›Inclusion‹ and ›Exclusion‹: Transnational Experiences of Turkish and Kurdish Youth in London

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Living across the borders of two settlements has constructed different ways of defining ›home‹, and little has been written on the thoughts of second generation migrants about the country of origin, the city of settlement, and local neighbourhooding. In this paper, I aim to explore in which ways their relationship with the places they interact with redefines their sense of self and belongingness to the country of origin and the country of settlement. By doing this, I focus on the youngsters' relationship with London, the city they live in, North London where they locally dwell, and the country of origin where they visit at least once in every year.

Much research on second generation transnationalism has focused on visits to the country of origin, and transnational networks (Eckstein 2002; Golbert 2001; Haller and Landolt 2005; Levitt and Waters 2002; Morawska 2003; Perlmann and Waldinger 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Q'Flaherty et al. 2007; Vickerman 2002; Zhou 1997). This article distinctively looks at Kurdish and Turkish youths' relation with the receiving society, as well as the sending society.

Recent research (Çağlar 2001; Ehrkamp 2005; Faist 2000, 2000a; Kibria 2002; Levitt 2002; Wolf 2002) on urban spaces, identity and transnationalism focus on how urban spaces are transnationalised through immigrants' transnational relations when exploring migrant identity in relation to places. However, the interaction with the city of settlement has not yet received much attention. This paper aims to contribute to the current literature and to fill the existing gap in research relating to Turkish and Kurdish young people living in London. It aims to explore the sense of self and belongingness of Turkish and Kurdish youth in relation to three locales – London, North London and Turkey – that they interact with in their everyday lives. The paper first looks at how ethnic enclaves and urban space influence the ways transnational relations are constructed by asking young people about their perceptions of North London, where the majority of Turkish and

Kurdish migrants are settled. Secondly, it explores their relationship with London and, then, looks at their experiences with visiting the country of origin.

The findings presented here based on an ethnographic case study carried out in North London. I conducted in-depth interviews with 45 Turkish and Kurdish young people, both male and female. The ages of the young people are between 18 and 23. Most were born in London or came to London at an early age, and they were educated in London. Most of them are bilingual and live with their parents. I chose the age group 18 to 23 under the assumption that young people of this age are in the process of becoming adults. They will be more aware of what is going on around them in comparison to previous generations in terms of interaction with the other community members. Their ability in using the English language also assists them in engaging with different cultural components (Epstein 1998).

Experiencing North London

Cosmopolitan cities like London, New York, and Berlin offer a diversity of cultures, containing localized spaces whilst being at the same time global (Cattacin 2006; Dahinden 2009; Parkin 1999; Smith 2001). These cities are localized because they receive a large number of migrants from all over the world, and migrant communities construct their urban spaces in specific locations they have settled in. As a result of this diversity, transnationally connected and socio-economically differentiated local places can be found in global cities (Dahinden 2009). According to Parkin (1999), the significant migrant populations in the big cities of Europe is an important characteristic feature of these cities, as these migrant communities have their own political agendas which are not necessarily compatible with British, German or French identities. Economic reasons, job opportunities, and other facilities influence migrants' choices about which city to live in. Turkish and Kurdish migrants constructed an urban space in North London where they created local and transnational connections to the country of origin through shops, media, satellite dishes, travel agencies, solicitors, restaurants, bars and coffee houses. They have also created particular neighbourhoods in Kreuzberg in Berlin (Küçükcan 1999, Kaya, 2001). They live in the urban space within the multicultural city where they maintain multiple ties to their country of origin through social networks, consumption practices, and transnational media. In this way, migrants create new transnational social and cultural spaces for themselves.

The majority of Turkish and Kurdish migrants live in North London, Green Lanes which starts in Newington Green and extends to Winchmore Hill in the north part of London. Castles and Davidson (2000) argue that 'newcomers seek to construct a place that they can again call home, and follow their own prefer-

ences. Migrants transform the urban districts by doing, what some outsiders see as, ›ghettoizing‹ those areas (Çağlar 2001). I, rather, focus on the experiences of Turkish and Kurdish youth about living in the ethnic enclaves.

Most participants live in North London, having been born there or at least residing there from a young age. Thus, their social lives are embedded in this specific urban district. Friendships were built with the people living in the same area, they have gone to school in the same area, and they are familiar with all the shops and institutions established in this specific urban district. Some see living in North London as being a marker of lower status and feel ostracized. According to one respondent, Belgin, the local area she lives in labels her in the eyes of others:

I have grown up in North East London, Hackney and it really affected my accent. People pick up from my accent that I have grown up in a specific place. I do think that where you live affects your identity.

