



Transnational Social Network of Turks Living in the USA, and Turkish Associations in the USA

Emel Yigitturk Ekiyor^{1*}

¹*Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Gazi University, Ankara, Turkey.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

An indicator of immigrants' involvement in various areas of social life and of transnational activities in the host country following transnational migrations is their relationship with non-governmental organisations. In this context, this study is concerned with the views held by Turks living in the USA in relation to Turkish immigrant associations in the USA and their ties with those associations. The research data were collected from Turkish immigrants living in 34 different states of the USA through questionnaires. Immigrant associations are the collective organisations through which immigrants develop their social networks and social capital. However, the functions those associations fulfil and their purposes influence immigrants' ties with those associations. The findings of the research showed that the Turks living in USA took part in the social networks of immigrant associations. The findings also indicated that the transnational ties between the Turkish immigrants haven't yet strengthened enough.

Keywords: *Transnational migration; transnational social sphere; transnational social networks; transnational immigrant; immigrant associations.*

1. INTRODUCTION

International migration is the mobility between the borders of two distinct nation-states. The conception of transnational migration, which is a relatively new approach in immigration studies, claims that it is not only humans who move between the borders of countries but that ties are also transferred due to technological advances. Faist describes the process as in the following: "international migration is a multidimensional, economic, political, cultural and demographic process summarising a great number of ties and two or more locations in a great number of nation states and the various ties between people moving and people remaining" [1]. In this context, the concept of transnational immigrant is considered as subjects having connections with both the country of origin and the country of arrival; having complex, multiple, ultra-local relations and expanding networks [2] and supplied with different identities.

International ideas were made widespread in transnational migration studies by means of transnational social spheres approach providing a medium level analytical framework [3]. Transnational social spheres represent a dynamic area which is composed of social, economic, cultural and political relations between the borders of individuals' countries of origin and the countries of arrival or going beyond the borders [4,5,1]. Transnational migration means immigrants whose daily life depends on multiple and continuous connections along the borders and whose public identity is configured in relation to the status of more than one country [6]. In Basch et al. [4] immigrants are referred to as "people who go beyond national borders and who set up relations in economic, social, institutional, religious and political areas" and they are described as trans-immigrants. Thus, social networks emerge with individuals' relations and with social interaction developing in consequence of those relations. Immigration researchers assume jointly that migration processes do not occur in isolation but they are embedded in social networks [7].

2. TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Transnational migration is a process assuring that immigrants set up and maintain versatile social relations [6]. This network of social relations immigrants have is the social capital which can be consulted when necessary, which offers help related to migration and which

assures solutions to problems [8]. Although social networks are considered as a component of social capital, social capital is often considered as a consequence of social networks. According to Lin, social capital is the sources which can be reached or which can be catalysed through an individual's connections in networks and which are inherent in social networks [9]. Setting out from the thought that each individual has a network, Bourdieu considers social capital on the basis of the continuity of relations in this network and concentrates on how to use networks in reaching the results of social capital. According to Putnam, social networks are in the essence of social capital and that those networks have values and social connections influencing individuals' and groups' efficiency [10,11]. In migration studies, on the other hand, Taylor considers network ties as a source of "migration capital" [12]. Massey et al see immigrant networks as a source of social capital especially [13]. Social networks play an important role in starting spatial mobility and in many immigrants' selection of destination. Social networks also play roles in immigrants' integration into the community they join and in assimilation processes [14,15,16,17]. Former immigrants help other immigrants in getting a job and in being informed of other important matters, and this situation is interpreted as the successful sign of integration [18]. Thus, social network analysis can be beneficial in assumptions indicating how the relations in certain places as well as in geographically scattered places are developed and maintained [19]. Social networks provide immigrants with a mechanism through which they can cope with disadvantages they can encounter in the target community with ties of confidence and mutuality and thus they are considered as the source of social capital; and the approach of social network analysis has strong effects on current social capital activities [20,21]. The basic question in social capital studies is whether or not ethnic groups can develop bridge ties or whether or not they have continuous ties with ethnic origins [18]. On the other hand, the quality of networks differs not only from immigrants to natives but also among immigrants [22]. At the foundation of the differences in the structure of transnational domain which also has potential for conflicts and which is continuously changing with migrations and conflicts [23].

3. TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPHERES AND IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

International ideas in transnational immigration studies were made widespread in the approach

of transnational social domains, which provided a medium level analytical framework [3]. While 'transnational domain', which describes immigrant groups, is a conceptualisation of Basch and Portes; James Clifford and Steven Vertovec developed the concept of "diasporic domain". Levitt and Glick Schiller-referring to Bourdieu's concept of "social domains"- used the concept of transnational social fields in which new ideas and new resources were created and at which various transnational networks intersect [24]. Transnational domains-which are conceptualised as "third domain", "romantic domain", "diasporic domain" and "transnational domain"- emerge on a plane where nation states go beyond their boundaries. This domain also represents the whole of social networks and relations which are continual [25]. Social networks going beyond national borders are considered as a type of transnational social domains. These networks are not established only by citizens of a country from which people immigrate. They have multiple ties and were formed by everybody. Social networks, which connect at least two geographical regions, can be analysed within the conceptualisation of transnational social domains [26].

Transnational social spheres are generally divided into three types as daily life practices, organisations and institutions [27]. Transnational social domains, which is described by Faist is composed of a combination of social and symbolic ties, content, positions in networks and organisations and networks of organisations which may be available in more than one state [28]. These domains express dynamic procedures, not the static thoughts of ties and positions and they emphasise transformation.

Immigrants as the actors of transnational social spheres set up non-governmental organisations/associations in this area. Those organisations are the institutionalisation affecting immigrants' integration with the society on the one hand and their organising within themselves on the other hand and their disintegration as ethical communities. Studies on migration usually lay emphasis on the positive contributions immigrant associations make to the host country and the newcomers' integration. Those associations provide immigrants with employment opportunities and help them to learn the ways to participate in social life such as language acquisition, recognising laws and traditions in addition to meeting their economic needs. In this sense, associations and similar

non-governmental organisations established by immigrants "provide them with a social sphere through which they can develop their civic skills and learn ways of local organisation and thus develop their human capital" [29]. Critical approaches hold the view that the concept of transnational social sphere is a reflection of neo-liberal policies into the field of migration. According to Akbaş, immigrants forming networks and ties between two different countries and creating a new social sphere develop traditional and new forms of solidarity, and non-governmental organisations fulfil an ideological function re-generating this form of solidarity [30].

4. METHODS

This study contends that Turkish immigrants living in the USA have built a transnational social sphere and that they have developed social networks in this field. In this context, immigrant associations are believed to function as instruments in the formation and/or development of immigrants' transnational social networks. Therefore, this is a descriptive study performed to obtain immigrants' interest in and views about the immigrant associations in the host country. The research data were collected from Turkish immigrants living in 34 different states of the USA and above 18 years old randomly through snowball sampling by using questionnaires. 511 participants in total were reached via e-mails and social sharing networks. The data coming from the survey were analysed on the SPSS programme and were shown in charts in frequencies (f) and percentages (%).

The great majority of Turks living in the USA are in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. The region with the highest intensity of Turkish population in the USA is the region where Patterson and Clifton cities of the state of New Jersey are located. The number of Turks living in the region is approximately 10,000 according to official figures [31]. The research population was taken as 182,000- the figure declared by American census bureau. The sample size was calculated in the following formulas:

$$n = \frac{\eta}{1 + \eta} \div N$$

$$\eta = t^2 \cdot s^2 / d^2$$

(N: the size of population, n: sample size, t: table z value corresponding to the level of confidence (1.96 for 0.05, 2.58 for 0.01 and 3.28 for 0.001),

s: estimated standard deviation for population, d: acceptable deviation tolerance)

The number of people in the sample was calculated as 384. Considering the fact that there may be survey forms which are not returned or that some of the forms may not be completed fully, extras were added to the number [32]. The data coming from the survey were put to SPSS programme and Tables showing the frequencies (f) and percentages (%) were prepared.

The study seeks answers to the questions “is there any communication and interaction between immigrants of Turkish origin living in the USA?” and “what thoughts and interest do the immigrants of Turkish origin living in the USA have in relation to ethnic organisations in the USA?”

Due to the fact that this is a descriptive study, no hypotheses were made. The basic assumption of the study was made on the basis of the fact that immigrants life was not restricted to the country of origin and the country where immigrants were accepted. In addition to that, the study was designed with the assumptions that “Turks living in the USA set up social networks in a large area and in transnational domains and develop ties” and that “immigrants will develop their social capital by means of non-governmental organisations.”

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Immigrant associations or organisations set up “locations [33] of social relations where imaginary communities become real communities” and their networks. Turks living in the USA “have set up associations to solve their problems, to meet their needs, to attain unity, solidarity and coalescence, to benefit from legal rights better and to protect their vested rights” [34]. Those associations having different structures and functions fulfil such functions as cooperating with non-governmental organisations in Turkey, financing community projects such as building hospitals and schools, transferring ideas, accumulating knowledge and exchanging information and setting up scientific networks [35]. Associations also serving to prevent such developments as Armenian lobby working against Turkey and Turkish public opinion have gained institutional quality in the USA.

