

“As the distances are getting closer, our hearts are moving farther”: the Sociological Implications of Transnational ICTs use on the Socio-Cultural Integration of Immigrants

Mücahit Aydemir¹ 

Abstract

This paper examines the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the process of socio-cultural integration of immigrants into the receiving countries. By focussing particularly on the context of Turkish immigrants in the UK, it aims to answer the questions of how the increasing level of communication and contact has influence the socio-cultural integration into the local life in the UK. Through a qualitative conduct, this research found that the participants regard ICTs as the tools for creating social bridges with the members of different groups. However, interestingly enough, a salient emphasis among the participants argues that the online contact with the social ties in the homeland trivialises the significance of pre-migration social ties, which eventually leads to the lesser degree of online contact with the people in Turkey. Additionally, it is found that the participants are strategically consuming and re-producing the cultural codes of Turkey, and articulating their senses of belongings by referring to individualised reference points. It is clear out of the data that participants utilise ICTs for making everyday life easier and the majority are eager to use the up-to-date technology of ICTs in order to maximise the benefits in their lives. Overall, this research found an increasing level of individualism and particularism in terms of sociality, identity, cultural codes and re-formation of everyday life. Considering these findings, this research discusses that the concept of integration should be revisited and elucidated since it remains inadequate in understanding these multiple life trajectories. Furthermore, since the socio-cultural implications of immigrants' ICTs use are characterised by the individuality, temporality and hybridity, further research of which focal points different contexts and social settings is encouraged.

Keywords

Socio-Cultural integration • Transnational communication • New media

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To cite this article: Mücahit, A. (2018). “As the distances are getting closer, our hearts are moving farther”:
The sociological implications of transnational icts use on the socio-cultural integration of immigrants. *Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi*, 75, 15-42. <https://dx.doi.org/10.26650/jspc.2018.75.0007>



“Mesafeler yakınlaştıkça kalplerimiz uzaklaşıyor”: Göçmenlerin Ulusaşırı Bilgi ve İletişim Teknolojileri Kullanımının Sosyo-Kültürel Entegrasyonları Üzerine Etkileri

Mücahit Aydemir¹

Öz

Bu çalışma, bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin göçmenlerin yerleştikleri ülkelere olan sosyo-kültürel entegrasyon süreci üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktadır. İngiltere’de yaşayan Türk göçmenler özelinde yoğunlaşan çalışma, göçmenlerin artarak devam eden ulus-aşırı iletişim ve irtibatlarının göç ettikleri ülkelerde yaşadıkları yerel hayata sosyo-kültürel entegrasyonu üzerinde nasıl bir etki oluşturacağı sorusunu cevaplamayı amaçlar. Niteliksel bir çalışma sonucunda katılımcıların bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerini yeni sosyal bağlar kurmanın bir aracı olarak gördükleri bulunmuştur. Ancak, ilginç bir şekilde, katılımcılar arasında bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin memleketlerindeki eski sosyal ilişkilerini önemsizleştirdiği ve bu yüzden Türkiye’deki sosyal çevreleri ile dijital münasebetin giderek azaldığı vurgusu yaygındır. Ayrıca katılımcıların stratejik bir biçimde Türk kültürel kodları ve ürünlerini tükettiği ve bunlar aracılığıyla daha bireyselleşmiş bir kimlik oluşturmak üzere referans kaynakları olarak kullandıkları görülmüştür. Katılımcılar açık bir şekilde bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerini kendi gündelik hayatlarını kolaylaştırmak için kullandıklarını belirtmiş ve birçoğunun bu ihtiyaç doğrultusunda son teknoloji araçlara sahip olma konusunda istekli oldukları gözlemlenmiştir. Temelde, bu çalışma sosyalleşme, kimlik, kültürel kodlar ve gündelik yaşamın oluşturulması gibi konularda artan derece bir ‘bireyselleşme’ ve ‘tekilleşme’ bulmuştur. Bu sonuçlar göz önüne alındığında, bu tür ‘çoklu yaşam örgülerini’ karşılamada yetersiz kaldığı için, ‘entegrasyon’ konseptinin yeniden ele alınması ve açıklığa kavuşturulması gerektiği öne sürülmüştür. Dahası, göçmenlerin Bilgi ve İletişim Teknoloji kullanımını bireysellik, geçicilik ve melezlik içerdiği için odak noktası farklı bağlamlar ve toplumsal durumlar olan yeni araştırmaların olması gerektiği belirtilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Sosyo-Kültürel entegrasyon • Ulusötesi iletişim • Yeni medya

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Atf: Mücahit, A. (2018). “As the distances are getting closer, our hearts are moving farther”: The sociological implications of transnational icts use on the socio-cultural integration of immigrants. *Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dergisi*, 75, 15-42. <https://dx.doi.org/10.26650/jspc.2018.75.0007>

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The New Turn in the Concept Migration²

The world is witnessing a silent revolution which is somehow reshaping the local and global societal relations. Underpinning this unnamed revolution, there lies the two unique characteristics of this era: For Castells this age is the ‘Information Age’(1996) of which relations are maintained through a set of networks backed by ICTs, while Castles named this era as ‘The Age of Migration’ (1993) referring to the unprecedented migration flows in the human history. At the intersection of ever-increasing massive migration flows and the mind-boggling pace of Information and Communication Technologies, millions of immigrants and refugees are moving across the globe, making use of the up-to-date information and communication technologies during a vast range of circumstances varying from emigrating, finding routes, settlement to integration and returning to homeland. Today, as Bonini notes: ‘a migrant may have no place to sleep, but cannot afford not to have a mobile phone’ (2011, p. 870). In this respect, the social context of the digital technology use by migrants urged social scientists to ask whether we have the language that we need in order to understand the social and cultural implications of this process.

