

Social Integration of Forced Migrants: The Case of 1989 Emigres from Bulgaria in Tekirdağ*

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This article examines the social integration of ethnic Turks, who were forced to migrate from Bulgaria to Turkey in the summer of 1989, within the framework of migration and settlement in Turkey, the efforts to find job, and the experiences of “building life” and survival strategies in Turkey. It is based on a qualitative research about the migration and integration of the ethnic Turks of Bulgaria and Ahiska (Meskethian) Turks. The article has two arguments: first, one of the major ways to understand what migrants experience while migrating and settling afterwards is to examine how they see and narrate the process of migration; and second, the concept of integration is insufficient in explaining what migrants experience after migrating. The 1989 emigres put emphasis on “starting from zero” and “building life”. When they came to Turkey, they were faced with many hardships. Yet, they “built a life” in their “homeland” and this is much more than settling. They continued their lives in Turkey where they felt free and secure and where they belonged. It was difficult and some of the emigres were disappointed however they were happy to come.

Keywords: immigrants, integration, ethnic Turks, Bulgaria, Turkey

The integration of migrants—be they economic or forced—to the host societies constitutes an important dimension of migration. The subject of the present article is the social integration of ethnic Turks who were forced to migrate from Bulgaria to Turkey in the summer of 1989. The group elaborated is the 1989 emigres living in Tekirdağ, a province in the northwestern part of Turkey. The social integration of those emigres is examined within the framework of migration and settlement in Turkey, the efforts to find job, and the experiences of “building life” and survival strategies in Turkey. In that regard, the aim of this article is to consider what the 1989 emigres in Tekirdağ have lived in the process of social integration and how they see the process at length.

Two arguments are put forth in the article. The first one is related to methodology. Due to the fact that the present study is based on a qualitative research the argument is as follows: one of the major ways to understand what migrants experience while migrating and trying to settle afterwards is to examine how migrants themselves

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see and narrate the process of migration.¹ The interviewees often compare Bulgaria and Turkey in different aspects. For example, they think that education in their childhood and adolescence periods, which corresponds to the communist period in Bulgaria, is much better than the one in Turkey. Moreover, the interviewees are well aware of what changed in their lives when they migrated, and they give importance to sharing this change by mentioning it.

The second argument of the article is that the concept of integration is not sufficient in explaining what migrants experience in the migration and its aftermath. As the data of the present study reveals, the concept of integration is not convenient in describing what different migrant groups live in the process of migration. In other words, the concepts need to be supported with detailed qualitative data gathered in the fieldworks. As shown in the following pages, such an approach is adopted in this article. In that regard, one of the concepts put forth here is “settling” (yerleşmek) and “building a life” (hayat kurmak).

This article is based on a qualitative research carried out to examine two groups which have migrated to Turkey in 1989 and 1990s, namely the emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskı (Meskethian) Turks. The fieldwork has been conducted in the summers of 2010 and 2011 in the four cities of the Marmara region² where most of those migrants are living. The cities in question are İstanbul, Bursa, Tekirdağ and Kocaeli. The subject of the research is the process of integration of the emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskı (Meskethian) Turks in Turkey. However, the group examined in this article is the emigres from Bulgaria who are living in Tekirdağ. The data used is based on the in-depth interviews conducted mostly in the emigres’ homes.

Certain factors have played a role in selecting the 1989 emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskı (Meskethian) Turks for the study. One of the prevailing factors is the so-called “affiliation” (yakınlık) these groups think they have to Turkey. In other words, the emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskı (Meskethian) Turks attach importance to migrating to Turkey and they emphasise the fact that they have always wished to migrate because they see Turkey as their “homeland” (anavatan).

The reason for examining the experiences of the emigres from Bulgaria living in Tekirdağ in this article is directly related to the fact that they have selected this city to live. Two factors are important in this selection. First, relatives, who have migrated before, are settled in this city. As underlined in many studies on migration, migrants think that they are supported mostly by their relatives. That is why they prefer to settle near their relatives. The second factor is related to Tekirdağ itself. Having one of the organised industrial zones, Tekirdağ provides many job opportunities.

As noted above, the research on which this article is based, is a qualitative one. The use of this method has to do with the purpose. The aim of the research is to examine what the emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskı (Meskethian) Turks have experienced in the migration and its aftermath and how they view this experience. Actually, there is a considerable amount of statistical data about these groups. They give information about the emigres. Yet, qualitative research is needed to understand what kind of a meaning emigres attach to “building life” in Turkey, what kind of an experience “building life” is for them, what kind of relations they try to establish, and finally how those relations, particularly the one with the State affect their lives. Accordingly, in-depth interviews have been conducted with 15 female and 15 male emigres in Tekirdağ.

¹ Even though migrants’ narratives are attached importance in the present study, the narrative analysis is not used as a method.

