»Homeland« in »Dreamland«?

Space and Identity in *Göçmen Konutlari*

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Space and Identity: An Attempt to Frame the Theory

In the globalized world of today, national boundaries are getting blurred for some and impassable for others, increasing debates over transnationality and migration. We are now experiencing the fluidity of boundaries, together with the meanings and identities attached to them. Keeping up with changing understandings in academia which now theorizes identity not as a single and holistic term, but as a multi-dimensional and processual concept, not as being but as becoming (Frith 1996: 109), is necessary in contemporary research. I prefer to use identity in the sense which recent studies adapt »belongings« for, following the challenging idea telling that »identity« should leave its place to a new and better defined concept since it is already overwhelmed with the heavy burden of connotations like core of selfhood, sameness, process and so on (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The wine analogy illuminates this notion: identity can be taken for granted not as »blood« but as »wine«, and a strict attachment to certain identities might result in »drunkenness« and even in »blindness« (Özmen 2009: 196). Thus, both for migrants and the migration researchers, fluidity, not rigidity, is key. It is not possible to talk about stable identities in the context of migration, given that the places migrants are »being« in and »longing« for (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002: vii) are fluid themselves.

When referring to places, we should keep in mind the relationship between space and place. We are not only talking about a geographical context with given borders that are never subject to change, but instead we should think about the subjects, institutions, networks and discourses of those places and take as a whole the social, cultural, economic and political relationships of the spaces (Kaya 2012: 77). This understanding of space is borrowed from Henri Lefebvre's social space, which he contends is socially constructed, and every society constructs its particular social space. Contrary to natural space which particularizes, social space as-

sembles everything including living beings, things, signs and symbols (Lefebvre 2007: 53, 101). Thus, not only the geographical places, but also the elements of everyday life play a role in the construction of social spaces. Considering the effect of changing places in the construction of social spaces and on the identity processes of migrants, it would not be difficult to agree with the idea that »questions of space and place are, in this deterritorialized age, more central to anthropological presentation than ever« (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 47). In light of the existing theories, this paper aims to better understand the context of migration from Bulgaria to Turkey, focusing on a certain place, *Göçmen Konutları*, in an effort to find correspondences between space and identity.

Before and After »The Big Excursion«: An Historical Account

Bulgarian-Turkish encounters can be traced back to the 6th century and to the Northern Caucasus, to the time of tribes before the rule of Khan Kubrat. He is regarded as the founding father of the Bulgarian Khanate, having ascended to the throne in 632, and uniting Bulgarian tribes before the settlement in the Balkans (Dimitrov 2002: 29–51). Following the settlement between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains in the 7th century,¹ and several wars with the Byzantine Empire, the Bulgarians fell under the rule of the Ottomans in the 14th century (Lutem 2000: 15–16) – referred to by some as »the Ottoman yoke« . During the Ottoman rule, the path of the Turkish people was from Anatolia to Bulgaria, a result of the Ottomans' settlement policy which sought to deeply imprint Ottoman culture and presence in the Balkans. The Turkish language was more prestigious than the Bulgarian language by then, and the Bulgarians were willing to adapt to Ottoman culture (Eminov 1999: 44–45). But after the establishment of the Bulgarian nation-state in 1858, the route for the Turkish changed to the opposite direction and with greater frequency due to the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–78 and the Balkan Wars in 1912–13 (Parla 2006: 545).

Three main migration waves were observed from Bulgaria to Turkey after the establishment of the Turkish Republic until the so called »big excursion«² in 1989.

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- 1 Bulgarian historians regarded them as Proto-Bulgarians as they were yet a combination of various tribes during the rule of Khan Asparukh (681) before the formation of the Bulgarian nation. Lutem sees the difference between Proto-Bulgarians and Bulgarians as a mere transition from their Turkic origins into Slavic ethnicity, and thus rejects this terminology (Lutem 2000: 15).
 - 2 Media from time to time referred to the mass exodus of Turkish people from Bulgaria in 1989 ironically as »the big excursion« since about half of the migrants turned back to Bulgaria after a short while within the same year (Fatková 2012: 317).