Since ‘the level and continuity of contact is unprecedented in human history’ (Georgiou, 2010, p. 32) some scholars declared the necessity of novel conceptual understandings of migration: for example, Diminescu (2008) put forward the concept of *connected migrant* referring to those who manage previous social and cultural ties through instantaneous mediated contact with the homeland. Nedelcu, similarly, conceptualised the ‘*contemporary/online migrants*’ who are ‘able to master new geographies of everyday life and strategically use his or multiple belongings and identifications within a ubiquitous regime of co-presence engendered by the technological developments of the twenty-first century’ (2012,

² This paper is derived from the research project that I have undertaken during my masters’ education in the Contemporary Sociology MA program at the University of Leicester. The final report of the project has been represented by an unpublished masters’ thesis named ‘The Socio-Cultural Integration of Turkish Immigrants in the UK and the Role of Information and Communication Technologies’ which has been granted with a distinction mark in 2017. The data of this research paper consists of the combination of the data of that research and my personal observations, conversations and interviews with the participants.

p. 1340). Thus, the conventional understandings of migration were seen as inadequate in explaining the socio-cultural implications of that growing trend.

The communication of immigrants is not a novel phenomenon. The letters written by immigrants were ‘read and re-read, touched, caressed, smelled, and carried around’ have now been replaced by instant messages, video calls, check-ins and so on (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014, p. 12). However, while migration used to mean cutting almost all the ties related to social and spatial contexts of the ‘homeland’ in the past, today ‘social interaction and relations are no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial co-presence’(Georgiou, 2010, p. 22). Thanks to the use of ICTs, now, those ‘who are physically absent are, in fact, increasingly present in everyday situations, and a continuity of social ties develops in spite of geographical distance’ (Nedelcu, 2012, p. 1351). Diminescu summarises this transformation as ‘yesterday the motto was: immigrate and cut your roots; today it would be: circulate and keep in touch’ (2008, p. 568).

This constant contact with distant worlds brought about issues about the nature of socio-cultural integration, national belonging, citizenship, social relations, cultural reproduction and spatial understandings. This led to a new and significant research agenda; transnational mediated communication of migrants. The ultimate objective of this research, in this vein, is to explore how these new phenomena have an impact on the social and cultural lives in the countries of origin and settlement.

Conceptual Framework for Socio-Cultural Integration

Investigating immigrants’ socio-cultural integration might be a confusing task due primarily to the mess of integration concept in the literature. It is, therefore, necessary to elucidate this –what Ager and Strang (2004, p. 9) call– the ‘chaotic concept’, and frame what is meant by the term socio-cultural integration.

A brief reading of the history of the term ‘integration’ suggests that the term has led to emerging of different terms such as ‘assimilation, absorption, acculturation, incorporation, participation, cohesion-building, enfranchisement’ and so on (Favell, 2010, p. 2). Preliminary conceptual understandings of integration argued a one-way process which eventually lead to the ‘final stage’ at which immigrants and minority groups are fully-

absorbed into the host society (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964; Lloyd & Srole, 1945). However, the pluralism, biculturalism debates have led to the end of the hegemony of the assimilation theories, with an argument that immigrants and minority groups do not have to be absorbed into the host society instead can maintain their previous social, cultural understandings (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). The conclusion arising from the related literature is that ‘integration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon’, involving social relations (Castles, Korac, Vasta, & Vertovec, 2001), migratory and citizenship and legal status (Zetter, Griffiths, Sigona, & Hauser, 2002), the psychological well-being of immigrants (Kuhlman, 1991). In addition, gender codes (Tienda & Booth, 1991) and migration and citizenship policies of the host nation states (Threadgold & Court, 2005) are also seminal factors in migrant integrations.

As for the concept of socio-cultural integration, it has been generally conceptualised as the combination of ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ integration. Castles et al. (2001, p. 160) classifies the ‘socio-cultural integration studies’ into six categories: religion, community, language, residential segregation and acculturation and identity. However, they also argue that creating a list of determinants of socio-cultural integration can never end because socio-cultural integration is also a process in which individual factors are also playing important roles. However, the most cited factors of socio-cultural integration are *social relations* in receiving countries (Fokkema & de Haas, 2015) and *social bridges* with different ethnic and national groups (Castles et al., 2001), the *cultural knowledge* of the host countries (Ager & Strang, 2004), *language levels* of the immigrant groups (Fyvie, Ager, Curley, & Korac, 2003) and *socio-cultural identification* of immigrant groups and social and cultural commitment to the society (Kuhlman, 1991). Therefore, this research focuses on the social relations, cultural codes, language and everyday life practices and identification processes of immigrants.

Literature Review

It should first be noted that the research phenomenon constitutes a relatively new research area (Elias & Lemish, 2008; Komito & Bates, 2009). Oiarzabal and Reips describe this field as a ‘very much under-researched area’ (p. 1334). However, within the research area of ‘transnationalism’ and ‘diaspora studies’, it is possible to mention an increasing trend and attention toward the ‘connected migrants’.