(Belgin, 20 years old, Kurdish, interviewee's house)

Belgin's North East London accent, and its lower social connotation, affects her daily life. Because her socio-economic and cultural origin is instantly recognizable by others as soon as she speaks, she feels that it affects her whole identity. There is a risk of exclusion from people outside her local context. In this sense, her belonging to a community has signified her class. Castles already pointed out that ›residential segregation in Britain was presented as the choice of migrants, but the development of minority neighbourhoods then appeared as the result of ›natural processes‹ of racial differentiation‹ (2000: 198–199). Tülay has a similar perspective on this. She feels that this influence on identity is not only related to migratory background, it also touches class issues:

I say I am from Enfield and my accent is obviously a North London accent. People can realize it is different from other regions of London. It does help to form my identity, and it reveals not only my cultural background, as everyone knows that North London is where Turkish people live, but also my working class background; it is just the way I speak.

(Tülay, 20 years old, Kurdish, café in North London)

This feeling of ›otherness‹ occurs independently of the cultural and social background of the interviewer. It seems, therefore, motivated by the local environment. Both Belgin and Tülay construct their sense of belonging to North London by experiencing inclusion as a member of the community, but at the same time they feel exclusion from the rest of society as a result of their accent, as well as socio-eco-

conomic and cultural background. The identification processes in relation to their ›ethnic place‹ is therefore related to both inclusion and exclusion depending on which region of London they are in.

The process of exclusion from the rest of the society as a result of living in the ethnic place is also highlighted by Ekim who lives in South London. He claims that living in North London makes it difficult to adapt to the receiving society compared to other places in London:

I grew up in Lewisham but I know North London. I grew up among English, Indian and black people. Where I live there were not many Kurdish and Turkish people, which is why I had to adapt. If I were to live in North London, which is sort of a ghetto, I would not have been able to adapt. I would not have had such a diverse group of friends.

(Ekim, 21 years old, Turkish, Gikder)

Ekim feels that living in an environment where there are various cultures and a diverse group of people make the adaptation process necessary. He compared two different urban districts – South and North London – in relation to diversity within the population, claiming that living outside of the urban space where the majority of Turkish and Kurdish community lives aids smooth interaction with the rest of the society. Alternatively, living in North London could also help Turkish and Kurdish youth in negotiating identity positioning by transforming the ›collective belonging‹ discourse of local neighbourhoods.

In the case of some young people who feel stuck in North London, interaction with other cultures is reduced. The predominantly Turkish-Kurdish ethnic composition of the neighbourhoods creates a space where they practice the culture of the country of origin as interpreted by family, relatives and friends, therefore limiting their involvement in British culture. Ersin stated the reasons for not socialising with British people:

I do not feel any affiliation with British culture. I never had any English friends. I tried my best, but it is quite difficult in North London, because there is not an English population.

(Ersin, 18 years old, Kurdish, café in Dalston)

Ersin practices the culture of the country of origin at home and in her community. The social environment in which Ersin interacts has limited interface with British culture. As mentioned by the respondents above, living in North London reduces the interaction with the rest of society. This challenges the arguments of Liempt (2011) and Zhou (2004). According to Liempt, the strength of the community can

actually facilitate integration into the country of settlement, especially into the local market. Zhou also argues that local neighbourhoods facilitate opportunities for migrants and their children. However, the experiences of young people living in North London do not necessarily promote social inclusion among Turkish and Kurdish youth.

However, living in North London also has positive influences on identity formation of Turkish and Kurdish youth. Dilek claims that living in a specific urban district where the majority of the Turkish and Kurdish community has settled has a crucial influence on her identity formation:

Hackney has made me who I am today. But it is not that important. I am closer to my community living in Hackney, possibly because of that I am more engaged with my community. It changed me completely as a person. I still have my beliefs, but it makes me closer to the community. It has got its advantages and disadvantages. You cannot walk with your boyfriends; there is always a chance that you will meet your dad's or mother's friend on the street. You are in their face all the time. Everyone knows your business, you cannot hide anything. The benefit is that you are part of the community, its weddings and parties, and it is not hard to meet people.