In 1925, an agreement between Turkey and Bulgaria was signed allowing voluntary resettlement, and about 220,000 Turks immigrated via this agreement until 1949. Between 1950 and 1952, about 155,000 people of Turkish origin escaped the communist regime in Bulgaria. And in 1968, another agreement allowed for family reunions, allowing about 115,000 Turks to cross the border and reach their families in Turkey until 1979 (Doğanay 1997).³ Then the assimilation policy of the Zhivkov regime reached its climax under the »revival process«,⁴ leading to the prohibition of the Turkish language in public, the forced changing of Turkish names into Slavic ones, and the denial of Turkish existence within the Bulgarian nation, which resulted in the escape of about 360,000 Turks to the border in only a few months in 1989 (Vasileva 1992: 346–47).

The borders were open for the ethnic kins (*soydaş*) for a short while, and not all of the newcomers were welcome. Thus, about 150,000 immigrants returned to Bulgaria immediately after the fall of the communist regime. The remaining immigrants had alternatives: some of them settled with the relatives who had immigrated beforehand, while others waited for the construction of permanent immigrant towns in the outskirts of cities like Ankara, Bursa and Istanbul. These immigrant towns were built by the state upon the objectives of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Kümbetoğlu 1997: 231).

The migration from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989 cannot be categorized as forced migration since some Turks in Bulgaria already had a »dream to migrate and live in Turkey« (Kümbetoğlu 1999: 239)⁵, and the free market economy in Turkey in the 1980s was better than that in communist Bulgaria, further making it a desirable destination. Thus, the migration was in fact forced towards the »dreamland«

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- 3 Zeynep Zafer mentions 5 periods of assimilation and 6 migration waves from Bulgaria to Anatolia, the first one of which corresponds to the time of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), that is before the foundation of the republic (Zafer 2012: 200) and the second and third ones are after the agreement in 1925 up till 1940, which I preferred to take as a single wave as taken by Doğanay. After the end of the 2nd Balkan War, Istanbul Treaty was signed between Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire in 1913 for reestablishing the diplomatic relations between the two countries (Boyar 2010: 57–58), which might have created the atmosphere for that first wave of migration in the 20th century.
 - 4 »Revival process« (*Възродителен процес* – *Vazroditelen protses*) was the official name of the assimilation policies of the Bulgarian state during the Zhivkov regime in the mid 1980s and Mary Neuburger refers to translate this name into English as the »rebirth process« (Neuburger 1997: 6).
 - 5 The status of the 89 migration of Turks from Bulgaria is debated. Mehmet Hacısalıhoğlu gives an account of the terminology used for those immigrants and concludes that the terms *göçmen* and *muhacir* imply a forced migration (Hacısalıhoğlu 2012: 31–36). Ayhan Kaya, on the other hand, looks at the transition from the Zhivkov regime to the European Union, and talks about transnational migration concerning the recent conditions of 89 immigrants (Kaya 2012: 81–91).

where the ethnic and religious kins lived (Vasileva 1992: 348). Furthermore, the *Göçmen Konutları* areas were the dream sites for some of the immigrants, since they were to provide immigrants with the opportunity to reunite with the neighbors from their villages back in Bulgaria. Hence, about 20 years after the settlement in those areas, it is possible to find a majority of immigrant residents in *Göçmen Konutları*. However, this is not due to the dream to come together only; the sites are not very appealing for permanent residents concerning spatial factors and the establishment of *Göçmen Konutları* areas as new districts in the outskirts resulted inevitably in ghettoization (Kümbetoğlu 1997: 257–58). In the case of *Göçmen Konutları* in İkitelli-Istanbul, where the research has been conducted, there is also the issue of confrontations with religious kins in the satellite town named *Başakşehir*, which grew immensely in the last decade and became a separate municipality.