This research dissects the approaches toward linkage between socio-cultural integration and ICTs use into three categories: the first view argues that the increasing contact with the origin country will ultimately facilitate the social and cultural integration of immigrants. This view is supported by some empirical findings: for instance, conducting a qualitative research on Russian immigrants living in Israel, Elias and Lemish (2008) found that participants are utilising ICTs in order first to learn local cultural codes and train/rehearse them in a relatively safe space. They argued that ICTs serve as a kind of ‘safe arena’ which can lead to a smooth and effective way of socio-cultural integration. Moreover, this safe-space argument has also been maintained by Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna (2006) who claim that online communication can be a very effective way of reducing inter-ethnic conflicts and tensions. Investigating Chinese expatriates in the USA, Zhou and Cai (2002) found that ICTs use is very significant for the ‘new’ immigrants since it has the role of serving as a roadmap for a safe socio-cultural integration as well.

Furthermore, there are studies which maintain the idea that communicating with the homeland via ICTs can also be a positive impact on socio-cultural integration because: the communication with the homeland construes a sort of ‘ontological security’ for immigrants (Georgiou, 2012); it reduces the levels of fear and anxiety (Harney, 2013) and being able to communicate with whom you wish boosts the self-confidence and individual resilience of immigrants against possible unpleasant situations (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014). From this point of view, the online contact with the homeland through ICTs can play a role of a facilitator for the socio-cultural integration of immigrants.

On the contrary, one competing view argues that increasing ICTs use by immigrants will eventually end up with social isolation and segregation. Some features of digital media culture have already been characterised by individualism and isolation (see; Bauman, 2016): Personalised content recommendation and the easiness of cutting ties with the unfamiliar people in online spaces, can create ‘filter bubbles’ in which users of digital media do only interact with similar social groups. According to Praiser (2011, p. 58), these ‘filter bubbles’ reduce ‘the mental flexibility and openness’ to different cultures. Furthermore, it is also argued that living in virtual filter bubbles and in isolated online communities will lead to a radicalisation of diasporas

by stimulating the chauvinistic types of nationalistic sentiments (Erikson, 2007). One of the main reasons for such an argument is that users' eagerness to maintain their previous social and cultural codes leads to the attempts trying to create the substitutes of previous social lives online (Kissau, 2012). The outcome of this process is the attempts of creating 'virtual homelands' in which the imaginary of the homeland is created in a digital arena (Senjković & Dukić, 2005; Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2005).

This view goes so far as to argue that these networks will be ended up with the 'irresponsible radicalisation' of diasporas (Conversi, 2012); for instance, conducting a social research on Polish immigrants in Ireland, Komito and Bates found that the participants are not eager to engage in communicating with the members of other cultures. The researchers put forward that thanks to the transnational communication, immigrants no longer feel the need for 'social and cultural integration' with the local cultures in Ireland. Thus, immigrants can probably turn into '*peripatetic workers*' who frequently moves for labour but are constantly self-segregated and isolated from the society in which they live in (2008, p. 243). Similarly, a PhD thesis investigating the ICTs use by disadvantaged women in London found that as the disadvantaged women receive help through transnational communication, they are being more isolated, marginalised and excluded from the realities of the society (Pavez-Andonageui, 2013).

However, a final approach theorise that as immigrants communicate with their homeland they can at the same time integrate into the life in their host culture. From this point of view, it would be wrong to see the integration process as a zero-sum game; integration either to the life in the receiving country or into the country of origin. The linkage between transnational communication and socio-cultural integration is different from such conceptions. Instead, this phenomenon signifies new forms of social and cultural codes, identifications, hybrid socialites, multi-contextual lives (Andersson, 2013). For example, analysing the digital space called 'Tibetboard', Brinkerhoff (2012) found that thanks to the digital communication, Tibetan immigrants are questioning the social and cultural values of Tibet. One of the most common themes he found was that the participants consider cyberspace as a 'safe haven' where the users can question and criticise social and cultural codes of their previous social and

cultural spheres. He states that even the Dalai Lama was questioned by some users, which shows that digital inter-ethnic contact does not necessarily mean that relations and discourses from homeland are strengthened. Instead what has been witnessed is a new type of hybrid and creolised form of relations (2012, p. 94). Therefore, in order to build a unique or particular identification points, immigrants can utilise the cultural codes from the country of settlement in drawing lines between them and the people in the homeland. Brouwer's work (2006) exemplifies this point clearly: analysing the contents in the Dutch-Moroccan websites, he found that Moroccan immigrants identify themselves with strong references to Moroccan cultural codes, whereas they use the Dutch language in order to exclude or distinguish themselves from the people in Morocco. Thus, rather than expecting one-way perceptions, it would be more appropriate to see the relationship between integration and ICTs use as a continuing process which can involve multiple relations with the different countries, social and cultural spheres and historical backgrounds.

Methodology

Pursuing the aim of understanding the integration processes of immigrants within the particular concept of ICTs use, this research has three major inquiries. The research questions are formed as flexible as one explorative qualitative research can ask so that all issues related to social and cultural integration can be covered by the scope of the research. Yet each of them signifies a major component of socio-cultural integration since the research questions are formed by dissecting the research phenomenon:

- What is the impact of ICTs on Turkish immigrants' pre-migration social bonds and potential new social bridges?
- How, and in what ways, do ICTs play a role in the cultural engagement of the participants?
- To what extent is the use of ICTs perceived as having influences on the sense of belonging of the participants?

Considering the tenets of qualitative research methodology, this research focuses on the 'perceptions' of participants toward the issues related to socio-cultural integration and the use of ICTs (Beuving & Vries, 2015). That is

to say, it is of paramount importance to gain an understanding of how the participants see ICTs, what kind of meaning they attribute to the notions of ‘integration’, ‘social ties’ and identities. The table below sums up the stages from the research inquiries to the ‘exploration’ of the outcomes.