² Marmara region, located in the northwestern part of Turkey, is the smallest but most densely populated geographical region.

The article is organised as follows: the first part is about the short history of Turkish migration from Bulgaria. The focus in this part is on the life of Turkish emigres in the communist period which lasted from 1947 to 1989. In the second part, the integration of migrants is reviewed with particular reference to social integration. The last part is about evaluating the data gathered from the fieldwork. Based on the data, the migration and settlement in Turkey, the efforts to find job, and experiences of “building life” in Turkey and survival strategies are considered in detail.

History of the Turkish Migration From Bulgaria in the Post-1945 Period

Due to its political and historical position, Turkey has been a stage for various population movements throughout history. Mass migrations taking place in the periods of both the Ottoman Empire and the Republican Turkey have had a deep impact on the demographic and social structure of the country.

The Ottoman State first faced the refugee problem towards the end of 17th century. As a result of the military defeats and the retreat from European lands, mass migration gained pace and continued at an increasing rate throughout the 19th and early 20th century. The asylum-seekers were all from the Balkans. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, major shifts in population occurred as a result of population exchange and compulsory migratory movements within the region. So Turkey continued to be a centre for population movements after the establishment of the Republic. Communities with differing ethnic backgrounds came by both forced and voluntary migration.

With regard to forced migration from the Balkans, it is to be noted that in the post-1945 period, most of the refugees Turkey hosted were called “national refugees” (Kirişçi, 1995). “National refugees” were the ones who escaped oppression and sought refuge in Turkey. They were subject to oppression because of their ethnic origins.³ According to the Law on Settlement of 1934, the rights to immigrate to Turkey, to settle in Turkey and to acquire Turkish citizenship were given only to those of “Turkish descent” and those who belong to the Turkish culture.⁴ In the Law on Settlement, the migrants in question are divided into two groups: (1) independent immigrants, and (2) settled migrants. As Kirişçi (1995) notes, “independent immigrants” are the ones “who are sponsored by Turkish citizens⁵ and do not need to be supported by the State”, and ‘settled migrants’ are those “who depend on the economic assistance of the State to migrate and settle in Turkey”.

Among “national refugees” coming in the post-WWII era, ethnic Turks emigrating from Bulgaria outnumber the others. Some of the emigres came to Turkey as independent immigrants and were supported by their relatives who had migrated earlier, while some of them were settled in different cities by the State.

From an historical perspective, the ethnic Turks of Bulgaria may be examined in four periods since the year 1878 when Bulgaria gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire. These periods are: (1) Principality of Bulgaria (1878-1908), (2) Kingdom of Bulgaria (1908-1944), (3) Communist Bulgaria (1944-1989), and (4) Post-communist Bulgaria (1989-). There are many studies on those periods some of which focus on the ethnic origins of Turks, as well (Turan, 2003; Şimşir, 2009; Kocaoğlu, 1998; Dayioğlu, 2005; Neuburger, 2004). Yet, in

³ The “national refugees” were ethnic Turks from the Balkans, or ethnic groups having close association with Turks like Turkic people coming from Central Asia (e.g. Afghanistan) and regions in the former SU (Kirişçi, 1995).

⁴ The Law on Settlement of 1934 was valid until 2006 when a new Law (Law no. 5543) came into force. Yet there has been no change with regard to the right to emigrate, settle and acquire citizenship.

⁵ These immigrants are supported mostly by their relatives and close friends who emigrated before.

in this article the situation of ethnic Turks of Bulgaria during the communist period is elaborated with particular attention attached to their emigration to Turkey.

Emigration from the communist Bulgaria in the post-WWII era took place in three phases. The first one occurred in the 1949-1951 period. In August 1950, it was announced by the Bulgarian government that 250,000 ethnic Turks had applied to leave for Turkey. The main reason behind their wish to go to Turkey was the fact that they suffered from the economic policies of the communist regime. As Petkova (2002) notes, forced collectivisation of land and the nationalisation were resented by both Turks and Bulgarians. Land has an important place in the life of Balkan peasants. Since the majority of the Turkish population in Bulgaria was composed of farmers, the expropriation of the land which took place in 1949 came as a shock for the Turkish farmers. So the Turks in Bulgaria wanted to migrate and Turkey opened its gates. Yet, faced with a huge mass of people within a short time, the Turkish government said that it was not able to receive this huge mass, and had to close its border in November 1950. Two months later, the two governments reached an agreement that Bulgaria would allow only the Turks, who possessed a Turkish entry visa, to leave. However, Bulgarian government did not comply with the terms of the agreement and continued evicting the Turks. So Turkey again had to close its border in November 1951 (Poulton, 1991). In the period of 1949-1951, about 156,000 ethnic Turks emigrated to Turkey (Şimşir, 2009). Most of the emigrants chose to settle in the Marmara and Aegean regions, setting a pattern for the following waves of emigration (Petkova, 2002, p. 44).