The Rise of *Başakşehir*

The İzmit earthquake in 1999 remains vivid in the memories of the relatives of the 17,000 people, who passed away under the ruined buildings in the Marmara region. Not so sad for those who lived in İkitelli, it turned out that the firm ground of the area made the houses more resistant to damage caused by the earthquake, and the site became popular as a new residential area in Istanbul for more prosperous citizens. The popularity of the site was also heightened in response to the social settlement project initiated in early 1990s, with an aim of providing residence for the employees in the new industry area in İkitelli, but which then as a project moved into the hands of political Islam by the rise of Welfare Party (Çavdar 2011: 3–4), which was the Islamic conservative ruling party until the postmodern coup d'état⁶ on February 28, 1997 and which was replaced by Justice and Development Party, ruling Turkey for 10 years in 2012, and became a symbol of the interaction between Islamism and consumerism.

This interaction can be considered within the project of »multiple modernities«, in that there is no single modernity of the West, but rather alternatives emerging on the edges in terms of both distance and difference, the Islamic modernity of the Turkish context so to speak (Göle 2000: 93). The Islamist movement became influential in the 1980s in Turkey, leading towards the questioning of civ-

6 Welfare Party didn't fall due to an actual coup but the military memorandum in 1997 resulted in violation of religious freedoms and the fall of the religious ruling party, which resembled the results of previous coups. The 28 February process, in local and global media, was largely referred to as a postmodern coup.

ilization, advancement, and modernization on the basis of religion. Criticizing modernity on the one hand, yet adopting the benefits it offers on the other, the Islamist movement offered an alternative to cultural modernization and the »Western« lifestyle (Avcı 2009: 215). Trying to become an alternative to Western modernity, the Islamist movement is radical in the sense that it aims at changing the course of history and challenging existing traditions by those of the golden age of Islam. This paradoxical relationship with history and traditions results in an Islamic modernity which doesn't reject the Western modernity, but rather critically and creatively reappropriates its values (Göle 2000: 93, 96, 97). *Başakşehir* is one of the rising symbols of this Islamic modernization high up in the sky. With a residence area of 10-storey-buildings, ornamented with mosques and Islamic markets, *Başakşehir* as one of the most expensive and desirable residential areas in Istanbul became the preferred site of high class society of Islamic modernity. The name of the site, which means city of ears, also has connotations referring to the emblem of the Welfare Party with ears of grain. Thus, the relationship between politics and Islam are even manifest in the name of *Başakşehir* itself.

Following the four stages (*etap*) of *Başakşehir* residential development project, different sites like Onurkent and Fuzulkent were built around *Göçmen Konutları*, putting the houses of the immigrants in an architecturally inferior position with fewer stories and with lower quality of construction. The existence of satellite towns reflective of Islamic modernity around *Göçmen Konutları* in the *Başakşehir* municipality, and the facilities provided in those satellite towns that are not available in *Göçmen Konutları*, play role on the identification processes of immigrants and contribute to the feeling of being segregated.

Where Is Homeland? Managing Exclusion

As German-Turkish youth can be seen as sitting on a third chair between Turkishness and Germanness (Kaya 2002: 44, 59), the Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria might as well identify themselves with the same feeling, concerning the understandings of »homeland«, and the processes of othering. The first reason why the immigrants were welcome by the republican Turkish government was their being an ethnic kin (*soydaş*). When the »revival process« is taken into account, it can be seen that the Turkish people in Bulgaria were forced to assimilate since they were »the other« in ethnic terms. However, when they immigrated to Turkey, they once again became the victims of othering – but this time by their ethnic kin, as a reaction to their »Bulgarian« lifestyle (Kümbetoğlu 1997: 235). Religious othering also occurred. Bulgarian Turk (*Bulgar Türkü*) as a concept was used publicly for the immigrants after 1989, with connotations of ethnic othering, and the »Bulgar-

ian Turks« were blamed for »not knowing religion at all«, implying religious othering in addition (Hacısalihioğlu 2012: 63). Being members of the Muslim minority among Orthodox Christian Bulgarians, Turkish immigrants would be enjoying the »dreamland« where they could practice their religion freely together with the religious kin. However, by the rise of political Islam, and the appearance of an Islamic satellite town next to *Göçmen Konutları*, the immigrants were to face being the »not-religious-enough-others« among the religious kin.

