CONSTRUCTION OF 'OTHERS' IN RELATION TO TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCES: THE CASE OF STAYERS AND RETURNEES IN THE ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY LIVING IN TURKEY

ULUS ÖTESİ DENEYİMLERLE İLGİLİ OLARAK 'BAŞKALARININ' İNŞASI: TÜRKİYE'DE YAŞAYAN ASUR TOPLUMUNDA KALANLAR ve GERİ DÖNENLER ÖRNEĞİ

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ABSTRACT: As a result of international developments, many communities had to "migrate" from their own country and tried to protect their existence by living their language and culture and transferring them to the next generations. However, some members of the immigrant communities returned to the land where they were born and migrated years later and tried to maintain this existence. Faced with immigration and Christian communities living in Turkey "Assyrians /Syriac" are also their native lands and those of their ancestors emigrated to European countries. The Assyrians were affected by both cultural changes with the migration phenomenon and the differences with their fellow countrymen who continued their lives by not migrating from the lands they lived in, along with the cultural units and changes they had acquired in the country they went to. In addition, the fact that this community was forced into the migration phenomenon by the Kurds living in the region and that they had to live together on their return was also discussed. With the return of the Assyrians, how the historical ties and cultures are similar among their citizens in the place they came from and what they have contributed to common life, the reflection of the past difficulties with the other ethnic element Kurds in the region, and the fact that they were examined in the light of the results obtained from one-on-one interviews in the field are the essence of this article.

Key Words: Others, Transnational Experiences, Returnees in the Assyrıan Communıty.

ÖZ: Uluslararası gelişmelerin bir sonucu olarak, birçok topluluk kendi ülkelerinden "göç etmek" zorunda kaldı ve dil ve kültürlerini yaşayarak ve gelecek nesillere aktararak varlıklarını korumaya çalıştılar. Bununla birlikte, göçmen topluluklarının bazı üyeleri yıllar sonra doğdukları ve göç ettikleri ülkeye döndüler ve bu varlığı sürdürmeye çalıştılar. Türkiye'de yaşayan göçmenler ve Hıristiyan topluluklarla karşı karşıya kalan "Asurlular/Süryaniler" de kendi doğdukları ve ata toprakları olan Avrupa ülkelerine göç ettiler. Asurlular, gittikleri ülkede edindikleri kültürel birimler ve değişiklikler ile birlikte hem göç olgusundaki kültürel değişimlerden hem de yaşadıkları topraklardan göç etmeyerek yaşamlarını sürdüren diğer vatandaşlarıyla olan değişikliklerden etkilenmişlerdir. Ayrıca, bu toplumun bölgede yaşayan Kürtler tarafından göç olgusuna zorlanması ve geri dönüşlerinde birlikte yaşamak zorunda kalmaları da tartışıldı. Asurluların geri dönüşüyle, tarihi bağlar ve kültürlerin vatandaşları arasından geldikleri yerde nasıl benzer oldukları ve ortak yaşama

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katkıları, geçmişteki zorlukların bölgedeki diğer etnik unsur Kürtlerle yansıması ve bu alandaki birebir görüşmelerden elde edilen sonuçlar ışığında incelenmiş olmaları bu makalenin özüdür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diğerleri, Ulusötesi Deneyimler, Asur Topluluğunda geri dönenler.

1.   INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the effects of transnational existence and experiences on the construction and perception of "Others" in social relations, and the way this perception might be differentiated from that of those staying in the area and not having migration experiences.   The basis of the article is a research on a small old Christian community living in south eastern Turkey, namely Assyrians. The data was gathered for a postgraduate study during 2009 and 2011 in the Mardin region. A mixed methodology was applied. The quantitative research data was supported by in-depth interviews and some focus group discussions. Unfortunately, the respondents did not give permission for the interviews and discussions to be recorded.

The article argues that the migration experiences affect the transnational experiences of the community members and their social relations with "Others". The article attempts to contribute to transnational literature by analysing the differences between returnees and stayers existence in transnational space in terms of social relations with "Others", and perceptions of transnational networks.