The second phase was in the 1970s. Following the 1968 Agreement on the Emigration of Close Relatives signed between Turkey and Bulgaria, Turks started emigrating. The Agreement allowed the departure of close relatives of the Turks who had come to Turkey in the previous phase. As Şimşir (2009) notes, when Turkey had closed its border in Nov. 1951, many families were separated and the close relatives of the emigres remained in Bulgaria. The families, which had been separated, wanted to reunite, and expressed their wish to emigrate. In addition, the rights of Turks were rather restricted. So the number of those, who wanted to emigrate to Turkey, increased everyday. The Agreement expired in November 1978. In the period 1969-1978, a total of 130,000 Turks came to Turkey within the framework of the 1968 Agreement.

The last phase is the mass exodus to Turkey which took place in the summer of 1989. Actually it is the result of the Bulgarian government's assimilationist campaign towards the Turkish minority, which had started in the 1960s and 1970s and gained a violent dimension in the mid-1980s. As Bojkov (2004) notes, the renaming campaign of the mid-1980s marked the beginning of various assimilationist policies that involved coercion. These policies aimed at "melting the identity of Bulgarian Turks into a communist-led nationalist ideology" (Bojkov, 2004, p. 354). What the Bulgarian authorities wanted was that Turks would be integrated into all aspects of social and political life but with one condition: their Turkish identity was to be replaced by an ethnic Bulgarian one. The so-called "rebirth process" began with the renaming campaign carried out in the last days of 1984 and early months of 1985. Why is it called the "rebirth process"? According to the Bulgarian authorities, Turks had originally been Bulgarian before they were converted to Islam under the Ottoman rule. In that regard, the campaign carried out by the Bulgarian government was nothing more than a restoration of the population's original, real identity. That is why they called the name-change as "reconstruction of Bulgarian names" and denied that they were forcing people to change their names.

In accordance with the campaign, police with dogs and troops with tanks surrounded the villages with

predominantly Turkish inhabitants, often early in the morning. As Poulton (1991) notes, officials with the new ID cards or in other cases with a list of “official” names to choose from, came and forced the inhabitants to accept the new cards and sign “voluntary” forms in which it was written that they requested their new names. In the areas, where there were not many Turks, especially in cities, their names were changed and the new ID cards were issued at their work-places (Poulton, 1991). The campaign began in the southern regions and continued to the northern parts and by the end of March the operation was completed. In addition to the name-change, we encounter other measures aimed at assimilating the Turks of Bulgaria. The use of Turkish language, Turco-Arabic names, way of dressing, circumcision, Muslim burial and other rites were all prohibited. As Neuburger (2004) notes, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) attempted to police everyday culture. This was nothing more than the imposition of the so-called “rebirth” conditions.

The Turks could not accept the conditions and they resisted the assimilationist campaign. While the name-change was carried out, there occurred many violent demonstrations which involved loss of life in a number of places. It appears that the stage for most of the demonstrations were the southern regions of the country where the campaign started. Many Turks, who resisted the campaign, were arrested. Some were detained in the Belene camp,⁶ some were killed, and some were beaten so severely that they almost died.⁷

By the end of the 1980s, the objections of the Turkish minority to the assimilationist policies and implementations grew. The detainees in the Belene camp launched hunger strikes in 1987 (Poulton, 1991). By May of 1989, hunger strikes began again leading to mass protests in the Turkish districts of northeast Bulgaria.⁸ The Turks demanded the return of their names and respect for customs and traditions. The demonstrations which quickly spread throughout the country, were quite brutally suppressed killing many demonstrators. Moreover, most of the Turkish leaders were expelled. The demonstrations clearly indicated that the so-called “rebirth process” had not been successful as it was hoped by the state authorities.

Towards the end of May, the communist leader of Bulgaria, T. Zhivkov, announced on TV that “Bulgarian Turks could freely visit Turkey as *tourists* if they so wished”⁹ (Bojkov, 2004, p. 360). The response to Zhivkov’s announcement was something the Bulgarian state authorities never anticipated. As Eminov (1997) notes, thousands of Turks flooded in the passport offices. The authorities almost immediately issued the passports and told the Turks to put their affairs in order quickly and leave. Actually, the authorities have introduced a new regime so that everybody, who wished, would be able to obtain exit visas easily. In the meantime, many families were forced to leave Bulgaria by the end of May. Some of them received phone calls by police or military while some were visited with ready passports and ordered to get ready and leave in a couple of hours. They were literally expelled.

⁶ Belene is a prison camp on an island in the Danube notorious in the 1950s for holding large numbers of political prisoners. It was reopened in 1985 to intern the Turks who resisted the name-change campaign.