(Dilek, 23 years old, Kurdish, café in Dalston)

Her experiences of living in North London underline the importance of being a part of the community in terms of social networking. She is, at the same time, aware of the negative aspects of living in North London. She has adapted living in North London as a crucial element in defining herself within and with relationship to the Turkish and Kurdish communities in North London. She transforms traditional discourses of the ethnic enclave into her everyday life and negotiates them on her own terms. As Çağlar (2001) states, German Turkish youth accept the ghetto metaphor to define their relationships to places, and this leads to negotiation because they do not adopt the precepts of the dominant discourse. Ehrkamp (2005: 349), similarly, states that 'migrants engage in creating places and transform the urban landscape of contemporary cities'. Urban settings represent new forms of identity and cultural references in the case of young German Turks (Pecoud 2004).

As illustrated by the interviews, Turkish and Kurdish communities in North London have created a homogenous urban space where they practice their culture, lifestyle, and habits, as seen in other European cities among Turkish migrants settlement as well (Çağlar 2001, 2007; Küçükcan 1999; Wagner 2002). While some respondents enjoy living in North London, others mention the negative aspects of it. For some, this specific urban space plays a crucial role in their everyday life because it is a constitutive part of their habitus which includes their social lives

and friendships, thus imparting a feeling belonging (Ehrkamp 2005). Knowing the people in the area also helps social networking (Zhou 2004). Others underline the negative aspects of living in an ethnic enclave, such as feeling ›other‹ to the rest of the society (Castles 2000). Young people take into account social networking, safety and shared habits as positive aspects of living in an ethnic enclave, but they also think that it reduces their interaction with the rest of the society. Therefore, their identification with the urban space reflects both the processes of inclusion and exclusion.

The Image of ›London‹

The majority of Turkish and Kurdish migrants in the UK are settled in London, where educational and job opportunities are more easily attainable (Liempt 2011; Wiles 2008). London has a cosmopolitan character that attracts all sorts of migrants, and migrant culture and influence is a valuable asset for a cosmopolitan city (Aksoy 2006; Glick Schiller et al. 2011). How migrants experience the city varies depending on their everyday life patterns. In order to understand how young people can transform the urban district of the city, and how their interaction with London influences the identity formation of young people, respondents were asked about their experiences of living in London. Most said that the cosmopolitan character of London offers them a rich perspective in understanding other cultures surrounding them. Alev stated that living in London offers a lot:

Living in London is in fact very attractive, because when I go to Istanbul, I look around and everybody is the same. I love it, but it is not what London can offer. London is multicultural. You meet with different cultures all the time. In the place where we live, there are Asians, Chinese. In Turkey, the upper class encounters different cultures. I like living in London. When I was younger I did not realise what London has to offer, I was happy in Istanbul, but now I appreciate London better.

(Alev, 22 years old, Kurdish, London School of Economics)

When Alev realised what London offers in terms of diversity of cultures, she started questioning her relationships with Istanbul where she was born and where she travels to every year. London's cosmopolitan character is attractive for Alev who compares it to how big cities are structured in Turkey. Alev clearly negotiates her relationships with Istanbul and London through her experiences and brings elements of both sending and receiving societies.

Serpil also claimed that London is a unique city in terms of the diversity of people and cultures:

London is a place where there are a whole lot of different cultures. People would never guess that they survived, but they exist in London. You can encounter people from many different cultures and you know that you are not the only one in the world. In a way, living in London is the best. You know how to get along with different people. (Serpil, 18 years old, Kurdish, café in Dalston)

Serpil feels that she is a part of the diversity which London offers. The cosmopolitan character of London helps her to be socially included and not discriminated from the rest of the population. She is comfortable with the city because in London everyone is from somewhere else. Living in London offers 'a globally understood and cosmopolitan identity' (Lam and Smith, 2009: 1264). Kasinitz et al. (2008) have observed that second generation migrants living in New York appreciate the cosmopolitan nature of the city as well.

While some respondents enjoy the diversity of London, others have a very different experience. For İlkan, diversity does not always have a positive influence on identity formation. He states that learning about other cultures makes one reflective:

First of all, it affects me positively in that we get to learn about other cultures and identities. We get to understand ourselves more, that is the culture where we belong. There is also a downside, because when there are so many different backgrounds it is likely that there will be clashes. We have different interests, objects, food, different ways of acting and dressing. For example, Arabic people talk from the back of their throat. They sound alien, strange and different. We push it away, it makes us feel insecure, we don't understand, we can't get used to it ... Some people say that Pakistani food stinks. Well, to you it stinks because your food is different. If you were from that culture, that ethnicity, it would not stink.