Table 1
The design of the research

The qualitative conduct was the best for such an epistemological understanding because, as Kalof et.al. articulate, qualitative research engages in the ‘meanings and motivations that underlie cultural symbols, personal experiences and phenomena and a detailed understanding of the process in the social world’ (2008, p. 79). Qualitative methodology has enabled this research to explore the implications of the phenomenon and explain the trends of the participants within their embedded social contexts.

As for the method for conveying data, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and observations have been utilised. Qualitative interviewing is described as ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984, p. 102) in the forms of ‘in-depth, semi-structured or loosely-structured’ (Mason, 2002, p. 62). Mason (2002, p. 63) argues that ‘people’s knowledge, views, understandings, and interactions are meaningful properties’ for qualitative interview technique. Additionally, as a researcher, I had the chance of observing the participants’ ICTs use and witnessing the social cues of the participants such as intonations of some terms, their voices, facial expressions, eye-contacts and body languages during the interview sessions (Opdenakker, 2006).

With this regard, fifteen one-to-one qualitative interviews were undertaken in Leicestershire in the UK. For determining the sample range, this research drew on two types of sampling techniques: i) opportunistic sampling which refers to determining some pre-requisites for being a participant for the

research is used. The pre-requisites of this research were being an adult (at least 18-year-old); having emigrated from mainland Turkey to the UK and having a citizenship right or ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) from the UK. ii) Snowball sampling method which refers to recruiting participants from a ‘small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility of the criteria for a study’ (Morgan, 2008, p. 815) is used. Out of fifteen participants, fourteen of them were male and one of the participants was female. The participants had an average of 34 years, with the youngest being 25 and the oldest 55. While eight participants have dual citizenship, seven of them have ILR (Indefinite Leave to Remain) status at the time when the interviews were conducted.

It should be noted that this research claims no generalisability of findings to the whole Turkish immigrants in the UK. Considering the epistemological foundations of the qualitative research, generalising the outcomes to the research group is not – and should not be for Becker (1970) and Stake (1980)– the primary concern of a qualitative researcher. As Myers articulates that the objective of the qualitative study is ‘to discover meaning and understanding rather than to verify the truth or predict outcomes’ (2000, p. 7). Thus, it is important to underline that the findings of this research are relevant for this particular sample group, at that particular times and spaces of the research.

In addition to this, one possible limitation might be the number of female participants in the sample group. This might create a sense of ‘gender bias’ since the sample is highly dominated by male interviewees. This was primarily due to the difficulties in the access: female participants were difficult to encounter in public spaces and to conduct interviews face-to-face. As Sirkeci et al write Turkish female immigrants are generally ‘invisible both to their households and to their community, as well as the outside world’ (2016, p. 111). Moreover, my gender role could be a handicap considering the refusal of the four initial female contacts on the basis of regarding being interviewed by a man as ‘weird’ and/or something that is ‘not culturally correct’. Future research which takes gender as a variable can be of importance in terms of revealing the role of gender in the research phenomenon. However, in order to expand the sample range, this research recruited participants from different social classes, occupations, age ranges and education levels.

Interviews have been conducted by the principles of an interview protocol designed particularly for this research. At the outset of the study, this research received the ‘Ethical Approval’ from the concerned authorities by guaranteeing to obey the University of Leicester Research Code Of Conduct (2016) and the 1998 Data Protection Act. Following the data collection phase, the recordings from interviews were transferred into texts and made ready for analysis. I have made use of the qualitative analysis application Atlas.ti 7.0 in the stages of creating/building data segments, codes, and references. Thematic analysis method has been used but in order to go beyond only identifying themes and gathering ‘things’ together, this research embraced Miles & Huberman’s (1994; 2014) three-staged qualitative data analysing method: i) the whole relevant corpus of data has been drawn together ii) the data has been classified as different titles, themes and references iii) the themes and codes have been considered in relation to the questions and objectives of the research.

Findings

The first research question is about the impact of ICTs use on social bonds: it is established that there is a strong emphasis on seeing ICTs as tools for building new social ties rather than maintaining previous social bonds. Secondly, regarding the linkage between cultural engagement and ICTs use, it is established ICTs in most cases are considered as tools for accessing and sharing the Turkish cultural products and codes. Finally, this research explored a common trend which regards ICTs as a facilitator for creating new reference points for identifications and managing the situational identities. For the reasons of clarity, findings are gathered and depicted as two overarching themes: findings related to i) social integration ii) cultural integration.

Social Integration

This section includes two sub-themes: firstly it is established that ICTs are generally seen as building new social ties based in the UK rather than protecting the pre-migratory social bonds. Secondly, it is argued that the pre-migratory social relations that are pertinent to familial relations are exempted from the above trend. In addition, this part of the research established that ICTs are mostly utilised for facilitating the everyday lives.

Weakening Bonds and Weaving New Ties

It is revealed that the participants mostly consider ICTs as tools for creating new bridges based in or out of the UK instead of continuing the pre-migration social ties instead of maintaining social ties in Turkey. Thus, contrary to the popular belief, there is not a notable tendency to regard ICTs as tools for maintaining social ties based in Turkey. What is more, in some contexts ICTs are being accused of being a hindrance on the path of maintaining social bonds based in Turkey:

Before I started to use the Internet, I used to communicate with my relatives in Turkey more than now. Believe me; I would call my all distant relatives and friends by using the Telephone kiosks on the London Road. It was really expensive; nevertheless, I used to want to hear from them. I would sometimes spend my entire wage there. But now, if you ask me, I do not call them, seldom, if ever... (Interviewee 1)