Although no clear information is available in relation to Turkish immigrant associations in the

USA in terms of quantity, there is a tendency to set up strong associations and to combine the associations under one single roof of association and thus to organise them. The Federation of Turkish American associations (TADF) in New York and Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) in Washington Dc are the commonly known examples for this [34]. According to the web pages of these organisations, there are 61 associations attached to TADF [35] and 60 associations attached to ATAA [36]. According to Akçapar, those associations and organisations function as catalysers in economic, cultural and political ties between the immigrant community and the country of origin [37]. For associations and non-governmental organisations to perform those tasks effectively and attain their goals depend on two-way communication that they are to develop with the target group. Therefore, the sample of Turkish immigrants in the USA was asked questions about their relations with those associations and about their views of the associations. 41.5% of the sample was composed of female participants while 58.5% was composed of male participants. Of the participants 14.5% were in the 24-29 age range whereas 19.2% of them were in the 30-35 age range, 22.9% in the 36-41 age range and 14.9% were in the 42-47 age range. As to their distribution according to their educational status, 24.3% of the participants had graduate degrees in Turkish universities while 35.4% had MA and PhD degrees from American universities and 40% received education at differing levels in Turkey and the USA.

The participants were asked the reasons for migrating from Turkey to the United States. Migrations for educational purposes ranked the first. Other reasons included such factors as better opportunities for career and research, the need for democratic rights and liberty, children’s future and combining divided families. The majority of the participants stated that their acquaintances living in the USA were influential in their decision to migrate. It is understood accordingly that social networks were influential in the ways they migrated no matter what their reason for migrating to the USA was.

19% of Turkish immigrants were engineers and technical staff, which were followed by entrepreneurs who had started their own business and by academic staff. The rate of entrepreneurs was 20% in this research. It was found that Turkish entrepreneurs mostly ran gas

stations, restaurants, supermarkets; they were butchers, bakers or worked in textile, carpet business, transportation and logistics or that they had small or medium scale economic activities in such states as New York and New Jersey- where Turks lived densely. Besides, the participants also had transnational activities in such different sectors and areas as informatics, design, medicine, accounting, estate agent and media. It became apparent in the research that Turk living in the USA were in medium or above medium income group.

The sample was first asked whether they had membership to any non-governmental organisations in the USA. The rate of those having membership to a non-governmental organisation in the USA was 31.7% whereas the rate of those having no such membership was 65.9%.

Accordingly, the sample group had interest in non-governmental organisations in the USA only at a limited level. According to Putnam, who claims that social capital has been decreasing in the USA for the last 30-40 years, social capital will increase as participation in non-governmental organisations increases [38]. According to Putman's approach, having a certain amount of social capital stock makes life easier. Social networks set up in this way facilitate cooperation and communication. It is thought in this context

that Turkish immigrants have limited social capital reserves.

On asking the sample group whether or not they had any information about the activities of Turkish associations and non-governmental organisations in the USA, 76.5% said that they were informed of the activities of the associations whereas 23.1% said they were not informed of the activities.

The rate of participants stating that they regularly took part in the activities of Turkish associations and non-governmental organisations was 15.7%. While the rate of those stating that they occasionally participated in the activities was 54%, the rate of those stating that they had never participated in the activities was 29.9%.

The Turks living in the USA were asked whether or not they were members to Turkish associations and non-governmental organisations in the USA. In response, 41.3% said they were members whereas 58.5% said that they were not members. Although the sample group was informed of the activities of Turkish associations and participated in those activities to a large extent, they were found to remain at a distance in terms of having membership to those associations and organisations.

Table 1. The Membership of Turks living in the USA to a non-governmental organisation

Membership to a non-governmental organisation	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	162	31.7
No	337	65.9
No answers	12	2.3
Total	511	100.0

Table 2. Being informed of the activities of Turkish immigrant associations in the USA

Being informed	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	391	76.5
No	118	23.1
No answers	2	0.4
Total	511	100.0

Table 3. Participation in the activities of immigrant associations in the USA

Participation in the activities	Frequencies	Percentages
Regular participation	80	15.7
Occasional participation	276	54.0
No participation at all	153	29.9
No answers	2	0.4
Total	511	100.0

Table 4. Membership to immigrant associations in the USA

Membership	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	211	41.3
No	299	58.5
No answers	1	0.2
Total	511	100.0