⁷ According to Poulton (1991), the protests during the name-change campaign were sporadic protests occurring in a small-scale, and they arose out of a largely passive but sullen acceptance of the status quo by the Turks.

⁸ On May 20-27th, mass demonstrations in which thousands of Turks participated, took place in numerous towns and cities such as Bohçalar, Akkadınlar (Dulovo), Vokil, Cerkovna, Vodno, Kemallar (İsperih), Cebel, Beli Lom, Osmanpazar, Şumnu (Shumen), Gradnica, Benkovski, Ezerçe, Razgrad, Mahmuzlar, Dobriç (Şimsir, 2009). The mass demonstrations started with the following statement: “Türkliğümüz’den asla vazgeçmeyez, Bulgar isimlerini almayız” (We will never give up our Turkishness and we will not take Bulgarian names) (Şimsir, 2009).

⁹This was really unexpected due to the fact that 4 years earlier, in March 1985, Bulgarian government responded negatively to a diplomatic note of the Turkish government about a possible emigration agreement like the one in 1968 (Bojkov, 2004).

The result was the biggest exodus experienced in Europe since the WWII. In the period between June and late August, when Turkey had to close its border to emigrants who did not have exit visas, more than 300,000 people left the country.¹⁰ The exodus was called “the great excursion” by the Bulgarian government. Why did the government adopt such a discourse? As Bojkov (2004) noted, there are a couple of reasons for such an act. In the first place, it is to be underlined that Zhivkov made a tactic to counter allegations that the government was expelling people out of the country. So, according to the government, the people leaving for Turkey were not expelled at all. Secondly, Turkey acted imprudently by opening its border without thinking of such an influx. In that sense, it was rather shocking for the Turkish government. Lastly, the option was open for people to return. Since they were going to Turkey as tourists, they could come back to Bulgaria whenever they wished. Some of the emigres used this option but it was after communism collapsed in Bulgaria and Zhivkov was ousted from power in November 1989.

Integration of Migrants: A Short Review of Literature

Integration of migrants—one of the controversial concepts in migration studies—is a process composed of the long-term results of migration, namely the migrants’ settlement and reception into the host society. Different concepts and definitions are used to express this process, e.g. absorption, accommodation, toleration, adaptation.¹¹

The use of the term integration dates back to the 1920s when it was popularised together with “assimilation” by the Chicago School of Urban Sociology founded by scholars such as Robert E. Park and E. Burgess. Both terms refer to “the process of settlement, interaction with the host society and social change that follows immigration” (Favell, 2005). The term “assimilation” was developed in the USA and “integration” in Western Europe, but because “assimilation” came to be perceived as a negative term, integration is preferred in the Western Europe. The concept of “integration” is being used in many academic disciplines including sociology. Two perspectives may be used while considering the concept. From macro perspective, integration is a characteristic of a social system, e.g. a society. If a society is integrated, then its constituent parts (groups or individuals) relate to one another in a closer and more intense way (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003, p. 6). Micro perspective is the one of groups and individuals. All groups and individuals show a certain degree of integration within a given society (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003, p. 6).

Integration is actually a multi-dimensional process with different realms. The prominent ones of these realms are socio-economic, cultural and legal and political realms. Each one has its own indicators. The socio-economic realm has employment (immigrants’ access to labour market), income level, access to social services, education level and housing quality as the main indicators. The ones related to the cultural realm are immigrant’s attitude towards the rules and norms of the host society, frequency of contacts between the country of origin and the host country, spouse selection, language skills and delinquency ratio. Legal and political realm has annual number of naturalised immigrants or the ones with resident status, number of immigrants with double

¹⁰In the period between June 2 when Turkey abandoned its usual policy of visa application and opened its doors unconditionally to the emigres and August 22 when it closed the border and started demanding visa again, a total number of 311,862 “kindreds” (soydaş) entered Turkey in daily convoys of 3,000-5,000 people (Şimşir, 2009).

¹¹ Despite “numerous national and cross-national projects”, there is no satisfactory core when the integration of migrants is in question (Favell, 2003).

citizenship, participation in the political life and civil society.

As noted above, integration is one of the frequently discussed concepts in migration studies. Sociologists such as D. Lockwood (1964) have major contributions to these discussions. Lockwood has combined micro and macro perspectives. Particularly the distinction he has made between system integration and social integration is quite important and it has inspired scholars like H. Esser. According to Esser (2000, p. 54), integration is “the cohesion of the parts within a ‘systematic’ whole as distinguished from the non-structured environment generated by it, regardless of what has influenced this cohesion”. Systems integration is, in this regard, the existence of relationships among the units within a system and depending on the structure of those relationships, a system can be “more” or “less” integrated (Esser, 2000, p. 54). When migration is in question, one comes across with two important items which are related to the individual and societal consequences of migration: the relationship between the various systems in the society, and the relationships which the actors within a social group maintain among themselves, in relation to the parts of the systems and to the society as a whole (Esser, 2000, p. 55). At this point, we need to underline the distinction Lockwood has made. The distinction is between systems integration and social integration. By systems integration he refers to “the orderly or conflictual relationships between the parts”, while social integration is “the orderly or conflictual relationships between the actors” (Lockwood, 1964, p. 245, cited in Esser, 2000, p. 55).

