

A GENERAL SOCIO-CULTURAL OUTLOOK OF THE EUROPEAN AND THE TURKISH MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

Avrupaluların ve Türklerin Amerika'ya Olan Göçlerine Genel Bir Sosyo-Kültürel Bakış

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ÖZET

Bu makalede, farklı Avrupalı toplulukların ve Türklerin Amerika'daki etnik kimliği üzerinde durulmuştur. Çalışmada, farklı dönemlerde Amerika'ya göç eden göçmenlerin farklı davranışlar sergiledikleri görülmüştür. Amerika'ya göç ettikleri tarihlerin ilk dönemlerinde, bu grupların geleneksel, kültürel, sosyolojik ve dinsel değerlerinden ödün vermedikleri irdelenirken, daha sonraki kuşakların bu hassasiyeti büyük ölçüde gösteremedikleri, önceki gruplarla kıyaslandığında nispeten asimilasyona uğradıkları görülmüştür. Fakat, bazı Avrupalı topluluklar ve Türkler diğer etnik topluluklardan farklı olduklarını sergileyebilmek amacıyla, birlikte düzenledikleri festivalleri, yürüyüşleri ve mutfak kültürlerini ön plana çıkarmışlardır. Dolayısıyla, bazı Avrupalı topluluklar ve Türkler “Ergime Potası’na” karışma yerine “Salata Kasesi’ne” katılmayı tercih etmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupalılar, Türkler, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Etnik Kimlik.

ABSTRACT

This article intends to deal with the ethnic identity of different European and the Turkish ethnic groups in the United States. This study puts forward that various immigrants of different dates portray different attitudes and behaviours. Whereas these main groups uncompromised their traditional, cultural, sociologic, and religious values in the earlier dates of their immigration, later immigrant groups were relatively subject to the case of assimilation. Yet, these ethnic communities held festivals, walks, and introduced their cuisine cultures in order to express that they are different from the other ethnic groups. There are two different symbols for the American culture: “melting-pot” and “salad bowl.” Some of these European and the Turkish groups do not participate in the “melting-pot,” but prefer to be the different ingredients of the “salad bowl.”

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Key Words: Europeans, Turks, The United States, Ethnic Identity.

INTRODUCTION

This study will focus on the analysis of the European and the Turkish migration in the United States. It is a fact that these ethnic groups portrayed different attitudes and behaviours in different times. Whereas the earlier groups of these ethnic groups preserved their cultural, traditional, sociologic, and religious values, some of the later immigrant groups became familiar with the other ethnic groups' ways of living. However, in spite of the later immigrant groups' pursuit of other groups' ways of living, it is undeniable that they uncompromised their traditional, cultural, and sociologic values. Their consistency in preserving most of their ethnic values makes them distinct ethnic groups when compared to the other immigrant groups. They were regarded as the European-Americans and the Turkish-Americans. Hence, rather than being subject to the concept of the "melting pot" in the United States, these ethnic groups could be evaluated as the ingredients of the "salad bowl" because of preserving their national and cultural traits such as their cuisines and their languages.

I. An Evaluation of the European and Turkish Migration in Respect to the Concepts of "The Melting Pot" and "The Salad Bowl" in American Culture

American culture basically combines two important symbols: "the melting-pot" and "the salad bowl." The former is the indication of the mixture of various ethnic communities in the same environment in which each becomes like the other. On the contrary, the latter signifies the combination of various cultures without losing their cultural, traditional, and religious values. This article chiefly aims at examining and interpreting the European and Turkish immigration in the United States as well as presenting some of these groups as distinct ethnic groups that had not been assimilated by the other immigrant groups. They keep their cultural, regional, religious and traditional values alive as well as their languages, cuisines, and ethnic festivals.

The concepts of "melting-pot" and "salad bowl" are significant in American culture due to multi-national/ethnic and multi-cultural nature. A considerable part of these groups directly or indirectly manifest their national, cultural, and religious values, i.e. they preserve their national and traditional values. The concepts of ethnic and ethnicity have always been the

centre of concern in the United States which is understandable and plausible. Ethnicity, basically, rests on the cultural differentiation of individuals and on the creation of social bonds between those who share a common culture. Ethnic groups differ in cultural, regional, and religious traits and in their collective identity. When an ethnic group achieves sovereignty in a certain state, that group becomes a nation that excludes the other ethnic groups (Smith, 1981: 34). Through being distinct from the other groups and participating in the groups they belong in the United States, these ethnic groups feel the sense of being powerful in their communities. Thus, ethnic identity of ethnic groups involves a set of shared understandings and common values in which individuals are assigned to one group or another (Cohen, 1978: 390).