Organising by means of Turkish associations in the USA has a long history. The process was started with the establishment of Ottoman Welfare Association in New York. Today, there are several Turkish associations and various non-governmental organisations which have political, economic, social, cultural and educational spheres and which are organised in many states of the US. Although the sample were informed of the activities held by Turkish associations and substantially join the activities, they are reserved in terms of membership to those associations and organisations. Although more than 40% of Turks living in the USA had membership to Turkish associations and non-governmental organisations, more than half did not have membership. They can be informed of the activities held by those non-governmental organisations thanks to developing communication technologies. But when it comes to participation in the activities held, interest is low. Approximately 30% of the sample- which can be considered high- never took part in those activities. Thus, they were not involved in organising. On the other hand, the participants were also asked questions about how they spent their free time and about cultural events. They said that they participated in associations established by Turks and in the events held by those organisations so as to preserve their language and culture.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Immigrant associations and non-governmental organisations perform various functions in terms of countries from where people migrate and countries accepting them and in terms of immigrants. The organisations were found to be effective in the formation and development of migration policies. While immigrant networks assure that political and socio-cultural relations are maintained in the contexts of migration into and migration out, they also form the basis for immigrants to get organised in new contexts [39]. Organising differs structurally and functionally but they contribute to the development of social networks and of social capital embedded in those

networks. Therefore, as Hagan also recommends, networks of immigrant solidarity should be considered in terms of their effects on making decisions to migrate, formation and development of currents of migration, formation of transnational networks and on the integration of immigrants [39]. Limited number of studies is available in the literature on the ethnic organisation of Turks in the USA. Yavuzer [40], in a study entitled "Turks in the USA and the Associations They Have Founded", describes the historical development of those associations. This current study, however, questions the immigrants' interest in and their relations with ethnic organisations. Thus, it tries to determine immigrants' interest in and their interactions with the above-mentioned institutions in the development of social networks and transnational domains by means of Turkish immigrants. The findings obtained were analysed benefiting from the approach of social capital. Putnam argues that participation in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can influence social capital in positive ways. Efforts were made to understand Turkish immigrants' social capital inherent in social networks by considering that immigrants' social networks were also the source of social capital. Social capital develops through membership to a community and by being involved in the network of relations and in relations of change in the community. Combining social capital assures that immigrants build economic and political capital in both their target and source regions [41].

Immigrant associations are important for immigrants to set up ties in a place where they are "foreigners", to develop social networks and to reduce the negative effects and cost of immigration process with those networks. The results of this study suggested that Turkish immigrants living in the USA were informed of the activities of Turkish associations and other non-governmental organisations in the USA and that they took part in the social, cultural and entertainment activities held by those organisations. Yet, it was found that the participants were not so willing to have a membership to those organisations and that they preferred to remain at a distance in this respect. The development of social capital depends on the existence of norms such as trust in network relations and mutuality. It is predicted that membership to the institutions mentioned above will develop as the models develop between Turkish immigrants.

In conclusion, the findings obtained in this study give a quantitative idea of the level of ethnic relations of Turkish immigrants living in the USA. The study aimed to reveal Turkish immigrants' views on the levels of Turkish immigrants' getting organised and on ethnic NGOs and to provide data for the future research studies. Social network analysis was not used in this study. The sample size was limited to 511 participants. Considering all these restrictions, it is recommended that the future studies should be performed with more participants. Besides, as suggested by Bilecen et al. [7] investigating the spatial, temporal and relational dynamics of migration by integrating the SNA in a mixed approach would contribute significantly to the field.

Immigrants participate in transnational activities, and they develop their ties and social capital through membership to various non-governmental organisations and institutions to set up networks and to build their existing systems in the country they live in. From the aspect of Turkish immigrants living in the USA, immigrant associations in the USA are thought to be functional in this respect and that they help immigrants to establish transnational social networks but that those networks are not strong enough to become social capital.

While advances in technology and communication and transport make immigrants' lives easier and strengthen transnational ties; changes in social and economic conditions, national and multinational political balance require that immigrants struggle with more significant difficulties. Immigrant associations-which are increasing in number day by day-should avoid becoming "vehicles reviving solidarist structure" [42] which cannot satisfy needs in this process without forgetting the fact that globalisation and neo-liberal policies lie at the foundation of the fact that non-governmental organisations are increasingly developing today in quantity and quality in many countries –mainly in developed countries [30]. Otherwise, those organisations will deviate from their primary purpose, they will lose their importance for immigrants, and thus they won't be able to institutionalise.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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