Inspired from Lockwood, Esser makes a distinction, as well. In this distinction, Esser defines systems integration as “the formation of relationships among the parts of a social system, independent of any special motive or relationships between the individual actors”. Hence integration is a process that is independent of actors involved. Social integration is, on the other hand, the relationship of the actors to each other and to the system as a “whole” and it has four mechanisms when we define it as the social inclusion of the actors in a social group (Esser, 2000, p. 56). The first of these mechanisms is *acculturation* which means that “the actors acquire the knowledge necessary and gain the particular competence required to operate within and among social groups in meaningful, understandable and successful ways” (Esser, 2000, p. 56). This knowledge and competence is, in a way, a capital to be invested by the actors, and social integration taking place as acculturation is “a process of acquiring the right degree of knowledge or competence” (Esser, 2000, p. 56). Among such knowledge and skills, language has a special place because the immigrants need to have knowledge and skills about the host society’s language in many areas including communication.

The second mechanism is *placement* which is defined as the actor having a place, a particular social position in society (Esser, 2000, p. 56). The crucial forms of social integration through placement are basically extending specific rights like right to citizenship and political rights including the right to vote, access to professions and other positions, access to social possibilities aimed at linking up with and having conversation in social relationships to other members of social systems. The essential conditions of this mechanism are social acceptance of immigrants and the absence of prejudices, discrimination and closures towards them. Social placement, as Esser (2000) emphasises, is closely related to acculturation and at the same time the most important condition for gaining capital in a social group, specifically in the form of economic capital and human capital.

Interaction is the third mechanism of social integration. Actors establish “networks” of relationships by using interaction. Such networks are based on people the actors know, forms of communication they use, and kinds of social relationships they maintain. Immigrants have interaction with the members of both the society of

origin and the host society. The crucial conditions for social integration coming through interaction are actually the consequences of acculturation and placement due to the fact that they include the control of the generally desirable resources, competence in specific areas, social acceptance and possession of opportunities for connecting and establishing strong contacts (Esser, 2000, p. 56). The most important consequence of social integration through interaction is acquiring the social capital.

The last mechanism is identification meaning that “special attitude by which actors see themselves and the social structure as a unit and become ‘identical’ with it” (Esser, 2000, p. 58). Identification points to an inspiring and emotional relationship between the individual actor and the social system, and shows itself with the “we” feeling the actor has with other members of the society or group. Perhaps the clearest example of this mechanism is “the conscious loyalty expressed toward the ‘society’ and its leading institutions” (Esser, 2000, p. 58).

Esser underlines the importance of placement among the dimensions of social integration and notes that this dimension is the primary one by which integration is achieved in social life and the reason for that is placement, which includes work-life, profession, citizenship rights and political rights, is a domain where almost all immigrants are integrating with the host society (Şahin, 2010).

Regarding the integration issue, the last noteworthy point is the approach inspired by Esser’s distinction. We come across with this approach in F. Heckmann and D. Schnapper’s edited book, *The Integration of Immigrants in European Societies*, which is a product of an EU-funded research project titled “Effectiveness of National Integration Strategies towards Second Generation Migrant Youth in Comparative European Perspective” (EFFNATIS) carried out in the 1998-2000 period. Immigrant integration is, in this edited book, connecting new populations, i.e. immigrants, to the social structures of a new society, that is the host society (Heckmann, 2003). It is a process which has certain dimensions. The first of these dimensions is *structural integration* which may be defined as “the acquisition of rights and access to positions and statuses in the core institutions of the receiving society by the immigrants and their descendants” (Heckmann, 2003). *Cultural integration* or *acculturation* is the second dimension. It is an interactive and mutual process which changes both the immigrants and the host society. The change is a cognitive, cultural and behavioural one experienced by the immigrants. It is a requirement for immigrants to participate in certain processes of learning and socialisation in order to enjoy rights and gain a position and a status in the new society. The third dimension is *social integration*, which is membership in the new society in the private sphere. It shows itself with immigrants’ private and social relations like friendships, marriages and group memberships such as working in voluntary associations. The fourth and last dimension is *identificational integration* which may be defined as “membership in a new society on the subjective level” showing itself “in feelings of belonging and identification, particularly in forms of ethnic and/or national identification” (Heckmann, 2003, p. 47). In the light of the dimensions mentioned above, Heckmann (2003, p. 47) defines integration as “an acquisition of rights, access to positions and statuses, a change in individual characteristics, a building of social relations and a formation of feelings of belonging and identification by immigrants towards the immigration society”.