II. The Evaluation of Cultural Plurality in the United States

When the United States is evaluated in its cultural plurality, it is possible to express that America is formed of different ethnic groups of various nations, and, thus, can be accepted as a “nation of nations” (Anderson 1983, 5; Brass 1991: 18). It is also possible to express that ethnicity is a mode of relationships in which these different nations gather. People gather in a certain place because of their cultural and social backgrounds. Max Weber and Fredrick Barth’s evaluation of ethnic communities can not be disregarded in the concept of ethnic relations. Weber states:

Groups whose members share a unique social and cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the next are known as ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are frequently identified by distinctive patterns of family life, language, recreation, religion and other customs that cause them to be differentiated from other. (Weber 1986: 390)

Weber’s explanation can be valuable for the European and the Turkish immigrants in America since these two groups had a distinctive family life, language, recreation, religion and other customs. Because of being in a different nation, in order to continue their lives properly, they needed to gather with the people of their own nationality. According to Weber, an ethnic group means a group of people that shares their common national feelings or their customs or their memories of hometown. These values become a pleasure for the immigrants in the land they immigrated. So, blood relationship is not really necessary to have an ethnic group in that land, because accumulation of individuals from the same national background forms an ethnic group. As Weber points out, ethnic groups are social groups and, thus, tend to interact with one another and share a national conscience. Fredrick Barth, such as Weber, evaluates ethnic group as: “a

self-perpetuating population, a sharing of cultural values and forms, a field of communication and interaction, a grouping that identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category different from their categories of the same type” (Barth, 1969: 19) .

Due to living in the same country at the same time with many nations, immigrants become affected from each other through assimilation. According to Masao Robert Jiobu, assimilation can be divided into three parts: the first one is “the melting-pot” which means an immigrant group merges with another group and both become partially like the other. When most groups in the United States are analyzed, it is seen that they become face to face with the case of the “melting-pot,” which means that an immigrant group in America affects both the other groups and also gets affected by them. Here, then, the assimilation begins because of resembling to each other with the mixture of the new and the old immigrants (D’innocenzo, 1992: 10). The second is “pluralism” which means an immigrant group remains distinct and coexists with the group in the country where they resided; and the third is “Americanization” which means that the United States is influential on the culture of other countries and, as a result, the substitution of a given culture with American culture emerges (Jiobu, 1990: 13). The second one points to the concept of “the salad bowl” in which different ingredients form the salad. Although some ethnic groups merge by adapting common cultural patterns, sharing the same institutions, intermarrying and eventually by losing their distinctiveness, some of the European and Turkish groups of different dates are not entirely the subjects for the concept of assimilation. For them, assimilation rarely takes the form of a true melting pot which produces a genuinely new nation. On the other hand, in the cultural plurality of “the salad bowl,” different groups exist in the same environment and preserve their ethnic traits. All of these groups gathered in the United States because of the need for having better living conditions when compared to their native countries.

The Europeans and the Turks gathered in the United States—the country of cultural plurality. Yet, some of these ethnic groups directly or indirectly had not been assimilated due to preserving their cultural values. It is a fact that ethnicity appears only in the case of the gathering of different groups with different backgrounds or with the same institutions or political systems. As Cheerily B. Leggon states, ethnic group is a human group sharing a distinctive homeland, language, religion and common ancestry (1979: 7-8). Different European immigrant groups and the Turks mostly preserved their native languages, religion and their national values despite being in a different nation. As Horace M. Kallen states, men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies to a greater or lesser extent, but they cannot change their grandfathers (1975:

220). That is, they cannot change their backgrounds and, thus, continue the same values of their background in the country they settle. Since members of an ethnic group also share certain feelings, ideas and behaviors, these two immigrant groups in the United States become more powerful as they gather under the same ethnic group. To form a real ethnic group, individuals must perceive themselves as a distinct ethnic community that shares “we” and “they” feelings (Epstein, 1978: 32). Feeling more powerful, the European and the Turkish groups portray that they have achieved in as “we” and “they” in America because of uniting in certain places and continuing their cultural values there. They have a common fate, interact among themselves and think and behave similarly in order to form a real ethnic group while evaluating the other immigrants as “the others.”