The first part is an analysis of theoretical discussions on transnational experiences in relation to return migration. Then, the article focuses on the Assyrian Transnational Space together with a historical background of the community. This is followed by an introduction to the research on which the article is based. Finally, the Assyrian community members discussed in relation to the "Others".

2. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION – THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STAYERS AND RETURNEES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS

In contemporary migration studies, theories of transnationalism have been used in order to explain the social, political and economic existences and engagements of various immigrant communities across several national boundaries (Portes et.al 1999, Faist 2000, Bradatan et.al 2010). The limits of these theories, such as the restriction of the movements for some groups, have also been mentioned in the context of citizenship (Kivisto 2001).

The transnational existence of immigrant communities has been discussed from various perspectives. Some concentrate on the influence of remittances on individual families in sending countries such as rural Bangladesh (Ahmed 2012). Others focus on the relationship between immigrant communities' political organisations and the sending nation state's political positions (Avcı 2005) or the effects of immigrants' remittances on sending countries' economies (Mügge 2012).

Turkish migrants have also been analysed using transnationalism theory. For instance, Avcı (2005) analyses Turkish immigrants' religious organisations in the Netherlands and their connections with Turkey. Enneli (2010) discusses transnational space in relation to second generation Turkish people in Britain. Senay (2010) points out the role of the Turkish consulate in keeping Turkish immigrants together in Australia (Senay 2010). Adaman and Ayhan (2012:3) mention the importance to Turkey of transnational social networks belonged to Assyrians.

In recent years, return migration has been mentioned more often in the context of transnational experiences of migrant communities (Perez-Jaramillo 2009; Phongsiri and Thongyou 2012, Ralph 2012, Yan et.al. 2012, Vanhonacker et.al. 2005). As Bhatt and Roberts (2012:165) mention, international migration today includes on-going movements between multiple social and geographic spaces. King and Christou (2011) emphasise the importance of return migration in contemporary migration studies and introduce various forms of return, ranging from short visits to longer term relocations involving many actors such as children and second generation adults. They also rightly question the influence of return on social and economic changes happening in the returning places.

In this sense, Ralph (2012:446-49) argues that returning migrants is a fascinating subgroup to study in the context of belonging to the places they inhabit – as both native and newcomer, their belonging is not fixed. On the contrary, it is a process in the places where returnees live, work and settle. Indeed, the meaning of returning to the old country might vary such as returning to the "old" home country, or a diaspora of the "new" home country to which they are still politically and socially connected (Yan et.al. 2012:6).

Existing studies on returning migration share several characteristics. First of all, they usually concentrate on skilled professionals, like Americans returning to Ireland, Italy, India or China (Perez-Jaramillo 2009). In the Chinese case, as highly skilled professionals the returnees bring their expertise and their money with them and this process is encouraged by the Chinese government (Perez-Jaramillo 2009). Professional returnees are also the case in India, and as their lifestyle in the country is somehow unattainable by other Indians, this makes them an executive community in the country (Perez-Jaramillo 2009).

Secondly, studies might discuss the condition of returnees in the context of citizenship rights. In relation to the Thai Diaspora returning home from Myanmar, it could be the case that their lack of political rights and powers such as citizenship rights make their livelihood risky in Thai society and in order to protect their livelihood, they engaged in political struggle for recognition as citizens (Phongsiri and Thongyou 2012).

In discussions of return migration, studies usually capture the places where returnees settled as socially homogeneous entities. For instance, Perez-Jaramillo

(2009) indicates that returning Afghans create some resentment among the local Afghans and some suspicions about their motives in leaving their luxurious standards and coming back to Afghanistan. The returnees then face some difficulties in adapting to their new life in Afghanistan. Yan et.al. (2012) found out that the young returnees from Canada to Hong Kong prefer to socialise with other returnees or as a second choice other English speaking people, rather than Chinese people in Hong Kong. They also experience cultural shock because of the different work and political ethic in Hong Kong. In a study about local and returnee entrepreneurs in China, it was argued that both groups need social capital provided by personal association with local Communist party officials. In such a case, the locals seem to have advantages compared to the returnees (Vanhonacker et.al. 2005).