Integration of the 1989 Emigres in Tekirdağ: Data from the Field

The present article, as noted in the introduction, has two main arguments. The first one is about methodology of researching the experiences of migrants. It is quite important to understand what they experience while

migrating and trying to settle afterwards, and one of the major ways to do this is to examine how migrants themselves view and narrate the migration process. The second argument is that the concept of integration is not sufficient in explaining what a migrant experiences in the migration and its aftermath. What different migrant groups live in the process of migration certainly differ from case to case, and the concept of integration is not convenient in describing those experiences. Thus, the existing concepts such as immigrant integration need to be supported with detailed qualitative data and even new concepts. In this part, these arguments are explained in detail by using the data gathered in the fieldwork carried out in Tekirdağ. Based on the data, the migration and “settling” in Turkey, the efforts to find work, and the experiences of “building life” in Turkey and survival strategies are elaborated.

“Starting from Zero”: Migration and Settling in Turkey

Regardless of the fact that they have come to their homeland, the 1989 emigres make up of a migrant group which tries to exist in a country different in economic, social and political terms when compared to the country they were born in, namely Bulgaria. Although the Turkish government provided assistance and various facilities to the emigres, they had to struggle with many hardships. In that sense, perhaps the most appropriate phrase that summarises the 1989 emigres’ migration and settling in Turkey is ‘starting from zero’. Nearly all of the emigres interviewed in Tekirdağ emphasise in their narratives that they had to leave almost everything behind when they were coming to Turkey in the summer of 1989. For example, some of them told me that they were not able to take anything other than a few pieces of clothes. They had to leave most of the stuff they were using in their daily lives. Most of the interviewees complain about one thing: having lost nearly everything they have acquired in their lives until the summer of 1989. Actually this is not leaving behind only the material stuff. It is definitely much more than that because they, at the same time, had to leave their “experiences” (*yaşanmışlık*) and memories of their childhood and youth periods. While some of the interviewees expressed this situation directly as “the point of zero” in their lives, others explicitly interpreted it as such. Their interpretations are quite important in terms of the arguments of the present article because it reveals first that immigrant integration is not an easy process and secondly that qualitative data is necessary and crucial in examining such issues. In other words, the qualitative data helps us understand what migrants live through in the migration process and more importantly how they interpret their experiences.

At this point, it is better to leave the word to the emigres interviewed in Tekirdağ because the prominent matters in their narratives seem to support the views I am trying to put forth in this article. The first one is about the difficulties they had while they were coming to Turkey. As mentioned above, most of the emigres came with a few of their belongings:

(How did you come?) We had a car then, we came by car. (What did you do with your belongings?) We took what we could but a lot remained there. We left our house, everything and came here... (Were you able to load the furniture to trucks, like other emigres?) No, we didn’t bring much, my dad came with two luggages and a bed so we didn’t rent a truck... (Male, 25, born in Razgrad, self-employed, Tekirdağ-Çerkezköy)

Some of the interviewees emphasise that the journey to Turkey was a quite humiliating experience because of the poor conditions. The Bulgarian police escorted the ones, who came by buses, trucks or private vehicles, to the Turkish-Bulgarian border. They were quite strict about the rules of journey:

We were going and there was a truck behind. (You came to the border. How many days did your journey last?) Five days it lasted. At nights the police set up camps. Nobody could leave these camps without their permission. If you attempted, you would be killed by the police. (How were the conditions?) The conditions were awful. There was no toilet. Those five days were the hardest days of my life. There was no bread, no water and it was so hot. The food got spoilt and we threw them away because they smelled very bad. Because there was no water, they were selling water and one liter water was 10 million TL. Why so expensive? Because villagers were bringing us water and it was banned. So the water they sold was very expensive. Nobody wanted bread. We all needed water. It was so hot that there was no place to sleep. (Male, 50, born in Stara Zagora, electrician, Tekirdağ-Saray)

One of the interviewees had the chance to observe the emigres passing the border. She shares her observations about the density of the population passing the border and the behaviour of the emigres, particularly the disappointed ones:

