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Editorial

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Definitions Matter

As part of a book project on Diaspora Representation Systems (2018), I visited diaspora deputies and senators in the French Parliament. In our conversations, representatives' opinions on the diaspora showed mixed feelings toward Turkish people in Europe, particularly in France. Their definition of diaspora did not fit well when I referred to Turkish people in Europe as a diasporic community. Representatives often called them immigrants, not a diaspora. Part of the reason there was a crisis of definition was because diaspora, for the representatives, meant something more political and historical than immigrants. The latter often referred to temporariness more than permanency, even though Turkish people have been settled in Europe for over a century.

Parallel to this, I also interviewed Turkish parliamentarians, whose background had emigrant roots and that had dedicated their service to be the voice of Turkish people who live abroad. Some of those representatives were also uneasy with defining Turkish people living abroad as a diaspora because of the deep connotation of the concept directed at Jewish people and Armenians (Anaz, 2018). So for them, Turks should be conceptualized differently than those of commonly known (politicized) diasporic groups. As the reader will find in this issue and the forthcoming issues, there is actually more than one way to define diaspora. The underlining point here becomes then that definitions matter. From a French perspective, the status of diaspora differed from what migrants meant for the French policy makers, while Turkish representatives remained uncomfortable with the usage of the term diaspora, which could ultimately lead to the politicization of Turkish people in Europe.

Thus, the Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies (TJDS), as a new and dynamic meeting place for diaspora and migration studies, aims to bring theoretical and practical streams together to form a platform wherein every aspect of diaspora can be discussed and examined. Today's challenges for diasporic communities are not only conceptual and ideological, but also mundane and visceral. These challenges include day-to-day encounters of diaspora and events that are as recent as global epidemics, in the case of Covid-19, and the centuries-long geopolitical fractures, as in the case of two great wars and regional conflicts during and after the Cold War.

In other words, diaspora today face various versions of political, geographical, cultural, and economic challenges. Without marginalizing any conceptualization, alternative ways of looking at diasporic communities can find place in this journal. This, we believe, is a much needed initiative.

Debating Diaspora Beyond National Borders

As a part of the modern nation-state system, millions of people's territorial bonding has changed, as many moved from one place to another for different economic, social, political, or environmental reasons. This reality made states either a receiving or sending country, as well as both. People, who migrated from one country to another, are acknowledged as the main subject in both countries. Today, it is beyond question that all states are either a host to at least one diasporic group or a sender of one. In other words, beyond formal territorial boundaries, there are groups of transnational communities that exist and their socio-cultural, political, economic, and educational rights have become a subject of national diaspora politics and gradually increasing internationally debated policies. In this context, TJDS wishes to establish a venue through which scholars investigate states' consideration of debating diaspora internationally, beyond assimilation and nationalization policies. Whether one accepts it or not, in all states diasporic communities exist and they exist in and beyond the nation-system of the modern time. Thus again, this journal wants to further the extraterritoriality of nationhood discussions in a scholarly fashion.

Why Launch?

TJDS, in its full capacity, aims to bring these scholarly inquiries together and form a platform to discuss topics that involve diaspora and migration issues from different angles and from around the world by attracting not only scholars of the discipline, but also government experts and practitioners. By doing this, TJDS aims to connect theory with practice, national with transnational, borders with mainland, and perceptions with realities. Naturally the journal's quest is interdisciplinary, political, geographical, cultural, and historical. As Robin Cohen highlights (in this issue), diaspora existed before the state, so such inquiry into the subject needs to go beyond our modern time and place.

Related to the earlier aim, TJDS also seeks to put more emphasis on non-western diaspora approaches and conceptualizations, especially when addressing the diaspora issues of our time. We strongly believe that such advocacy is needed and fructiferous considering the relatively one-way movement of migration and the contentious nature of diaspora issues in the West. Thus, differently situated lenses may bring balanced perspectives to the topic. Of course, this is not to say that studies wrought in the West should be discarded. Contrary to this, we strongly believe that a deepened search for answers is a necessity, in order to put the world of the diaspora in a much better place and to make diasporic policies much more humanist.

Diaspora Studies in Turkey

Diaspora studies have gained noticeable interest at the international level since it was recognized as a separate topic from immigration in the last quarter of the 20th century. However, it has not gained a sufficient level of inquiry in the Turkish academic community. Unfortunately, the field of diaspora is still understood as a sub-area within the migration discipline and confined to evaluation in the context of the elements and approaches of this discipline. This may be derived from the general negative connotations in people's minds on the concept of "diaspora," which is often understood in the narrowest sense.