Existing studies on Assyrian returnees also have some of these short comings. The Assyrians' transnational space has been relatively under-researched, and the socio-economic characteristics of the returnees have not been mentioned very often. The studies on the community usually concentrate on political identities and how the transnational migrants and networks are channel to gain positive ground in relation to citizenship and minority rights in Turkey under the influence of European Union accession (Arıkan 2011).

Prior to return, Assyrians already have some intense relations with other ethnic groups in the transnational space. Biner (2011:373) mentions the reservations of some community members about involvement in the PKK (an ethnic-separatist terrorist organization that uses Kurdish identity) in Europe, and their efforts at dissuasion from involvement. Moreover, Tuma Çelik, a transnational returnee migrant and activist, admitted that Assyrians' past experiences with their neighbours, Kurds in particular and Muslims in general, might not be positive for the community (Analiz Türkiye 2013). Similarly, Samur (2009:338) mentioned anxieties and suspicious attitudes among some Assyrians regarding other groups in society.

However, the present studies, the Syrian community "as a minority group in Turkey from time to time to assist the activities of PKK Terrorist Organization" claims that the tackles. This situation constitutes the main problem of the Syriacs. In this respect, it would be interesting to analyse the extent to which return migration has an effect on existing social relations and how these relations are fed by historical memories, and most importantly, what the differences are between returnees and stayers in social settings. By doing this, the existing study might shed more light on the Assyrian transnational community, beyond the context of positioning their presence ın Turkey.

3. ASSYRIANS – AN OLD CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY EXISTING ACROSS THE TRANSNATIONAL BOUNDARIES

According to Bohác (2010), Assyrians constitute an ethnically, linguistically and religiously distinct minority group living in Middle Eastern countries, of whom 20.000 are settled in southeast Turkey and Istanbul. Arıkan (2011) adds that approximately 2.000 to 3.000 Assyrians live in Mardin in southeastern Turkey. There is also a transnational Assyrian community, living in countries that include the United States, Sweden, Jordan, Germany, Australia, Canada, Russia and Armenia (Bohac 2010).

The migration experience is a very important dynamic in shaping the community's existence. There are various economic, political and social reasons for their migration (Çetin, 2007: 95). Among the various ethnic groups in Mardin, the Assyrians are the group which have highest levels of migration. In the 1860s, some Assyrians migrated to Syria as a result of natural disasters.

During the First World War, nationalist and seperatist movements in Anatolia and Mesopotamia had a deep impact on the Assyrian community (Bilge 1991:56). It could be argued that the main population reduction is among the Assyrian community in the region rather than in the Muslim (Özmen,2006: 88,89). Indeed, todays' Qamishli (Beth Zalin) was totally destroyed in 1925 by Kurdish people in Syria and then reconstructed by Assyrians coming from the Mardin region. In 1925, there were also some groups migrated to Hasakeh from Mardin, and to Aleppo from Urfa.

During the 20th century, a big migration wave caused a rapid reduction of the Assyrian population in Mesopotamia to near extinction. In the 1960s, Assyrians began migrating to other countries, especially European ones. As a result of a bilateral labour treaty between Germany and Turkey, Assyrians migrated to Germany as guest workers at the beginning of the 1960s, along with many Turkish workers. Then, after 1973, they went to Europe as asylum seekers. Today, Assyrians are mainly settled in Baden-Württemberg, Hessen, Köln, Hamburg and Berlin. They also went to the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium Switzerland and Australia (Brock and Taylor, 2006: 65-120).

In addition, the first migration wave to the U.S. and other transatlantic countries started in the 19th century. All Christian settlements in Hakkari, Siverek and Cizre became totally empty. In the U.S., Assyrians settled in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Florida, Detroit, Los Angeles and Rhode Island, and in Montreal and Sherbrook in Canada. The most recent migration wave from Mesopotamia was the result of the first Gulf War and internal terrorist activity within Turkey's borders in the 1990s (Taşğın, 2005: 75).

