors for return.
- The positive memories from the summer holidays in Turkey and ‘an unknown but natural instinct for returning to Turkey’ were the main reasons why the interviewees chose Turkey as destination of escape (of course we don’t know how many ‘escaped’ to other destinations (Gulf?)
‘My mother is a very dominant character’

My mother is a very dominant character; she was constantly taking the opposite side and arguing with me. I wanted to escape from her and her constant complaining... That summer, when I came to Turkey, I was for the first time able to communicate with people, I felt comfortable, I was able to find myself... There was a girl I knew from Germany... she studied at a high school in Istanbul. She told me: ‘Everyone in my school comes from Germany, it’s great fun! You should move to Istanbul and study with me!’ My parents immediately opposed this idea. But I was fixed on the idea... I felt the need to escape, to get away from my mother... I convinced them [parents] in the end. I arranged a meeting with the parents of the girl who studies in Turkey. They told my parents about the school; they had a good influence... Then, everything happened so fast. After two days, I started at the school in Istanbul!

Özlem (F33), moved to boarding school in Istanbul aged 16, then university, divorced, works for a German airline company
4. Narratives of self-realisation

• There is a notion of surprise when the point comes when the 2G realises that they actually feel closer to the Turkish culture.

• Self-realisation is related to the positive aspects of living in Turkey, but can also reflect job satisfaction and educational achievement in Turkey.

• ‘Erasmus route’ to developing a project of self-realisation in Turkey.

• The most common narrative themes are around realising the positive Turkish characteristics such as sharing, enjoying life, being warm and friendly, having stronger ties with family, feeling more of a ‘first-class citizen’ and less of a ‘foreigner’.
‘I always dreamed of experiencing life in Turkey’

First I was an Erasmus student [in 2009]. I wanted to study Turkish politics and history. I wanted to continue with my Master’s here because I always dreamed of experiencing life in Turkey... It was in my heart, I knew I had to come here... I got accepted, and am living here since 2011... I chose to do my Master’s in Cultural Studies since I wish to concentrate on ethnic and cultural topics in Turkey... Actually, I want to work here... I want to experience working life in Istanbul, I see Istanbul as a place of many opportunities.... There is a big market in cultural issues... and in recent years dealing with immigrant issues... Turkey has always been special for me. I like Turkish music, Turkish food, the weather, the Bosporus, nice beaches... Turkey has great potential... It would be nice if I had my own place [to live], but my family preferred I stayed with my uncle and his family; they feel more comfortable this way. But next year I am planning to rent a place for myself with some flatmates...

Akasya (F24), born near Cologne, graduate of Cologne University
5. Return and the ‘Turkish way of life’

- This is a narrative that filters through the previous two (escape and new start, and self-realisation), as well as childhood holiday memories.
- Key themes are: the warmth of human relations, family values, hospitality, relaxed attitude to rules and regulations, the lively outdoor and cultural atmosphere of Istanbul.
- If these are somewhat essentialised and romanticised views of Turkish life, several interviewees balanced this with a more ‘objective’ view, pointing to themes like city chaos, the dominance of personal networks, the non-professional work environment etc. These form the part of the ‘narratives of disillusionment’, to be considered next.
‘Turks are sharing, hospitable and friendly’

Turks are sharing, hospitable and friendly... If you visit a Turk, they will offer you, tea food and cakes, as they would be so sincere in their welcome that you would feel as if you were in your own home... Such manners are less visible in the big cities of Turkey nowadays; but still, compared to Germany, Turks are so much more hospitable

Pınar (F44), Istanbul

When I visit Germany, I really miss Turkey! It’s so alive here. I miss going out, just going out randomly: to take a walk, to take a glass of tea by the sea, with the simit-man (bagel-seller) shouting his wares... Everything is so alive and kicking here... You really miss these things when you are away

Didem (F24), Istanbul
RQ3: Narratives of disillusionment

- economic challenges: lower standard of living, difficulty of accessing employment, ‘un-professional’ attitudes in the workplace
- widespread culture of ‘networks’ and nepotism, especially as regards access to jobs and promotion
- challenges of living in Istanbul: traffic chaos, lack of infrastructure etc.
- Turkish education system: both for those who returned as teenagers as part of family returns, and for those who currently have children in school
In Turkey, it’s hard to work in a professional way. The companies either have no system at all or a corrupt system… Turkish workers are lazy… instead of finishing their daily work, they surf the internet. They come to work late and they take long lunch-breaks. In Germany a worker works eight hours straight, very efficiently… In Germany meetings are important to plan things, to process projects, for evaluation and future targets. In Turkey things work like this: ‘you scratch my back, I scratch your back’. If you don’t have a good network it is hard to do business here.

Özlem (F33, Istanbul), now works for a German airlines company, previously for a Turkish one
‘If your father knows the right man’

In Turkey you will only get a job if you have a network, or if you bribe the right people. If your father knows the right man. It is horrible...