It was so crowded at the border. Meals were served; though it was just a tent, we had a shelter. We were registered by the officials. The ones who were coming and the ones who were leaving the tents were registered at the same time. The officials were working very hard. We stayed there for one night but it was enough for me to observe what was going on. How many persons? Well, I can't tell but there was the elderly, children and so on. It was very crowded. (Did you come across with anything shocking or interesting? For instance persons who were complaining or yelling or kissing the Turkish land because of happiness?) Well, you can come across with anybody in such situations. Of course, some were regretful. Just two days passed after their arrival and they had no relatives who came to look after them. They, in a way, found themselves on the edge of an abyss. They are served meals but but they are used to getting everything from their own gardens so it is strange for them. Or they had money and they were buying. But now they have neither money nor garden. They have nothing, think about it for a moment. They just sit there, doing nothing. (Was there anyone shocked?) There were many disappointed people. (About what?) Psychologically they were not ready for migration. They knew nothing about it. They did not know Turkey. They did not have financial problems before. Life standards are different here in Turkey. They are coming here because they are Turkish but still they have features of the life in Bulgaria. They have many expectations but suddenly they find themselves at the bottom and this is very shocking for them. (Female, 48, born in Burgas, primary school teacher, Tekirdağ-Saray)

At the border, the Turkish officials kept the records of the emigres and asked them whether they had any relatives in Turkey and wished to go to them or not. The ones who gave their relatives' names were sent to the cities where they were living, and the emigres without any relatives in Turkey were sent to cities such as İzmir, Aydın and Edirne. Before being sent to those cities, some were first accommodated in a camp called "tent city" (çadırkent) in Kırklareli, a border province in northwestern Turkey. While some stayed in the camp for a couple of days, some stayed for 10-20 days. One of the emigres interviewed recalls the camp life as follows:

We got on a bus in Kırklareli¹² and were sent to a camp. What kind of a camp was that? I did not have such a life like the one in that camp before. (Were the conditions in the camp poor?) At that time, tents had been set up by the time we arrived. There was no building or anything like that. Now there are buildings. ... Turkey was not prepared. It was an emergency situation. ... We were sent to tent city near Kavaklı village in Kırklareli. I stayed there for 15 days. There was bread, meals were served three times a day. Everything was good, there was nothing to complain. While we were coming from Bulgaria, nobody asked whether we were hungry or thirsty. The guys were checking our bags and throwing away everything they have found. They didn't have mercy at all. If you change the country you live in, you should have a relative or a friend who would help you. Otherwise the life is very difficult. (Male, 52, born in Burgas, worker, Tekirdağ-Saray)

The emigres, who were sent to the cities where their relatives were living, spent the first weeks or

¹² Kırklareli is a province in Northwestern part of Turkey. It has a coastline on the Black Sea.

months in Turkey near those relatives. In the following periods, they either rented flats or built their own houses. The ones, who had no relatives in Turkey, were accommodated in schools and dormitories until the new academic year began in mid-September:

(Where did you stay when you came?) In the dormitories of Ege University in Bornova.¹³ But if you ask me whether I have walked around the town (laughing) it was so hot that we couldn't. We were going to breakfast at 7.30 in the morning and our soles were burning. It was very hot even in the morning. (Where was breakfast served?) In the dormitory. (So you were looked after by the State while you stayed there, weren't you?) Yes. (Was it only breakfast or were you served other meals, too?) I think there were other meals, too. Where else could we eat? We came almost without a stitch of clothing, we didn't have any money. My daughter, who was 3,5 years old at that time had to wear the same undershirt for a month until my mom and dad came to Turkey. (Female, 48, born in Shumen, retired, Tekirdağ-City Centre)

After staying near their relatives, some of the interviewees moved into their houses:

(Where did you come when you migrated to Turkey?) Çerkezköy,¹⁴ here. (Why did you prefer Çerkezköy? Were there any relatives?) Yes, we had relatives who came here in 1978. (For how long did you stay near them?) For 40 days. (What happened afterwards? Did you rent a flat?) Yes, we rented a flat and stayed there for four months. Then we moved to another flat. There we stayed for 5-6 years. Then we came here, to our house. (Female, 60, born in Razgrad, retired, Tekirdağ-Çerkezköy)

A new life was waiting for the emigres in Turkey. This new life brought with it different conditions and that difference paved the way for different experiences in the emigres' settlement. For some of the emigres the conditions were not so difficult while some others were faced with various difficulties. One of the interviewees, who moved into a rented flat after staying near her relatives for a few days, recalls particularly the emotional difficulties as follows:

(How were the conditions in the neighbourhood you settled when you came?) Ooooo I can't talk about the conditions. There were herds everywhere. When I talk about those days my daughter, who was 7 years old at that time, laughs. There were 25 cars, lined up in a street. The emigres were sleeping in their cars. Some stayed in schools. There was nobody to guide them. My uncle found a basement flat. We stayed near him for 6 days. Then we found a flat and settled there. We stayed in that flat for some time. My mother-in-law was babysitting. I found a job in a factory. We were crowded at that time. We were cooking but it was never enough. It was so hard at that time. ... The life, the conditions were very different. There was no water heater. I had to wash my daughter in a bucket with water heated on stove. She didn't want to be washed like that and was crying. I was trying to convince her that we would soon be moving to a better place. ... A week after we arrived it was the Feast of the Sacrifice. When my father-in-law came home he was crying. In every Feast, he was sacrificing his animals when we were in Bulgaria. The whole family came together. We were eating, drinking beverages. My father-in-law was giving pocket money to his grandchildren. But that year the Feast was different. It was emotionally so hard for us. (Female, 55, born in Razgrad, retired, Tekirdağ-City Centre)