Three quarters of the Assyrian population had already migrated from Mardin to the West between 1975 and 1995. In 1985, there were 15,770 Assyrians in Mardin

and the figure declined to 1,580 in 2001 (Taşğın, 2005: 77). As a natural result of this shrinkage, there are only three metropolitan bishops left in Turkey. In previous times, there was a patriarchate, Episcopacy, three ministries of the patriarchate and eight Metropolitan Bishops (Seyfeli, 2005: 57-68). Nowadays, monasteries not only function as religious centres, they also offer community services such as language courses or other educational practices. For instance, the Assyrian community in Istanbul tried to solve their internal conflicts informally by referring to well-known community leaders before 1959. After that time, the community applied to official authorities to construct an official foundation to serve the community more effectively, and in 1959 they established the Foundation of the Assyrian Orthodox Virgin Mary Church, recognised officially by the General Directorate of Foundations (İris, 2002:161-162). Nowadays, the monasteries have their own foundations, and possess some agricultural lands including vineyards. Donations from monastery visitors, especially members of the transnational community living in other countries, are another important source of income (Özmen, 2006: 188).

Moreover, the church establishment is important only for Assyrians living in Turkey; it functions as a cohesive power for Assyrians around the world. The church serves in teaching the Assyrian and Aramaic languages to the next generation, and also in maintaining the cultural characteristics, rituals and customs of the community (Rabo, 2005:2-3).

While the migration experience creates a Assyrian transnational community, the community members have always had conflicting ideas and interests about their historical heritage and their relations with other transnational groups from Turkey, such as Kurds. In a study on Assyrians living in Sweden, Gaunt (2009) discussed rivalries between different clans, especially concerning the true naming of the community, which is Assyrian, Assyrian or Chaldean, historical heritage based on the original brought from the Middle East by of the Assyrian community.

Biner (2011) focused on the relationship of transnational Assyrians with another transnational group, namely the pro-Kurdish political movement, and how some young Assyrians became involved in PKK Terrorist Organization, which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and its Western allies. According to Biner (2011:367), these young Assyrians were the latest participants to transnational communities in Turkey and in the 1990s, they had migrated from villages and towns in southeastern of Turkey. In those years, the Turkish State declared a state of emergency due to the actions of the PKK Terrorist Organization and some Syriac youth who joined the terrorist organization were also negatively affected by these terrorist acts.Biner (2011:372) identified their position as a break from the historically submissive position of Assyrians with respect to the State, although the so-called Kurdish Parliament in exile's invitation to Assyrian activists caused heated debate within the Assyrian community, where cynicism and suspicion of Kurds were

expressed and suspicion grew deeper (Biner 2011:373). In the process, it seems that PKK Terrorist Organization claimed that they had been used by the Ottoman Empire to victimise Christian minorities. The Mesopotamia Freedom Party (Gabo d'Hirudoid'Beth Nahrin) was established in 1996 with a claim of being representative of all Assyrians, regardless of sectarian or class differences. The party seeks sovereignty over the area called Beth Nahrin, which encompasses part of Iraq, south eastern Turkey, western Iran and eastern Syria, and declared solidarity with the PKK (Biner 2011:373-74).

This cooperation might not be as widely accepted by Assyrians as it has been represented and assumed. However, according to Tuma Çelik, the current relationship is both productive and effective for the community's rights for recognition at the national level. In this respect, he especially mentions the role of the Kurdish insurgency in making minorities more visible despite the violence, destruction and terror it has caused in the region. He gives the example of the first Assyrian parliamentary member elected from the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), supporting PKK Terrorist Organization. On the other hand, he emphasises that this member was elected by the majority of the Kurdish electorate, rather than any sensitivities of the Assyrian communities (Analiz Türkiye 2013).