The ethnic and religious othering faced by Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria is accompanied by spatial othering. My ongoing research among the immigrants living in the *Göçmen Konutları* in *Başakşehir*, which started in May 2012, focuses on the production of identities through space. Together with ethnographic methods like oral history and in-depth interviews, I have been collecting data through ethno-photography throughout this research, and the material for this paper was mainly drawn from photos. Spatial othering, coupled with religious and ethnic othering, leads the immigrants towards different adaptation strategies, making the *Göçmen Konutları* area the revival of »homeland« in »dreamland«.

As mentioned above, *Göçmen Konutları* has been suffering from ghettoization due to the rise of *Başakşehir* stages and other satellite towns around it. For instance, there are bus and minibus services to *Başakşehir*'s stages (photo 1), which also have stops in neighboring sites, except for *Göçmen Konutları*, meaning that immigrants cannot benefit from public transport as easily as their neighbors. There is also a large subway station being built in *Başakşehir*, but it only has an emergency exit in *Göçmen Konutları*, further underlining its lesser status. In addition, *Başakşehir* has large motorways for transport, while *Göçmen Konutları* has small roads, and there are large signs with directions to *Başakşehir*, while there are small arrows for *Göçmen Konutları* (photo 2), which means it is also difficult for nonresidents to visit *Göçmen Konutları* by their own cars if they don't know the area well.

Spatial segregation is also apparent in shopping facilities. *Başakşehir* besides large supermarkets has a shopping mall among buildings (photo 3), while, in contrast, *Göçmen Konutları* has small markets (photo 4). It is significant that alcoholic drinks can be found in these small markets, while they are not available in the conservative Islamic context of the supermarkets and the shopping mall of *Başakşehir*.⁷ Moreover, the care of the site provided by the administration makes the buildings in *Başakşehir* far better maintained (photo 5), with professional gardening (photo 6), while *Göçmen Konutları* cannot enjoy such care, and the resi-

7 Alcoholic drinks are also available in *Başakşehir*, but only in few places, one of which is a buffet closer to the industry area than the first stage of the site and another managed to sell alcoholic drinks only after struggling for it (Çavdar 2010: 3).

Photo 1 Motorways of *Başakşehir*, high billboard showing the route of the forthcoming subway next to the station on the left and a municipal bus driving towards the 1st stage on the right.

Photo 2 Huge direction signs for the stages of *Başakşehir* on the left and tiny arrow for *Göçmen Konutları* on the right.

Photo 3 Shopping mall in *Başakşehir*, next to apartments.

Photo 4 A small market sponsored by Tuborg, selling alcoholic drinks in *Göçmen Konutları*.

Photo 5 Well cared 10-storey buildings of *Başakşehir*, with exterior thermal sheathing and regular repainting.

dents must care for their environment themselves; there are several apartments with half painted and half ruined walls, and there are some others where only one story is insulated with foam coating (photo 7). Being on their own makes the immigrants develop strategies for modifying their environment. They do not have much space for enjoying the weather in their site but they can take chairs out and sit in the gardens of their apartments, for instance (photo 8). Also, their agricultural origin back in their villages helps them deal with their gardens differently, that is they can enjoy the fruits and vegetables of their small gardens which don't have professional gardeners (photo 9).

In addition to the aforementioned adaptation strategies, immigrants prefer to build transnational ties between Turkey and Bulgaria in an effort to adapt the Turkish republican way of life. Being stuck between the dilemmas of the »home-land« and »dreamland«, they travel back and forth between the countries with their two passports due to their dual citizenship and have their memories refreshed frequently, and that is why they should be called as transmigrants instead of immigrants now (Kaya 2012: 91). There are cars parked in *Göçmen Konutları* with Bulgarian plates (photo 10), and there is a border crossing bus service which takes immigrants directly from their residential area, instead of using the main

Photo 6 View of a garden in *Başakşehir*, under the care of professional gardeners.