(İlkan, 23 years old, Turkish, café in Dalston)

This quotation shows that, on the one hand, İlkan appreciates and enjoys the benefits of diversity in London. On the other hand, he claims that living with other cultures, and the relative liberalism in London which allows people to practice their culture, creates problems. He feels safe and comfortable in ethnic enclaves because this is where he interacts with other people from the same ethnic background. He has had a much more ethnic enclave oriented experience of the city, and is therefore more comfortable in his own ethnic enclave. In the case of Turkish migrants living in Marxloh, Ehrkamp (2005) stresses the Turkish character of the environment because it provides migrants a feeling of comfort and safety.

Some young people stated that once their environment has changed, and when they have more social interaction with other cultures, their sense of self also

changes. Alev said that she has learnt Turkish and Kurdish traditions and culture from her family, but started socialising with people from different cultures at university:

When I was at secondary school, I had a lot of Turkish and Kurdish friends. The cultural activities like Newroz or Bayram were more important, everybody were celebrating it with their family. You get it from school and from home. I was more exposed to it. I was not really involved community organisations, like youth club, but I was involved with activities. The way I behave is very different and it is not in terms of age, not because I was younger. It is just I cannot remember but I had more Turkish and Kurdish friends, now I have got more English, British friends, because, my environment change. My secondary school was in an area where there was ethnic minorities mainly.
(Alev, 22 years old, Kurdish, London School of Economics)

In the case of Alev, the socialisation process, different life experiences related to changes in her social environment, and increased interaction with people from different ethnic backgrounds including British people, opens a space for Alev to engage with different identities. This leads her to start questioning why she held onto Turkish culture, and was socially endogamous, when she was in secondary school.

Alev compares herself to her friends in terms of experiencing different aspects of the city. She said that her path diverged from her Turkish friends who preferred to stay among themselves:

I compare myself with a friend who stayed in the same environment and do not have much of an experience with British culture. It was quite strange that my friend did not know Tate Modern; she lives in London but does not know what it has to offer. She seems more concerned about her family; she wants to get married and is just 19. We did not have much to talk about. We do not have similar interests. She wants to spend more time with her family, get married and have kids. She was my best friend at primary and secondary school. She goes to university but there are a lot of Turkish students there. She has the same friends as before, whereas I do not see the same people. Her environment has not changed even at university, because she had same friends, same things. We became quite different. We have grown apart. Environment is really important. This is also about where do you study and who do you study for.
(Alev, 22 years old, Kurdish, London School of Economics)

Alev has moved to higher education, expanded her social networks, which are now multi-cultural and multi-racial. However, her friend's social environment has not changed: she was still mixing with peers from the same ethnic background. In

the case of Alev, multi-ethnic and multi-racial networks open up a space for her in which she negotiates the issues of identity. Some young people enjoy the diverse character of the city which helps them interact with different people from various backgrounds and feel included in London.

Visits to the Country of Origin

Trips to the country of origin are hugely important for the interviewees, and, needless to say, necessarily shape their relationship with the country of origin. Young people who were raised in the receiving country do not have as close a relationship with Turkey as their parents do. They cannot make claims to their identities based on birth or a personal history of residence in the country of origin (Kibria 2002: 301). In this respect, their relationship with Turkey is limited to the periods they spend in the country of origin. All of the respondents stated that they travel to Turkey once or twice a year with their parents. Their visits are fairly short in duration, and are focused on seeing family and friends, tourism, learning about their heritage, and participating in cultural production, such as learning about traditional food, music, cinema, *inter alia*.

In order to understand the transnational engagements of Turkish and Kurdish youth and their relation to the country of origin, they were asked questions relating to their visits to the country of origin, the time period they spend there, and their reflections on this time. The majority of the respondents mainly go to rural areas of Turkey where their relatives live. The lifestyle in Istanbul and in rural areas is different. One of the questions relates to their ability to adapt to the country of origin when they visit. Many young interviewees said that they have problems adapting because of inability to express themselves in the mother tongue, feeling that they do not belong to the country of origin, and because of differences in lifestyles and everyday life. Ersin sees difficulties in adapting to a new environment where life is different:

I definitely find it difficult to adapt when I go back to Turkey. I was like a stranger in Istanbul. It was very difficult. Even going to a shop, you do not know the prices, the currency, all sorts of problems, like how to pay ... I do not have any cultural adaptation problems. They are really kind people. I do not have cultural, but system-related problems when I travel to Turkey.

(Ersin, 18 years old, Kurdish, café in Dalston)

As it is evident, Ersin claims that adapting to lifestyle in Turkey can be problematic. He finds difficulties in practicing specific rules related to everyday life in Tur-

key, such as shopping and transport. His habits and lifestyle are associated with the receiving country. Like Ersin, Alev and Belgin also feel like outsiders in the country of origin because they are not familiar with the lifestyle and social systems in Turkey. They find it difficult to conform to norms having spent most of their lives in another culture. Alev said,

›I found a lot of things different in Turkey. For instance if you wear something unusual, they will stare at you in Turkey but not in London‹.