In the 2000s, the community has been experiencing a return migration wave, though on a small and usually individual basis (Arıkan 2011:87). In 2002, fifteen to twenty families migrated from Europe to Midyat (Arıkan 2011:87). The idea behind the intention of returning is summarised very well by Rabo (2005:11):

"Nobody can guarantee the future of Assyrian in Diaspora. Their chances of survival are much higher on their own soil for 6000 years. That's why they need to be officially recognised by the State as a Christian minority with certain religious, linguistic and cultural rights and they need more respect for their identity as Assyrian. In order to fight against discrimination, the Assyrian Church should also be recognised officially by the State."

It seems that the transnational Assyrian community has the capacity and an important world presence to announce their above approaches and claims to the Turkish State through their churches. The expression of higher chance of survival on their own land is an important identification. Because the assimilation of a few Christians in numerical order in the multitude of christians is undoubtedly inevitable. If the Syriacs are sure of their sincerity for a permanent solution in the region, all demands can be met without conflict.There is no doubt that the efforts to add other dimensions and influence in the direction of their own discourse are evident in the formation or transmission of these claims.

But the Turkish State issued a circular on June 12, 2001 which wasted the arguments of some groups and theoreticians in the Assyrian diaspora in a way that is not expected by those who were in preparation of some other fiction on the return

of the Assyrians. In the Circular No: 2001/33 which was published by the Prime Minister of the period Bülent Ecevit, is said : it is claimed that our Assyrian citizens who are abroad for various reasons, including PKK Terrorist Organization terror have encountered some problems in returning to their villages. It was considered that these claims can be brought in front of Turkey such as a new human rights violation by international community. The necessary work will be carried out by the Ministry of the Interior to allow our Assyrian citizens and the ones settled in the European countries to return to their villages on request (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Circular 2001/33).

Moreover, over 2 billion U.S. dollars in non-Muslim communities during the AK party period were returned to the fondations and this process continues. 1600 years old Mor Gabriel Church was returned to Assyrian community during the Prime Ministery of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Twelve of 30 parcels of Mor Gabriel Church in the disputed property were returned and the process continues for rest of the 18 parcels.

4. METHODOLOGY AND THE SAMPLE

This study is a part of the research conducted for a postgraduate study between 2009 and 2011. During the research, the data was gathered to shed light on various issues which are important for the Assyrians, from their social lives, cultural norms, and religious practices to their political attitudes. This paper concentrates on their attitudes and relations with other people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds living in the same area (e.g. Kurds, Arabs and Turks). In order to analyse these attitudes, respondents were asked about their relationship with their neighbours of different faiths and ethnicities, their trade preferences and their thought on other members of the transnational community living outside the homeland.

The research involved four stages, and data was gathered using several research methods. In the first stage, religious leaders of the community were interviewed in order to get first-hand information about the community. Then, leading figures in the community such as businessman, mukhtar, and old people were interviewed in order to get more in-depth information about the community's history and social life. Using the detailed information about the community gathered during these stages, an eight-page questionnaire was prepared. After a pilot study, a revised form of the questionnaire was applied to 474 people aged eighteen years and over (184 women and 290 men). The data was analysed using the SPSS programme. In the final stage, we discussed our results with 30 respondents (20 men and 10 women) and conducted three focus group discussions with 12 people (one with four returnee males, one with four staying males, and one with four women both stayers and returnees). None of the interviews or focus group discussions could be recorded, since respondents did not wish them to be, but during these stages we took extensive

notes, and citations from interviews with the community members are contained in the article where appropriate, names have been changed.

The research was conducted in a mountainous region called Tur Abdin in southeast Turkey, surrounded by Mardin to the west, Cizre to the east, Hasankeyf to the north and Nusaybin to the south (Göyünç 1991:1). The area was chosen for several reasons. First of all, the area is the oldest Assyrian settlement, and its history dates back to the Roman Empire (Keser, 2002: 10-12; Aydın et. al. 2000:5-6; Özmen, 2006:154). The name Tur Abdin appears during the reign of Emperor Justinian in the fourth century, when in Assyrian language it meant 'mountains of the slaves'. A monastery existed there, and in reference to this monastery, Tur Abdin has also been translated as the 'mountains of God's servants' (Akyüz, 1998: 26). In this respect, the Assyrian community see the area as original and sacred. Secondly, the area historically is composed of various other ethnic and religious communities as well, including Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Arabs and Turks (Özmen, 2006: 85). Finally, the returnee communities settling there is adding an extra dynamic to community relations.