The weakening of kinship ties is surprisingly common in the sample group. In addition, some participants claim that their social ties with their friends in Turkey were also interrupted after they started to use the Internet. Interviewee 2 expressed his regrets by saying that ‘*it is upsetting that I had so many friends who were closer to me more than my brothers. With the Internet use, I lost contact with nearly all of them*’. When it comes to the causes of such a deep interruption process in the social bonds, nearly all of the participants were unsure about that. The Interviewee 5 articulated the ‘blame’ of the ICTs:

Now, I do not even miss my relatives and friends who are in Turkey. You know, missing requires being unable to see someone. Before I started to use the Internet, I did not see the faces of my relatives for months even for years. But now, I see my cousins and friends on Instagram and Facebook. That is why I do not feel the necessity to call and communicate with them. I guess they feel the same... As I always say; “As distances are getting closer, our hearts are moving farther. In the past, distances used to matter a lot to us, but now they do not at all. But this time we are remote from everybody”.

However, there is a strong emphasis on making friends by using social media with the members of the host culture and the other ethnic groups. Thus, the data stresses that the participants are not liable to perceive the ICTs as

the tool for securing the relations based in Turkey rather we can see a clear tendency on seeing them as a way for creating new social bridges.

Mediated Deterritorialisation of the Notion of Family

One of the most significant outcomes of the study is about the family relations. Answers to the questions like how the participants perceive their families and how ICTs play a role in their family relations reveal an increasing communication with family members in Turkey. Most of the participants maintain that they continue their familial relations irrespective of the physical absence. As such, almost all of the participants declared that they make use of ICTs to communicate with their family members; some argued that they use ICTs just for this reason. For some contexts, the family has such a pivotal role that it is directly related to the notion of ‘homeland’:

What is memleket (homeland)? It is just my father, mother and siblings. If they did not live there, I would not have cared about the place. (Interviewee 11)

For most of the participants, the family was the red line and something they cannot ever forget, ignore and still comprises a space where they can feel safe and at ease. What is novel with this conception is that they can maintain their family roles and memories through the use of ICTs:

I have a ten-month-old baby. My parents in Turkey have not seen her yet. We couldn't go to Turkey because we thought that flying would be harmful to the baby. But, I have had video calls with my family. Even just after my wife gave birth, I had a video call with my mother and father and we decided whom my daughter looks like the most. If it wasn't for the Internet, they wouldn't have been able to see my daughter's smile for a year. (Interviewee 3)

Communication in the context of family members signifies a fertile yet equally under-estimated research area: transnational care through ICTs. For the majority of participants, communication with the family members involves care issues. The extracts below exemplify some of the questions related to care that participants asked:

Once, my son got a really high fever. It was at night; I called my mom via Whatsapp and asked what we should do. She told me to take off his clothes and splatter some water on his body. (Interviewee 6)

We couldn't find a solution to my daughter's diarrhoea. I remembered that my mom used to cook something when we had diarrhoea in my childhood. We got the recipe of 'piring lapası' (traditional Turkish rice mush) and cooked it. (Interviewee 3)

My son had small red spots on his arms. I sent the pictures of him to my sister through Whatsapp. (Interviewee 11)

The examples are of paramount analytical importance for two reasons: i) they epitomise that there is a salient social context of the use of ICTs. What is seminal in this context is the meanings ascribed to the Information and Communication Technologies. That is, ICTs are transformed into the mediums and channels by family roles can be maintained (Madianou & Miller, 2012); ii) secondly it signifies a shift for the sociology of family; in this new understanding a change occurs from the territorial understandings of family to the de-territorialised notions of family. Here, the term 'de-territorialisation', which originates in the *Anti-Oedipus* of Deleuze and Guattari³ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), refers to a process in which certain notions, cultural codes, practices and memories transcend the pre-defined territorialities by global technologies. That is to say, the meanings which are previously ascribed to (or at least related to) the territoriality are no longer meaningful (Clarke & Kessl, 2008). According to Deleuze and Guattari, there are two kinds of deterritorialisation: absolute and relative. While the former refers to a complete separation of cultural and social codes from territories in which the *socius* turns into a sort of 'body without organs' (1983, p. 170), 'relative deterritorialisation' process involves a re-territorialisation stage which means a process of creating new social worlds by using the previous social and cultural codes.

Therefore, it is understood that what the majority of the participants have been undergoing in Deleuze and Guattari's terms (1983) is the relative deterritorialisation of their understandings of family. On the one hand, family roles (parenthood, grandparenthood), relations, discourses are being continued through transnational communication, on the other hand through a kind of re-territorialisation process participants' family members can intervene into their lives in the UK. It has been witnessed that for the majority of the participants, the virtual space has the capacity to substitute a wide range of real-life family activities:

3 For a detailed analysis of ICTs and new technologies around the philosophical tenets of Gilles Deleuze and David Guattari please see (Poster & Savat, 2009).

Interviewee, 3: Sometimes I invite my family to tea.

Interviewer: How?

Interviewee, 3: First we arrange a time. Then, they make tea and I brew my own tea here and start to have a video call, so we are drinking tea together.

One of my brothers is working in Saudi Arabia, the other is working in Qatar and I am here. We have video calls at least twice a week. We see each other and ask after each other (Interviewee, 11).

As Benitez notes ICTs ‘constitute not only a way to keep in touch with their loved ones but also a mechanism and for reconfiguring hybrid family memories, history and identities’ (2012, p. 1446). However, one should be mindful when arguing that the physical distance does not matter at all in contexts. The de-territorialised familial relations bear three important characters: i) temporality ii) spatiality iii) relationality (Prelipceanu, 2008, p. 8). Namely, these processes are not fixed organisations but temporal and ephemeral moments. Additionally, the same conclusions should not be expected from all contexts since these effects are highly dependent upon spatial and relational settings of individuals.