[...]
I found it hard to deal with the bureaucracy in Turkey. Once I received an official letter through the past. I went to the Internal Revenue Office to collect the document, it was something for my father. The official there didn’t want to understand me, he didn’t want to help. He only wanted money; he wanted me to bribe him. But I didn’t, I could never do that!

[...]
These things would never happen in Germany

Nurten (F38, Istanbul), returned to Turkey to get married to a relative, two children, trained in Germany as pharmacist but doesn’t work in Turkey, following her husband’s wishes
‘Living in Istanbul... is complete chaos’

The biggest downside of living in Istanbul is the traffic... it is horrible, complete chaos... The city is very crowded; sometimes you can hardly breath on the buses

Berna (M26), Istanbul

In Germany I had a car but it is not possible in Istanbul because petrol is so expensive; I can’t afford to have a car when you consider how much time you spend stuck in traffic jams every day. Life in Istanbul is very expensive and the quality of life is low

Nilgün (F50), Istanbul

I want to play tennis but the membership of a tennis club is so expensive. In Germany there are public courts for free. I want to swim but the entrance fee for the pool is high... and the men’s and women’s pools are separate! The women wear costumes like astronauts! I want to live with modern people...

Sevim (F47), Ümraniye, town on the Asian side of Istanbul
Education... ‘Turkey is following Europe from 50 years behind’

My son couldn’t have the opportunities I had during my childhood in Germany. Education was free in Germany... I couldn’t send my son to kindergarten in Istanbul because it was too expensive... In the 1970s in Germany, we had everything... In 2012 in Turkey I am not able to give to my son one quarter of the things I could have in my own childhood... The education is still horrible in Turkey. Turkey is following Europe from 50 years behind. The state school I went to in our shitty little town in Germany was more modern and better equipped than the private schools in Istanbul today. We had a pool, library, sports field, social events... We had separate desks – in Turkey when I was in school here, I had to share my desk with two other students. The classrooms were packed! We were more than 50 students in our class. And I hated wearing those uniforms

Sevim (F47, Istanbul), returned as teenager as part of family return, now married with a son in Turkish high school
Conclusions on RQ1: Pre-Return

• Sample of 2G ‘returnees’ interviewed were *not* the typical children of rural-origin, poorly-educated Turkish ‘guestworkers’: mostly their family backgrounds were ‘upper working class’, ‘middle class’ or even elite.

• This meant that they did *not* grow up in the Turkish enclaves in German cities, but in German neighbourhoods, often in smaller towns, and in schools with mainly German fellow-pupils.

• Hence, compared to the average 2G German-Turk, they are *educational high-achievers*, with many going to the gymnasium stream to university, either in Germany or Turkey.

• At the same time, their Turkish *ethno-linguistic identity* was preserved within the family sphere, combined with frequent holiday visits to Turkey: this gave them some degree of preparation for the ‘return’.
Conclusions on RQ2: Return

- Half returned as part of family return, therefore as teenagers and usually requiring final years of schooling in Turkey: for many youngsters this was a ‘forced’ return and therefore seen as traumatic.
- Many family returns prompted by the ‘return incentive’ scheme introduced by the German government in 1983.
- Return was not a function of lack of integration, or of racism in Germany, except in a tiny minority of cases; rather the reverse – those who returned were the most integrated into German society, but also had a strong sense of their Turkish identity too.
- Return also prompted by the perceived attractions of the Turkish way of life, and seen also as a project of self-realisation, both through successful work experiences (excepting low incomes) and the educational route.
Conclusions on RQ3: Post-Return

• Initial reaction to return, especially for teenagers brought back, was traumatic; but most eventually overcame the severe ’displacement’ within a year or two, yet for many the effects are also still there.

• Many returnees were able to access employment in jobs where their German language skills were useful or essential.

• Whilst there were many references to the positive aspects of being in Turkey (way of life, family relations, attractions of living in a vibrant metropolis compared to small-town Germany), what also stood out in the narratives were the challenges and disillusionments:
  – contrast between education systems
  – low incomes and high cost of living in Istanbul
  – challenges of living in Istanbul, especially the traffic chaos
  – culture of personal networks and corruption
Avenues for further research

• more attention to 2G returnees settling elsewhere in Turkey
• Haven’t (yet) probed questions of identity, patriarchy and gender relations
• ongoing post-return ‘reverse’ transnational links need to be explored – to what extent do returnees ‘look back’ to Germany?
• future plans: stay in Turkey, move back to Germany, migrate elsewhere?
• what will be the future of the ‘next’ generation, i.e. the children of the 2G returnees? Will they want to ‘reconnect’ to their parents’ country of birth, and perhaps where their grandparents still live? The transnational/diasporic cycle goes on...