At the time of the research, there were around 2,000 Assyrians in the area, with the densest population in Midyat and its surrounding villages. The total number of returnees is around 91 households. In our sample, 21 respondents from these 91 households were included. Twelve of them had returned within the previous five years and the remainder had been there for more than six years. Considering the total number of the returnees, it may be said that twenty-one survey respondents is quite representative. However, due to the small number, we did not include a gender dimension in our analysis, but it must be said that in most of the issues raised in this paper, there is no obvious difference between female and male.

Construction of Assyrian Social Identity in relation to Others:

The transnational connection which exists for the Assyrian community in Mardin and it's surrounding area serves two main functions. One is its ability to mobilise members in order to gain some political ground for Assyrians. For instance, during the 2011 general election campaign, one Assyrian declared his intention to be elected to parliament in the Turkish Assembly through the ruling party. He claimed that the Assyrian community worldwide was in support of him, yet in a short while, Assyrian non-governmental organisations in various countries ranging from Sweden to Germany and Austria declared their disapproval of his candidacy (Sonkale 2011). This incident serves to show the political existence and power of the transnational movement among Assyrians.

The second function of the transnational network is to assist community members in their social lives and financial problems. Table 1 indicates that both stayers and returnees have similar connections with, and expectations from, members of the transnational Assyrian community outside the country. As may be

seen, in both groups about two out of ten people have contact with members living around the world. In other words, there is no differentiation between stayers' and returnees' expectations from the transnational community. During the interviews, we realised that when the respondents spoke of their transnational relations, they usually meant relatives around the world and they usually asked them for assistance when needed. For instance, one 40 year old villager, a primary school graduate, married for 17 years with two children, shared with us his experiences. He is a stayer. "For villagers like us, it is not unusual to have some financial difficulties from time to time. It is true for me as well. About two or three years ago, because of the drought we could not get enough money to survive the rest of the year. That year, one of my relative sent me enough money to survive."

Transnational assistance is especially important for private social relations such as marriage, as in the case of one 26 years old girl's marriage to a man in Belgium. They were introduced to each other by the elders of the community during their reciprocal visits. It seems that the community especially leans on its network in order to arrange the marriages for the younger generation.

Table 1: Have the Transnational Community Members Enough Interests on the Assyrians in the Area?

| | | TRANSNATIONAL | | Total |
		STAYERS	RETURNEES	
Transnational Community	No Idea/No Answer/No Contribution to Us	82	4	86
		18%	19%	18%
	Yes Continuously	219	7	226
		48%	33%	48%
	When we ask for assistance	152	10	162
		34%	48%	34%
	Total	453	21	474
		100%	100%	100%

In other words, they share similar feelings about their fellow members around the world and a similar relationship with them. On the other hand, there is also a difference between the stayers and returnees in their relations with the transnational community. Although the transnational members of the community in diaspora offer private assistances to both stayers and returnees, the latter might have some political expectations from his/her network in the name of recognition of identity. For instance, one 46 years old married returnee man explained the

importance of the transnational organisation in gaining cultural recognition for Assyrians:

"The aim of the community organisations outside Turkey is to keep our community together and keep our consciousness alive. That's why their aim is sacred to me. These activities are somehow new for Assyrians living in Turkey. They do not bother to engage in these sorts of activity as they should. Some of them do not know the importance of such organisations and some of them are scared."

Stayers also place high regard on their identity, cultural rights, though in contrast to returnees, they display a tendency to solve these problems without leaning on transnational community members. Stayers also have a tendency to address their demands directly to the official authority or express their problems within the boundaries of the citizenship concept in Turkey. As one of the stayers puts it:

"I am a Turkish Christian living in Midyat. I am a Christian and I am a man of this land. I prefer to solve my problem in this land. I do not believe that I could identify myself in other places such as Europe. The only thing I need as a Turkish citizen here is public order. Public order might protect my rights as a citizen. As a man of this country, I must have a right to speak about its present and future without there being any doubt about my Turkish identity."