With regard to integration into the life in the UK, immigrants interactions with their family members have been regarded as bearing some positive aspects in relation to integration and expressions of amelioration of being deterritorialised (Benítez, 2012; Mirca Madianou & Miller, 2012; Tsai, 2006). They in this sense provide ‘stronger sense of shared social field’ (Wilding, 2006, p. 38), emotional reassurance (Madianou, 2016, p. 196) and psychological support (Bacigalupe & Cámara, 2012).

Mapping Out Routes for Integration into Everyday Life

An increasing trend which sees ICTs as remarkable sources for facilitating their everyday life activities can be an important finding of the research. From weather forecast or map applications to dictionary and shopping apps, there are a vast range of areas where ICTs are employed in everyday life situations. The idea that ICTs are useful mostly in mundane situations is so entrenched that some participants stated that they use ICTs just for their everyday lives.

For instance, the Interviewee 10 defined ICTS as ‘they are *like my hands and feet, in daily life*’. However, the extract below shows the usefulness and practicality of ICTs employment in everyday life:

Last year my cousin came here. He hadn't been to Leicester before. I sent the location of my home to him on Whatsapp and he found my home in 15 minutes. This reminded me of my first years in the UK... Oh, the first week I came here, my boss taught me a route to go to the city centre. I had used the same route for 2 years. Now, the situation is way different... (Interviewee 13)

Interviewee 11 told me that If the Google Maps didn't exist, he could not have found his way to home! This is worth considering because for newly arrived immigrants finding directions can matter. But with the advent of ICTs, one can mention a sort of ‘freedom of movement’. Moreover, in some contexts map applications can have impacts on the mental conceptions of the space in the country of settlement. The extract below which is one of the most intriguing information I came out during the interviews exemplifies this process:

Interviewee 8: *I have two hobbies on the Internet: the first is watching cartoon movies and the other is travelling on Google Maps. I don't know why but I like it so much... In my spare time, I travel around the UK on Google Maps... By using ‘street-view feature’.*

Interviewer: *Do you also ‘travel’ to other countries?*

Interviewee 8: *No, just the UK. Since I want to learn this country... This is functional, for example, I haven't been to Edinburgh yet, but I can give you any directions around the centre of Edinburgh now.*

The kind of ‘armchair-travelling’ that Interviewee 8 referred is worth analysing. This signifies a sort of radical transformation from being bounded by a single space to having spatial freedom which ultimately culminates in having improved mental conception of space and geospatial knowledge of the UK.

In addition to these applications, it has been understood that the participants use applications for the purposes of religion, language, music and video and so on. Finally, the use of ICTs by the participants can mean a kind of psychological support during their daily lives. For some ICTs are regarded as providing self-confidence to some participants in real life situations:

Once, I wanted to have my house painted. Where on earth could I find a house painter here? But I searched the internet and found a really nice website, there are grades and comment about painters. I chose one, it was great. That made me feel strong and powerful, knowing I can do my stuff without the help of anyone! (Interviewee, 3).

In some contexts, participants consider ICTs as connecting the person with whom they can reduce their loneliness and ‘*pour out their souls*’:

My brother has always been my best friend. The age gap between us is just one year. Here, thank God, whenever I feel depressed, I can call my brother and talk about my problems (Interviewee 13)

Indeed, the majority of the participants are highly grateful to the Internet; one of the most frequently used expressions in the interviews was ‘*nimet*’ (a present from Allah) for describing the ICTs, with 84 times. Interviewee 4 stated that ‘*May Allah send the inventor of the Internet to the Heaven*’. Therefore, it is clear that the use of ICTs is perceived as something very valuable since it is a tool for ameliorating the feelings of being displaced or deterritorialised –besides, its practical uses for mundane purposes.

Cultural Integration

Regarding the cultural integration concept, the data revealed two important explorations: firstly, the majority of the participants stated that their cultural engagements through ICTs are mostly related to their previous cultural codes. Secondly, it is established that the senses of belonging of the participants are manifold. Additionally, for the vast majority, ICTs can comprise bases for the multiplication of identifications and the use of ICTs in a strategic way.

The Continuity of Cultural Practices

A strong emphasis has been revealed out of the data that the cultural codes and practices are somehow being maintained. The role of ICTs in this process then is in a word seminal:

In the past, it was really hard to reach Turkish songs. We used to request our relatives in Turkey to send us some albums. But now, we can download everything from the Internet. For some, there is even no need to download. I

have to have some frequent visits to London. One of the greatest things in my life here is to listen to Orhan Baba's (Turkish arabesque singer) songs aloud while driving to London. (Interviewee, 1)

Listening to Turkish songs while driving to London, in his terms, gives him self-confidence. Underlying this idea, it is the tranquillity arising from the ability to bring the culture which he was born with and raised by to the abroad. Additionally, it has been revealed that most of the participants are using radio applications such as *AndroTurk*, *Avrasya Turk* for listening to different types of music from Gurbet Türküleri⁴ to the modern Turkish music.⁵

Concerning other cultural activities, it has been understood that the participants utilise ICTs for cultural activities which are related to religious rituals, cinema and TV series, watching football matches and following the news from Turkey regularly. Additionally, there are cases in which the participants learn and even sometimes experience the cultural practices of the UK. For instance, Interviewee 3 told me the documentary he watched about the Easter and explained the importance of it in British culture and how the British people celebrate it. The role of ICTs then in the continuity of Turkish cultural codes can be seen as unique in Georgiou's term: 'on the one hand, it resists the processes of assimilation and disempowerment, but it advances active and informed participation to the society' (2006, pp. 136–7).