If some of the Turkish groups in the United States are given as an example here, it can be stated that they are aware of their nationality, i.e. they are aware of their ethnic identity. To illustrate, they speak Turkish in their own groups, keep their cultural values such as their wedding parties and become different from the other nations. And, for the Europeans, they speak French, English, Spanish, German, and Italian in the places they migrate and again continue their cultural festivals and carnivals in the United States. Europeans migrated to different parts of the United States and contributed to the formation of the mosaic nation of nations. Between the period of 1880 and 1920, over twenty million immigrants came to the United States. By 1907, 80 percent of them had come from the countries like Poland, England, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Italy, France, and Germany. Since there are different nations under the title of Europeans, these different nations combined different national, traditional, regional and religious characteristics.

Both the European and the Turkish immigrants were mainly effective in American cultural pluralism due to preserving their cultural, religious, regional and traditional values. When the European immigration is analyzed, the most crowded group was the English that had arrived in New England and, therefore, English became the common language of the States. Later, the Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and the Dutch arrived in the United States. The first big wave of migration from Europe happened between 1840 and 1860 because of the pushing factors of hunger, famine, dearth, over population, and political disorder. For instance, after 1847 Potato Famine, 118, 120 people migrated from Ireland to the United States. On the other hand, when the 1848-1849 Revolution of German

Confederation failed, most Germans again migrated to the States to be wage earners in the Army.¹

III. The Waves of Turkish and European Migration to the United States and the Continuation of the Socio-Cultural Heritage

Three different waves of Turkish immigrant groups in respect to their social and educational traits can be expressed: the first is between 1820 and 1920; the second is after the Second World War; and the third is from 1980 and onwards. The first combines the Turks and the *millet*s from the Ottoman Empire. The second involves the Turkish immigrants after the Emergence of the Turkish Republic. Especially after the 1950s, the immigrant wave is totally different from the first one, because according to the United States immigrant statistics, 27.060 individuals involving doctors, engineers and people from other jobs preferred to settle in America. Whereas some of them returned after improving in their jobs, some others remained in the States. After this brain migration, comes the third one that mainly combine the students after the 1980s. Thus, another pushing factor for the Turkish migration to the United States should be added because of the need to have better education opportunities.² Whereas the first group of individuals tended to remain strict on preserving their cultural, social, religious, and national values, the other groups were somehow akin to assess the other groups' values in their lives.

Turkish immigrants of the first wave from Harput (Elazığ), Dersim (Tunceli), Capakcur (Bingöl), Siverek, Rize, and Samsun had cultural differences even in Turkey. When they immigrated to America they continued their different cultural values there. As Frank Ahmed also points out, Turks also joined the other groups in America. According to the United States immigration records, from the period 1900 to 1920, at total of 291, 435 immigrants whose "Country of Last Residence" was Turkey entered the United States. This total included both the Turks and Kurds besides ethnic minorities such as the Greeks. They were mostly unskilled, illiterate and unemployed immigrants. Their main aim was to find a good work opportunity and to have a prosperous life in America by settling in the industrial regions such as Detroit, New York and Chicago. The Turks, like the other groups, wanted to be richer than they had been in Turkey. They

¹ Ellis Island in New York had been the historical gateway for the newcomers of about 12 million to the U.S. between 1892 and 1954 (<http://www.ellisland.org/>)

² However, under Green Card application, most individuals, even the unskilled and the illiterate could find the opportunity to settle and work in the United States in different manual jobs.

could not easily adapt to the way of living of the other immigrant groups because of not having any foreign languages. Since they had the absence of English, loneliness and homesickness became unavoidable because of not being able to interact with the other groups. They basically interacted with their Turkish neighbours (Ahmed, 1986: 16). This indicates that they preserved their vernacular hometown language in the new country. According to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (2001), 450.539 individuals between 1820 and 2000 immigrated to the United States from the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. The highest immigration ratio happened between 1900 and 1920 and the lowest had been in the 1930s (INS, 2001).

As Milton Gordon also emphasizes, cultural pluralism was a fact in American society before it became a theory. The theory of cultural pluralism was based on the assumption that there is strength in variety that the nation as a whole benefits from the contributions of different groups. America can be seen as a mosaic of ethnic groups, a “nation of nations;” each retaining its unique qualities while contributing to the overall pattern (Alba, 1990: 20). This is the reason why the ethnic groups feel the right to remain distinct from the other groups.