The differences between the stayers and returnees are not only due to their expectations and their relations with fellow members in the transnational community. The two are also differentiated in their preferences of social contacts with outside groups living in the Mardin and around, namely Kurds and Arabs. It could be the case that the multi ethnic structure of the area creates micro tensions.

Although all community members have some kind of relationship with their neighbours from other faiths, villages usually consist of one group, either Assyrians or Kurds. However, in the city, they live in mixed neighbourhoods. At least, most of them know their neighbours by name, or exchange greetings when they see each other. They do not seem to have regular home visits or socialise together during wedding or funeral ceremonies etc. For instance, one 39 years old housewife living in an apartment block talked about her neighbour's making noise upstairs regularly. She admitted that she had put up with this problem for years, and had no confidence to say anything as she knows they are not Assyrians.

Indeed, they usually have contact with 'Others', though the stayers might have more reservations than the returnees about relationship with their neighbours from the other faiths or ethnic groups. As one returnees reveals when speaking of his support for the Kurdish cause:

"We share the same geography with other groups. We also have common cultural customs......... That's why we make an effort to support the Others' struggle. For instance, I support the resolution of Kurdish problem."

On the other hand, Stayers might have a different opinion on the subject of support of others' political actions. In this context, one of the young men who specifically mentioned his lack of willingness to migrate shared with us his reservations about giving unconditional support to the PKK Terrorist Organization or its extension organisations:

"Some of The young people and some of the Returnees have sympathies with PKK Terrorist Organization. But I still have some doubts. I am not sure about our future as a community in this movement. Their main mistake is that they feel themselves as the representatives of the Kurds and they say they are the majority in the area, they behave arrogantly and destructively. We have to see the truth. They wanted to make us subject to their rules. Anyway, this is how I feel. In the end, the important thing is being a human."

Table 2: How do you judge your relationship with the people outside your Assyrian community?

		TRANSNATIONAL		
		STAYERS	RETURNEES	Total
Relationship with Others	Good	188	8	196
		42%	38%	41%
	Normal	182	6	188
		40%	29%	40%
	Weak/Non Existed	83	7	90
		18%	33%	19%
Total		453	21	474
		100%	100%	100%

In fact, as seen in Table 2, when asked about the nature of their relationship with 'Others', a smaller number of stayers compared to returnees describe their relationship as either non-existent or weak (18 % and 33 % respectively). In other words, stayers might not bother about the nature of the relationship with others as much as returnees do. However, even a higher number of stayers (four out of 10) describe their relationship with "Others" as normal, compared to only 29% of returnees.

Moreover, it seems a fact that attitudes towards "Others" also show differentiation between stayers and returnees. Table 3 indicates that stayers have more reservations than returnees when it comes to choosing friends and neighbours. Four out of ten stayers prefer other Assyrians as friends, compared to two out of ten

returnees. Again, this could be a result of stayers' extensive experiences with "Others". As can be observed more clearly from the words of one female stayer:

"Our family did not want to reveal our religious identity. My mother warned us when we went to school about not commenting on religious issues. When they insist on knowing our religion, my family prefers being Atheist than being Christian. The most hurtful memories of my life were the religious holidays. We participate in neither Muslim nor Christian ones."

Table 3: Do you care to choose your friends and Neighbours especially from the Assyrian community?

		TRANSNATIONAL		
		STAYERS	RETURNEES	Total
Friends and Neighbours Preference	Yes	176	4	180
		39%	19%	38%
	No	277	17	294
		61%	81%	62%
Total		453	21	474
		100%	100%	100%

The differences between stayers and returnees' attitudes towards 'Others' are even more observable in the case of their preferences for a trade partner. The main economic activities in the area range from jewellery making to farming and animal husbandry, and other trade activities including shops such as estate agents, durable goods' services etc. In this respect, we questioned their preferences for Assyrians as trading partners on the basis of trust. As seen in Table 4, only 24% of returnees prefer Assyrians as trade partners, compared to 66% of stayers. These attitudes might be result of their experiences living with other groups.