While diaspora studies were previously evaluated in the fields of anthropology and sociology, they have gradually gained an interdisciplinary dimension, where different disciplines, such as international relations, politics, economics, development, and security work together. Similar to the international trend, diaspora studies in Turkey were slow to establish a main current on its own in Turkish universities and other related institutions. It is a recent effort that diaspora studies have found a place in privately run think-tanks and university institutions in Turkey, but not yet at a satisfactory level. However, in international literature, diaspora studies have relatively established a respected position especially, through the works of prominent theoreticians some of whom include: (Tölölyan, 1991), (Cohen, 1997), (Vertovec, 1999), (Safran, 1991), (Sheffer, 2003), (Baumann, 2000), and (Guveli, 2015).

Parallel with the recent increase in the number of state institutions working for the Turkish diaspora, there is an upward trend in research centers in universities and foundations that focus on contributing to the diaspora. Burgeoning literature in diaspora studies in Turkey has been supported with the studies of academicians such as: (Kaya, 2014) (Akcapar & Aksel, 2017) (Durmaz, 2017) (Ulusoy, 2017), and (Zirh, 2008).

The existing trend in the field of diaspora studies in international literature can easily be observed in Turkish literature in which different diasporas are examined under the lens of history, politics, international relations, psychology, education, security, economics, and other important disciplines. In Turkish diaspora literature, there is an intense academic interest in topics such as identity and belonging, the role of the diaspora in international relations, Turkey's diaspora politics, security, and development.

Although diaspora studies are a relatively new area of study in Turkey, there has been a significant increase in the number of master's and doctoral theses, as well as other academic studies, such as articles and reports. For instance, up until 2009, only 4 doctoral dissertations were written on the field of diaspora; 17 more doctoral dissertations were added to this number in the last 10 years.¹ The total number of master theses was 49 in 2021 and it is impressive that 24 of them have been conducted in the last 2 years. The content of these studies reflects a significant variety. In theses and other academic studies, not only the Turkish diaspora but also other important diasporas such as Jewish, Circassian, Tatar, Azerbaijan, and Palestine have been studied with their different aspects and points of importance.

Today, within the framework of the theoretical approaches of the aforementioned academicians and the practical studies of national and international organizations, diaspora -in its broadest sense and most dynamic nature- can be defined as immigrant communities that exist beyond their homeland and whose economic, social, and political ties extend beyond state borders. We also acknowledge that, with the effects of globalization and the ease of communication and transportation, migration movements continue to occur and the existence of diasporas has become more evident. Thus, this situation innately necessitates the consideration of all aspects of the diaspora issue, especially the concept itself.

Finally, the Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies, by launching a specialized journal on the

¹ Council of Higher Education, National Thesis Centre, accessed on 16.02.2021 retrieved from the site <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp>

topic, will give new momentum to diaspora studies and create an academic form through which it will bring theory and practice together to discuss diasporic and migration issues. In this sense, TJDS also aspires to be a venue that produces high-standard publications and a pool for the latest developments in the field. It is our hope that this unique, topic-related journal in Turkey will be an important podium for all stakeholders in the field.

Concluding Remarks

In this inaugural issue, we have included great articles that incorporate different aspects of diaspora topics. Mehmet Özkan discusses an unconceptualized population in Turkey, Afro-Turks and their possible contribution to Turkey's foreign policies in Africa. Istvan Egresi and Voicu Bodocan examine diaspora direct investments and the motivations behind such movement of capital to the homeland in the case of the Romanian diaspora. Burcu Degirmen-Dysart writes about the evolution of the politics of the Russian diaspora and how compatriots have become an indispensable part of the Russian world since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hayati Ünlü, in his paper, examines the Gulf diaspora in India through a social movement perspective and how the Indian diaspora has been remade during the Modi administration. Mehmet Köse, on the other hand, attempts to redraw the borders of the Turkish diaspora from its formation, historical continuum, and migrant labors' perspectives.

To give this inaugural issue more eminence, we have included interviews with scholars who are well established in the field. The interviews were conducted to answer four main questions that aimed to address the conceptual borders of the diaspora, states' diaspora policies, the impacts of globalization on the diaspora, and new study areas in diaspora studies. Interviewees gave their opinion on the questions however they wished to address. Responses followed no specific format and referee procedures were not applied. Thus, some of the responses include references at the end and some do not, some are short and others are longer. However, they are evenly rich and valuable in their own right.

TJDS also gives special importance and consideration to book reviews. For the readers of TJDS, internationally recognized and in-depth analytical books are given priority. When possible, books written in languages other than English and Turkish will be examined and reviewed. The journal pays particular attention to their existence and genuine contribution to the literature on diaspora. For this reason, TJDS seeks contributors who wish to enhance this aspect from all around the world. In this inaugural issue, we publish four book reviews from the leading scholars in this field, highlighting their immense influence on diaspora studies.


Seizing this opportunity and on behalf of TJDS, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation for all of the responses and the effort given by the interviewees. I hope that this inaugural issue of TJDS will fulfill what is expected from an academic journal and become fruitful in contributing to the field in a most valuable way in its long journey. A greater effort is our part; discretion and contribution remain on international students of diaspora studies.

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