Photo 7 A 5-storey building in *Göçmen Konutları*; half repainted, half neglected.

Photo 8 Handmade garden design in *Göçmen Konutları*.

Photo 9 Handmade agriculture gardens by the immigrant residents in *Göçmen Konutları*.

coach station in Esenler. Furthermore, goods from Bulgaria are brought to Turkey via this transnational mobility so that the ones who settled permanently in Turkey can still enjoy the taste of Bulgaria. However, this transfer is usually illegal. Thus, the man who sells Bulgarian goods at the open air market on Sundays became afraid of me when he saw my camera (photo 11). »Shoot me even with a gun, but not by a camera,« he said, and began sharing stories of his interactions with the police. He was afraid that I would share his photos on social media just like the teenagers living around once did, the police would identify him through these photos and come again for punishing him with fines difficult to pay and seizing his goods.

Since people were suddenly expelled from their homes back in Bulgaria, they still fear for the future. The rising satellite towns around the neighborhood and the rising value of *Başakşehir* because of its firm ground, together with the ongoing gentrification projects all around the country, make the immigrants feel insecure in their housing situation in that they have possibility to lose their site as suddenly as they lost their homes before.⁸ The conspiracy theory is that their certificates of ownership will become de-authorized, and they will be expelled from their site in the name of »gentrification«-so that more impressive buildings can rise for the »indigenous« rich in the area they are now residing. Also, the compulsory structural reinforcement of the buildings of the school and health center is interpreted as the expulsion of those social facilities from their site. The residents I talked to thought the school would turn into a religious secondary school (*imam hatip ortaokulu*), in line with the new educational regulations, to teach their children »proper Islam«, and the health center would turn into the quarters for new religious teachers coming to their school. They believed that the government was taking advantage of the maintenance of the two buildings for depriving their neighborhood of secular education and cheap and accessible health service. Concerning the handmade gardens of the site, one elderly woman who used to water the garden was sorry for not being able to do this anymore, »We were able to water our gardens with the municipal water supply for free, but suddenly they made us pay for it«, she said. »How are we going to do this? Don't they see what we earn is barely enough for us and not at all for our plants?« She thought this was another step taken towards expelling them from their neighborhood: first taking the water, then taking the right to reside there, and lastly the houses themselves. She sighed

8 Ayşe Çavdar mentions districts like *Şahintepe* and *Altınşehir*, which are located in *Başakşehir* municipality but which haven't yet been part of satellite town projects, where people from lower classes reside, and talks about the possible gentrification of those districts (Çavdar, 2010: 2). The Islamic modernity of the recent municipality, and the state support for this particular modernity, generates ill-ease not only amongst the residents of *Göçmen Konutları*, but also the poor residents of the neighboring districts.

Photo 10 Cars parked on a road in *Göçmen Konutları*, the anterior with a Bulgarian plate and the posterior with a Turkish plate.

Photo 11 Products with names written in Cyrillic alphabet, brought illegally from Bulgaria to Turkey, sold in *Göçmen Pazarı* (immigrant market) on Sundays

for her olive trees, which need great amounts of water during the summer and which will not be fruitful anymore due to lack of water.

Another strategy for adapting to Turkish life can be seen as a reverse othering; that is, self-segregating from their neighbors along religious and lifestyle factors. The reaction towards the idea of having a religious secondary school within the district resulted from the religious othering mentioned above. Paradoxical to that religious othering of immigrants by their »indigenous« kin, the immigrants I communicated with regarded their neighbors living in *Başakşehir* as less religious than them. An example regarding dress codes: there are women who wear headscarves in both districts, but the dressing styles and age range of women with headscarves differ. An immigrant woman, for example, can recognize who is from *Göçmen Konutları* and who is from *Başakşehir* by just looking at their headscarves. An »open«⁹ immigrant looked at the teenagers from *Başakşehir* shopping in the open air market with disappointment because they were wearing bright and colorful headscarves. She turned to me and whispered, »Is this faith in God or faith in fashion? Thank God I don't show off with my religion in that way.«¹⁰