Fragmented and Situational Senses of Belongings

One of the questions that this research aims to answer is whether the ICTs have an influence on the identifications of the participants. The data revealed two significant conclusions: i) the identifications of the participants are multiple, hybrid and fragmented ii) ICTs are utilised for maintaining and strategically using the multiple identifications in relation to different situations.

Firstly, the most common reference points for identification among the participants are as follows; the Turkish identity, the British identity, birthplace/

4 For Turkish migration, music is so important that there is genre called 'gurbet türküleri' (migration folk songs). The songs in this genre are regarded as manifestations of a 'mental state of those who have been away from their beloved ones, the places they used to live and their behaviours, and of the things they have left behind (Harmancı, 2013, p. 920).

5 There is a growing research interest on how diasporic music have influence on cultural identity of immigrants, for a review article see; (Lidskog, 2017)

village-based identifications and having a sense of belonging to Leicester. These reference points for senses of belonging are not fixed yet constantly in progress and situational depending on the socio-cultural contexts of the immigrant. For instance, the majority expressed that they tend to stick with their Turkish identity while they are in the UK or in an inter-ethnic context.

-My accent... my appearance... my ways of doings reveal that I am not British (Interviewees; 4,5,10 respectively)

-Here, I am interested in Turkish history nowadays. There are lots of material such as documentaries about the Ottoman Empire and WWI on Youtube. When I was in Turkey, I did not engage in this kind of stuff. Like a fish out of water, I only understood the value of the sea (Turkey) when I came to live here (Interviewee, 15).

However, this is also not a permanent way of feeling belonging to a particular nation following their visits to Turkey or encountering a Turkish ethnic identity based social group:

Interviewee 4: *Whenever I go to Turkey, I miss the UK, Leicester...*

Interviewer: *What do you miss the most?*

Interviewee 4: *The lifestyle of the UK, the people, everything. Look, I do like my origin and my homeland but I realise that I do not feel that I belong to there. Once, I used the word “please” a lot which is not common in Turkey. My friends mocked me and made quite a bit fan of me. That made me annoyed. Here in the UK, I use the word “please” maybe hundreds of times in a day.*

-People in Turkey do not consider me as genuine even my friends. They give me nicknames as “İngiliz” (the Englishman) or Alamancı⁶ (Interviewee 6).

In addition to this, the city of Leicester can sometimes be a source of building reference points for the sense of belonging. For instance, at the outset of my interview with Interviewee 7, I asked his origin by referring to the regions in Turkey. He replied: ‘I am Leicesterian’, in Turkish. Another

6 The word “Alamancı” is a derivative word of Turkish word for “Germany”. It refers to Turkish immigrants in Germany. Since the majority of Turkish immigrants settle in Germany, all Turkish emigrants are named as *Alamancı* sometimes regardless of the country of their settlement (Yasa, 2011).

participant named Leicester as “ilk göz ağrım” (my first love), while another participant said: *when I go to, let’s say, London for a week or 20 days, I miss Leicester. Here is my home* (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 5 claimed that he and his family miss Leicester when they go to Turkey for a summer vacation. He added that they use online media such as Leicester online newspapers, radio stations, activities on social networks sites for engaging with Leicester.

However, again, a remarkable number of participants retain a sense of belonging directly toward to the village they were born. After a second analysis, I understood that a relatively big group of the Turkish immigrant in Leicester came from the same city and even same county in Turkey but only the villages differ. Some in this sense articulate their identities with a reference to a particular village in Turkey and separate themselves from people who are from other villages. Sometimes the separation is based on ICTs; for instance, 3 different Whatsapp groups on the basis of being from the same village have been identified among the participants. Thus, we can say that the senses of belonging of the participants are manifold and hybrid yet also situational. It is also evident that ICTs are playing notable roles in demarking the boundaries of the different types of identifications.

Conclusions and Discussions

First, this research underlies that in the migration context, ‘the death of distance’ (Cairncross, 2001) does not necessarily bring about a sort of resurrection of old societal/communal social ties. More precisely, the idea that when immigrants make use of ICTs they automatically communicate with their countries of origin has been treated as a taken-for-granted postulate of transnational media studies (see Diminescu 2008, 2012). However, the data of this research revealed to the necessity to question this assumption. It is important to remember that ICTs should not be regarded as the ‘utopian alternatives to histories of dislocation’ (Ponzanesi & Leurs, 2014: 7), therefore, it is useful to approach the abovementioned postulate with caution. Moreover, some empirical studies about the psychology of the ICTs users suggest that ICTs use can boost the creation of new ties while it ‘displaces strong social ties’ with friends and relatives (Coget et al., 2002; Kraut et al., 1998: 1029).

However, this weakening process of pre-migratory social ties raises the question: Why cannot we talk about a similar trend when it comes to transnational

familial communication? There are at least two possible answers to this question; one is related to the behavioural patterns of online social relations and the other is about the changes in the structural patterns migrant families. First, the weakening of social ties confirms the idea that online social relations can bear a selective character (Madianou, 2016). Who does select the people whom they communicate with? The answer is ‘the individual’. Technology, Turkle notes, ‘makes it easy to communicate when we wish and to disengage at will’ (2010, p. 14). Wellman names this sort of social relations as the regime of ‘networked individualism’. In this networked individualism, ‘as people manoeuvre through their days, lives, and networks, the nature of their ties varies from situation to situation’ (Wellman and Rainie, 2002, p. 125). Thus, an exemption from such a weakening process can be explicable considering the sentiments, emotions related to the family.