The individual who identified himself as a Turkish-American has a tendency for a fondness to a love of Turkish cuisine in family life and a love for Turkish folk music especially reminding their own hometown such as “Ordu’nun Dereleri/Aksa Yukarı Aksa/Vermem seni ellere/Ordu üstüme kalksa...” Since ethnicity is inherently a matter of ancestry and a belief of the origins of one’s forebears, individuals look for their backgrounds, toward the history of the origins of their family, group and nation. As each group member has close connection to each other, there is group cooperation, closeness to one another because of preferring the same settlements and dependency to present, i.e. to their own group members of the same nation at that time (Hill, 1977: 75).

There are two significant elements of ethnic identities—namely, their cuisines and languages. In order to illustrate their cultural unity the Turks can also be given as an example. Their unity can be seen especially in serving other ethnic groups with their Turkish cuisine which has been significant for its “*döner, lahmacun, iskender, mantı, cılbır, kete, mantı, lor peyniri, tarhana and pekmez.*” Traditional ethnic dishes become valuable especially in the Turkish village weddings that are held out of intermarriages in the United States.

Their feeling of nationalism is also reflected by their emphasis on being proud of being a Muslim and a Turk. They prefer to celebrate their religious *Bayrams* either in Turkey or in America. Most of them return to

Turkey to pass their religious feasts in Turkey. Turks' tendency for attending religious feasts, traditional weddings, and cultural meals of Turkish cuisine implies that the Turks in the United States preserve their cultural and traditional values. In addition to the Turkish cuisine, Italian, French, and English cuisines widely take place in the United States. Italian pastry, French Champaign and, especially, English tea have been significant in American life.

English cuisine, also known as Anglo-American cuisine, pays attention for the traditional time for tea at four or five p.m. Tea has been a valuable beverage since the 17th century for British as they had trade relationships with the Far East, Southeast Asia, and India. It has also been significant for Anglo-Americans in the United States under "tea time." As it is known, the creator of afternoon tea time was one of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting in the 19th century, Anna Maria Stanhope, known as the Duchess of Bedford. After that time, tea time for the British is widely known as the afternoon tea time even in the United States.(Stradley, online: 2004). There are some traits that are basically known with the Anglo Americans in the United States:

One such value would be that, in general, Anglo Americans tend to consider their personal goals over group goals because they are generally goal and future oriented, especially when it comes to monetary security. To prepare and save for the future is a common Anglo trait, as well as is the tendency to strive for material comfort. Another area in which the Anglo tendency toward being goal oriented is seen in communication. When Anglos converse, it is usually oriented toward exchanging information in a quick and efficient manner. A direct question often leads to a direct response, often without a great deal of polite small talk. This may explain why Anglo American tourists are often viewed as pushy and rude in other countries. They simply don't want to "waste" time on small talk. As compared to other cultures, Anglo Americans are very direct in addressing their conversation partner, using that person's name often. They also tend to interrupt each other more often.

Another Anglo American characteristic which differs from many other cultures involves the raising of children. Strict discipline, which may include physical punishment, is considered acceptable.³

Italian immigrants were also influential in their cultural activities in the United States. As Michael Barone states, the great majority of Italian immigrants were between the years of 1890 and 1914. The culture they brought included not so much the high culture of Dante or Michelangelo, but the village culture of the region or village from which they came. In the

³ An online source on Anglo Culture.

Italian neighbourhoods, craftsmanship or talent for carpentry became famous as well as the inner designs of the buildings of the Little Italies of New York, Chicago, Cleveland and Boston. Inner designs included beautiful paneling and marble work that reminded classical and Renaissance Italian heritage. Italian immigrants basically brought with them vernacular architecture of Italian village, tailoring and cuisine. Italian-Americans are also famous with their pasta. “Cocina Italiana” became, in time, standard American food. Since Italian-Americans advertise their pasta, American food is increasingly Italian influenced. So, Italian influences in the United States cannot be overestimated (Barone, online: 2008).

Equally important, culture can define a heritage viewed as the essence of a group and thereby preserves an ethnic connection. Ethnicity is then justified as the way of preserving traditions handed down by forebears. In the case of language, it is apparent that individuals having an ethnic background use their native language among their family members. Living with parents is also a means for the continuation of native languages at home with the family members. The words used are of words and phrases that can appear as an ethnic value in their native languages. Through their interaction, they are still capable of signalling their ethnic membership and contributing to the feelings of solidarity based on ethnicity.