Even those selling goods sometimes indicate their reservations about selling their products to "Others". One Assyrian shop owner (due to sensitivity, we cannot give any further information about the nature of his trade) commented that:

"Sometimes, the other people feel free not to pay, because, even if they don't, I have no enforcement against the informal network of their large tribes. They usually sort things out through these informal networks. In the end, we as a community are smaller than their communities."

Another example is from a villager. He explained his experiences with the "Others":

"They (the Others) still believe that we have buried treasures under our homes or our churches. But, the soil treats all communities equally. The difference is that we take care of our living space."

Indeed, some of the stayers found the returnees' open relations with the Others very naïve. An old man from a village said:

"There is a difference beyond comparison between our social life in Mardin and the social life in the West. In these lands, individuals are tied to each other in society through romantic connections. The West is individualistic and materialistic to the utmost and is limited to a space where life's rules aren't flexible. We (Assyrians) and other migrants like us open our doors to each other due to the experiences we've had in this life with rules and in a foreign culture, meaning we open our doors to people who are part of the same cultural sphere."

Table 4: Do you feel yourself much more secure when you are doing your trade with Assyrian people?

| | | TRANSNATIONAL | | |
		STAYERS	RETURNEES	Total
Trade Preference	Yes	297	5	302
		66%	24%	64%
	No İdea/No	156	16	172
		34%	76%	36%
	Total	453	21	474
		100%	100%	100%

The differences between stayers and returnees in their relationship with others show that their alliances with other groups, especially with terrorist groups or their extensions for some political gain, might not be as welcome by the whole members of the Assyrian community as is assumed in the existing literature. The returnees might have a tendency to cooperate with the PKK Terrorist Organization or with its extensions in the same direction as mentioned in existing research, while stayers might prefer to keep some distance between themselves and other groups' political intentions or being totally opposite.

5. CONCLUSION

In the case of the Assyrian community, this article has tried to discuss transnational experiences from a different perspective, and thus challenge the existing literature of return migration on several points. First of all, this studies must consider more the situation of those returning to a multi-ethnic and religious setting. Secondly, the studies should take into account the differences between the returnees and the stayers in the community where the returnees settle. Thirdly, the relationship

and cooperation of various transnational communities originating from the same space might determine both the relationship of a community with a state and with other groups living in the same area. And finally, transnational existence must not be considered only within the narrow boundaries of political rights, but also with all its social implications.

This article discussed the role of transnational experiences in the social relationship of returnees and stayers with other communities in the sending society. The Assyrian community, with its transnational character, offers a rich source of material in any investigation of the various dimensions of migration practices. This article had a chance to discuss the returnees' position in relation to "Others" in the host society, and how this position might differ from that of the stayers.

This study shows that when compared to returnees, stayers seem to have more reservations in their social contacts with other ethnic and religious groups. It is also the case that the perceptions and expectations from the transnational network vary between stayers and returnees.

The community members have constructed their identities with reference to their social and political experiences where they lived. In this sense, returnees seem to have fewer reservations in their social relations with other communities, while the stayers, with different experiences and memories in relations with others, are more wary of their neighbours' attitudes and intentions towards the Assyrian community. This could be observed when they are questioned about their more personal relationships with others, such as in home visits or trading.

Another difference between stayers and returnees is their relationship with the transnational community members living abroad. The stayers have some personal expectations from transnational members, such as financial aid, but returnees might seek a transnational alliance in accordance to their demands and most interestingly, this alliance does not only include the Assyrian transnational community, but also other transnational communities.

The most obvious implication of this variation between stayers and returnees is in their positioning of themselves vis a vis the Turkish state. The returnees might be more willing to cooperate with other groups, especially Kurds, while stayers might have a tendency to keep their distance from the Kurdish political movement and tried to reach the state directly through its officials.

In short, return migrants might add an extra flavour to social relations in the host society. Indeed, being in the transnational space may affect the construction of identity among community members not only politically, but also religiously and socially.

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