Moreover, such an exemption leading to increasing familial contact can make it necessary to question the notions of family. The ‘de-territorialised’ notions of family show that familial relations can somehow be maintained irrespective of distant. The idea of family, in this sense, is no longer dependent on territory. It can be explored, re-formed, re-casted by its global members (Baldassar 2007, 2008). In this regard, these trend shares similarities with what Beck-Gernsheim (2002) calls the ‘post-familial family’ which signifies a process whereby the traditional solid bases of families are undermined. In this vein, what is seen is the emergence of a sort of ‘de-contextualised family’ since the scene is relatively different from the conventional answers given to the question of what constitutes a family. During my observations, I encountered a grandfather who was buying introductory Turkish language books. He told me that he would send those books to his grandchild who lives in France with his family. In this regard, people who do not share the same territory, the same interests, even the same language can constitute a family, even with close family knits. Moreover, this new landscape can be a precursor of a shift from the basic features of family such as from economic production, home creation, sexual control, being an intimate domestic social group to family discourses, memories, online family culture and , transnational care and circulation of family roles around the globe (Georgiou & Ponte, 2013; Lobel, 2003; Wilding, 2006).

As for the findings of the continuity of cultural practices, fragmented and situational sense of belongings and the utilisations of ICTs in everyday life

situations, it is clear that transnational mediated communication research should focus on the concepts of fragmentation, individualisation, and hybridisation in understanding the social implications of ICTs on immigrants. In other words, what this research calls transnational particularism. Consistent with the theory of ‘networked individualism’ (Welman and Rainie, 2002), the data regarding the cultural integration shows that individuals do choose their types of cultural practices, produce and consume them via ICTs. Nedelcu (2012) theorises that these cultural flows bring about a sort of ‘*transnational habitus*’ by which immigrants create their own cultural spheres, everyday routines, discourses by means of different social and historical backgrounds.

Moreover, it could be argued that a set of ‘decentering’ of previous social and cultural belongings are occurring by the channels of ICTs. As Georgiou writes, ICTs can ‘challenge to national boundaries and any assumes affiliation to singular communities’ (2006, p. 72). When conceptualising the new identities S. Hall writes (1991: 47) ‘identities are never completed; that they are always as subjectivity itself’. Thus, instead of fixed affiliations toward national communities and any other meta-narratives, what this research found is that there are tiny singularities which are used for building reference points for the sense of belonging. The Whatsapp groups based on being from the same village in Turkey epitomise the fragmented identities and senses of belongings to ‘particularistic values’. Thus, these findings confirms the idea that ICTs ‘diversify ways of belongings at a distance’ (Nedelcu, 2012: 1340, 1345). The self-determined identities are self-presented on online medium, which demonstrates the relevance of transnational particularism.

Similarly, ICTs use in everyday life situations suggests that ICTs employment in different circumstances is dependent on the social context of immigrants. It is no surprise that map applications, dictionary applications are common among immigrants. Furthermore, it should be noted that ‘media do not just fit in every day; they alter repertoires, methods and practices’ (Georgiou 2006, p. 14). In the same vein, the social setting and the context of its user is also important in its use. Driving from Leicester to London with the assistance of Google Maps and listening to Turkish arabesque song of the 1980s demonstrates the re-interpretation of ICTs for the purposes of reterritorialisation. The creation of everyday life practices through ICTs is ‘fundamentally tied to household experiences and practices’ (Slette-meas 2013, p. 53). To sum up, the signs of networked individualism and transnational particularism can be clearly seen

by the findings of ‘the specialisation of and diversification personal portfolios of social tie’s (Rheingold 2006, p. 50); the continuity of local cultural flows; hybrid, and multiple identities; new subjectivities and commonalities for sense belonging and the re-territorialisation practices through effective use of ICTs.

In this world of the particularity of social relations, hybridity and the temporality of identities, the mobility of cultural codes and discourses, the term of socio-cultural integration remains a slippery and contestable concept. As Prelipceanu (2008, p. 4) notes: ‘The traditional discourses in terms of social integration, assimilation, and identity does no longer correspond to these migrants’ experiences as they live in a world of multiple allegiances’.

Thus, integration, under these circumstances, depends on how you define it, where you look at it. As Erdal and Oeppen (2013, p. 774) clearly put it: ‘If assimilation is understood as a ‘programme’, something that migrants are pushed into and expected to achieve within a given time frame, then integration and transnationalism are not compatible. However, if integration is seen as a process, as we understand it, then there is no conflict’. In this regard, beyond certain clusters around the theoretical basis of socio-cultural integration, this concept should be revisited in light of the transnational questions. For instance, what is the goal of socio-cultural integration? Is it a political project of which objective is to level immigrants and minority groups with the members of the host culture? If so, whose culture is it; for instance, which culture is ‘the host culture’ in Leicester or London? Or is socio-cultural integration a process whereby immigrants and minority groups live on and share their differences? In that case, one could argue that transnational mediated contact facilitates the integration of even the people in the countries of origin, let alone boosting immigrants’ socio-cultural integration processes.

Therefore, considering the effacement of the meta-narrative in terms of sociality, culture and identity and the rise of individualism and particularism, it should be argued that the integration process of immigrants who use ICTs is somewhat reduced into the level of individuals. As personal experiences, memories, cultural and historical backgrounds, life-views and so on are significant variables at this stage, further research which focuses on different social contexts; intersections of different social and historical backgrounds are needed in terms of understanding the contours of the transnational situation and exploring its different facets in different social contexts.

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