Another ethnic experience is again can be observed through Turkish gatherings. They attend or participate in their ethnic festivals or the celebrations in Walnut Street in Philadelphia. Turks have Turkish Annual Picnics or Traditional Turkish Walks every year. Another ethnic experience is their visiting of ancestral homeland. Most Turks in America come to Turkey in their holidays to imply how strong their patriotic feelings and their homesickness are. Using words or phrases from a native language is another ethnic experience which is widespread among Turks because of not being able to speak English well. Another ethnic performance is that Turkish men continue smoking *nargile* in coffee houses. Moreover, feeling a special sense of relationship is another ethnic experience. Turkish people call their Turkish neighbours or relatives as their *hemşerhis* in order to refer to their national unity in the United States.

As Richard D. Alba also discusses, feeling special interest in the career of a public figure or celebrity and getting special help in business or profession from someone with the same ethnic background is what different European groups and the Turks experience in the United States (Alba, 1990: 79). Most common experiences were fairly customary ones, such as eating ethnic foods or attending ethnic festivals. Moreover, food or language can provide the basis for celebrating and renewing the solidarity of common

ethnic background.⁴ Attendance at the ethnic festivals is a reminder of group culture and an occasion for its celebration. For example, there are some picnics such as Annual New England and Annual Turkish picnics in different places.⁵ There are also festivals usually centred on foods with an explicitly multiethnic character. In fact, the Europeans and the Turks portray their ethnocentrism through being distinct from the other groups in the United States. Here it is thought that one's group is the centre of everything and all other groups are evaluated and rated with reference to their superiority in the States.

America is a nation of nations that signify plurality and multiculturalism. The members of most ethnic groups have a sense of group identity. Such a case also exists amongst the Turks in America. The members of an ethnic group may reside in special areas and attempt to exclude the members of other ethnic groups. Especially, the earlier immigrant Turks nearly gathered altogether in Walnut Street when they immigrated. They continued their linguistic, religious and ethical differences there.

Some Turks in the United States also teach their children how to be a Turkish patriot as well as how to keep their national values alive. Teaching children about their ethnic background is widespread among Turkish-Americans by supporting them to get married from the same culture and religion. Turks in the States assess their religious values more valuable than they do in Turkey. For example, the following commentary from a Turkish immigrant mother describes the experience of her children in one of the schools in the East Coast area:

My children were very Muslim in public schools, they always talked about it. And they were proud to be Muslims. . . We live in an area which is predominantly Jewish, and my children were probably the only Muslim children in school at that time. But they had programs on Islam in school and they made plays about it. Just to introduce Islam to this society, and also to make my children feel good. . . I also was invited by their teachers and went to their schools and gave lectures, and the teachers always called and asked if I had any slides on the Middle East that I could show and talk about. They asked me all kinds of questions. I think the school benefited from it and my kids more than anyone . . . and if there was a (Muslim) holiday and they wanted to take the day off, no problem. My children are very proud of being

⁴ There is a large search source on Turkish immigrants in the United States. 5000 archive sources on Turks that exist in the Chicago University should be examined.

⁵ When online sources on assemblies of Turkish and European-Americans are analyzed it has been observed that these groups basically unite under different organizations such as Turkish Cultural Center of New York City, American Turkish Friendship Council, Assembly of Turkish American Associations, and Turkish American Cultural Alliance.

Muslims, they never hide it. If they want to pray, they will get up and pray; there is nothing holding them back. (Haddad, 1987: 82-83)

Here, it is indicated that most of the Turks and—also the Europeans—did not totally become Americanized, but formed different ingredients of “the salad bowl.” As a conclusion, an ethnic group is a social segment of a society identified primarily on cultural grounds by such behaviours as language, religion, nutrition habits, folk practices, dressing, gestures or manners. Both the Europeans and the Turks have been effective in these values, behaviours, and activities (Zanden, 1983: 36). These qualities of different nations signify the existence of cultural plurality in America, therefore, it can hardly be stated that there is Americanization among the Europeans and Turks, because they mostly preserve their own ethnic values.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the continuation of their socio-cultural heritage in the United States, it is possible to call most Europeans in the United States as European-Americans just because of the choice of living there, not because of being assimilated by the other ethnic groups. It is the same with most of the Turkish groups: they are called Turkish-Americans not because of being under the influence of assimilation, but because of having settled in the United States. Finally, some ethnic groups’ consistency in the refusal of assimilation in the United States indicates how they are strict on uncompromising their traditional, cultural, sociologic, and religious values. Their consistency in the refusal of assimilation also refers to how they preserve their national identity as well as how they carry their unique social and cultural heritage in their new residence. Sharing unique cultural traits with the neighbours in their new environment becomes inevitable as these ethnic groups intend to continue their socio-cultural background.

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