(Alev, 22 years old, Kurdish, London School of Economics)

The differences in values and lifestyles make adaptation difficult. Belgin also states clearly that she does not feel she belongs:

I do not really feel at home when I go there; I feel like an outsider anyway. In that sense, it is quite difficult to adapt ... It is because everyone knows that you did not grow up there and assumes that you are different. So they treat you differently. You have to act accordingly.

(Belgin, 20 years old, Kurdish, interviewee's house)

In the case of Alev and Belgin, adaptation also proved to be a challenge as they were regarded as outsiders and treated differently. Christou (2006: 841) observed that ›second generation Greek Americans feel like strangers in their homeland‹. Alev and Belgin similarly feel like outsiders when they visit the country of origin. Regarding this, it is crucial to look at which parts of Turkey young people visit, and what the concomitant lifestyles they experience there are. If they experience adaptation problems in Turkey it is probably because they find it difficult to adapt to the lifestyle of rural areas after experiencing multicultural London.

Besides problems with the environment and the social systems which these young people perceive in the country of origin, there are problems related to language and feelings of marginalization. The inability to speak fluent Turkish is clearly a concern for Belgin:

I do not feel very comfortable in the Turkish environment, because I do not feel comfortable with my Turkish and do not want to speak it. When I speak English, they do not understand and everyone gets uncomfortable ... I am quite lost.

(Belgin, 20 years old, Kurdish, interviewee's house).

Language is a central issue for Belgin in terms of adapting to the environment. It plays a crucial role for young people in building social ties with people in the

country of origin. Losing their parents' language over time makes it difficult to participate in social networks and they feel uncomfortable in the environment.

In the case of second generation migrants, the country of origin is not the main place they spend most of their time or socialise – they have built their lives in the country of settlement and are familiar with the social life and regulations of the country of settlement (Haller and Landolt 2005; Schans 2009). Many respondents were either born or raised in London from an early age. Consequently, London provides their sense of belonging, as their schools, friends, and parents are based there. Aziz points out the importance of social networks in London:

I was in Turkey for four months. But I really missed London when I was in Turkey. It is not because I belong to London. It is because my all friendships and my whole life are in London. I know every single place in London. In Turkey, I do not know any places. I had my life here. In Turkey, you are from Europe and they look at you in a different way.

(Aziz, 18 years old, Kurdish, café in Dalston)

Social networks and habits are important ways that he embeds himself in London. Aziz also feels he is an outsider in Turkey. Comparatively, he does not know the lifestyle or social system in Turkey, and this makes him feel different. The difficulty of living in Turkey is connected with the experience of living in London from an early age. The majority of the respondents feel excluded in Turkey.

Conclusions

Second generation migrants position themselves in three different locales: the city in which they live, the country of origin, and the migrant community in London. Their everyday life experiences are constituted by interacting with these locales. Their positions with regards to these locales are in a process of transformation based on a dialectic relationship which is open to interpretation, reflection and comparison. For example, the majority of Turkish and Kurdish youth said that their attitude to London has changed since realising what London has to offer them outside their ethnic enclave. Their thoughts about the city have changed through everyday experiences. In this way, their positioning with these locales is transformative as a result of everyday experiences.

Youths associate themselves more with the city of residence, the specific urban space, than the country of origin. The experiences of Turkish and Kurdish youths with Turkey, London and North London underlines human relations be-

yond national boundaries, as well as the importance of social relations and social networks in their local and international aspects (Cressey, 2006). In the narratives above, the dualism of inclusion-exclusion is reflected in their relationships with these places and constructions of belongingness. The construction of ›otherness‹ through visits to the country of origin, and living in North London which possesses some cultural elements of the country of origin, creates a sense of ›exclusion‹. In contrast, London's ›multicultural‹ character offers a sense of ›inclusion‹ for the interviewees. As a result, they have diverse ways of conceptualizing their sense of self, which is necessarily informed by the places they inhabit and socialize in. Homogenous spaces, therefore, create forms of exclusion in the case of these young people.

A mixture of 45 male-female Turkish and Kurdish young people were interviewed. However, no significant differences were found between these groups, as they did not refer to ethnic identification in relation to the places they socialize in. Apart from ethnic and gendered identities, religious identities and the practice of religion was not mentioned. It is clear that these young people did not take into account certain identifications when they spoke about their everyday life experiences.

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