Being subjected to segregation for so long, the immigrants feel that living in *Göçmen Konutları* is a privilege since they can now be self-segregated from the »indigenous« people in their site, just like once they were together with kins and away from the Bulgarian in their villages. They believe the »indigenous« renters in their apartments, with whom they have to share their »secure« area, are bad neighbors, and they treat the houses terribly since they don't respect the places they live in, like immigrants do. As in the Austrian case where activist immigrants deconstruct the dominant discourse of integration and deny fixed categories (Strasser 2008: 191), the immigrants in the *Göçmen Konutları* in *Başakşehir* reject »going native« by attaching themselves to the values of their »previous homeland«. They do not adopt the dress code of Islamic modernity, but they keep wearing their traditional clothes – and that is why it is easy for an immigrant woman to recognize women of *Başakşehir* based on their headscarves.¹¹ Although where

9 The women preferred to call their fellows who wear headscarves as *kapalı* (veiled-closed) and those who don't wear headscarves as *açık* (open). They sometimes used this terminology with the connotation that a woman whose head is open is open-minded because her brain is not veiled with the conservative curtain.

10 The religious faith of residents in *Başakşehir* is actually a frequently debated issue. Tayfun Atay discusses Islamic capitalism by giving examples from 5-crescent-hotels, »veiled« fashion shows, and houses rented by married men of Islamist background for their mistresses in *Başakşehir*. He concludes that although the expectation from Islamists was a pious lifestyle, Islamic bourgeoisie turned out to be consumers of the capitalist tastes (Atay 2010).

11 This difference in dress codes can lead to an accepted sharing of public spaces as in the case of *Başakşehir* State Hospital, where people from all districts of the municipality meet. The

the »homeland« is remains a question the answer of which differs from person to person (Parla 2006), it can be said in the *Göçmen Konutları* context that the immigrants were once different from the majority in their »homeland«, and now they are different from the majority living around them in their »dreamland«; nevertheless, they are happy being different.

Will They Ever Go Native? Soon

The spatial belongings of the Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria in their residence area tell much about how they construct and reproduce their transnational identity between Turkey and Bulgaria, how they manage to survive among their ethnic and religious kin who turned out to be not so kin to their lifestyle and how they themselves contribute to the segregation in both spatial and cultural terms. Having experienced the ethnic, religious and spatial othering, the immigrants now adapt strategies of modifying the space they reside in to resemble that of their homes back in Bulgaria, building transnational ties between the two countries to keep memories alive and segregating themselves from the »indigenous« people of *Başakşehir*, through a process of reverse othering, similar to the segregation they encountered from their Bulgarian neighbors before the »big excursion«. However, it should be kept in mind that the images I explain from the field are just snapshots from a larger picture. The identities of the immigrants should not be crystalized with the word »different« only, there are many dynamics which play a role in the identification processes of the residents of *Göçmen Konutları* in *Başakşehir* and their neighbors, and people might have more to tell than photos do, thus the final findings of my research would challenge my arguments in this paper. But taking identity as a processual flow already necessitates adopting such a perspective which is open to challenges and contestation, and the possibility of coming across immigrants sharing their environment, ideas and values with the »indigenous« residents of *Başakşehir* in addition to the ethnic and religious origin should be exciting even if it means the necessity of changing the whole framework of understanding the spatial relations of immigrants. The image of the immigrants in *Göçmen Konutları* I'm now looking at shows people who were once forced to assimilate by Bulgarians and who now feel the threat of assimilation by Islamic modernist Turks, who turned their not-dreamt-of-environment into »homeland«

hospital has several sitting sets in the large waiting room and people from *Göçmen Konutları* share the central sets with people from slums, while people from *Başakşehir* prefer to sit on the sets in the corners (Çavdar 2011: 7).

in their »dreamland«, which turned out to be not so strictly »the homeland«, and who are happy being different with their memories from the past, experiences of the present and fears of the future.

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