The second phase of settling in Turkey is marked by the 1989 emigres' efforts to find work. In that regard, the Turkish state's assistance is noteworthy. As Scott (1991) notes, in order to manage the labour market more effectively, the government requested help from the International Labour Organisation in researching the emigres' employment patterns and the effect of those patterns on their lives. The research was financed by the

¹³ Bornova is a town in İzmir, the mostly known province in the Aegean region of Turkey.

¹⁴ Çerkezköy is a town known with its organised industrial site in Tekirdağ.

United Nations Development Programme and carried out by the Ministry of Health.¹⁵ Making use of the results of the research in question, the state provided assistance to the emigres. For example, we can mention vocational training courses. At the same time, the state introduced a new rule in employment. Accordingly, large scale enterprises had to employ a certain number of 1989 emigres (Şirin, 2011).

Some of the emigres made use of the state's assistance in finding work. Apart from those, the majority of the emigres had access to the labour market in a relatively short time. Some were guided by their relatives and some found jobs on their own. The jobs they found were mostly in ones in factories and they worked even in night shifts. Some of the female interviewees said that they could not witness their children growing up because they had to work in shifts for three times a day:

(Where did you work in Ayvalık?¹⁶) In Komili¹⁷ factory. We were going to that factory and our children to school. They were taking care of themselves. We were leaving early for work and coming back late at night. There was no such thing as taking your children to school first and then going to work. It was 6.30 in the morning when we left for work. The children were sleeping at that time. We stood up to those hardships and worked and worked. (What was your job at Komili factory?) I was washing the dishes but sometimes I was cooking, as well. (Female, 56, born in Kardzhali, retired, Tekirdağ-Saray)

“Building a Life” in Turkey and Survival Strategies

The present article and my doctoral thesis¹⁸ show that migrants see the process of migration and integration as an experience of “building a life”. What they mean by “building a life” is beyond settling in a new place. It is actually continuing their lives in a place where they feel secure and where they belong. Migrants are aware of the fact that this experience is not something easy for themselves as well as for other migrant groups and they express this fact in the interviews. However they put forth this “building a life” as an essential wish. The emigres’ wish, as emphasised above, indicates the fact that the integration process is intricate for both migrants and host countries. The meaning and importance of “building a life” for migrants derives from their disadvantageous position due to migration. In other words, as noted above, migrants allege that they start from zero in the host countries. That is why they attach importance to building a life.

What kind of an experience of “building a life” can we talk about in the case of the 1989 emigres in Tekirdağ? Like other migrant groups, they developed some strategies to survive because it was necessary to “build a life” in Turkey. The prominent strategies that came up in the interviews are as follows. In the first place, employment is very important. When they first migrated to Turkey what the 1989 emigres cared about was working and earning money (Şirin, 2011, p. 365). It was the first step to survive. It did not matter whether the jobs they found were compatible with their professional skills. In many cases, they did not match at all. In one of the cases, the interviewee said that even though he was employed as a mechanical engineer in Bulgaria, after looking for work for a couple of months all he could find was serving hot drinks and guarding the machines in a worksite. He was in such a desperate situation that he considered the job as a “turning point” in his life:

¹⁵ There are other researches about the employment of 1989 émigrés. One of them is Prof. Dr. İsmet Sabit Barutçugil's research titled “1989 Yaz Aylarında Bulgaristan'dan Göçe Zorlanan Soydaşların İstihdam Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri” (The Employment Problems of the Kindred Forced to Migrate from Bulgaria in 1989 Summer and Solution Proposals) (1990).

¹⁶ Ayvalık is a seaside town on the northwestern Aegean coast. It is a district of Balıkesir Province in Marmara region.

¹⁷ Komili is Turkey's first company which sells olive-oil and olive-oil-related products. Its establishment dates back to 1870s.

¹⁸ My doctoral thesis is about the return of the displaced Bosnians after the Bosnian War of 1992-1995.

(How were the conditions in the neighbourhood that you settled. How did you manage to live off?) I was unemployed for two months. My wife was unemployed, too. We had two daughters, one was 17 years old and the other was 12. We had only one aim: to find work. ... I struck up a friendship with the mukhtar. One day I was brooding on. He said "Don't worry too much" and told me to go to the Head of Human Resources Department of the State Cement Plant in the city. I was 41 years old then and he said that I exceeded the age limit of working in the public sector. He didn't want to employ me. But I was ready for every kind of job, even for portering. I wouldn't give up. When I went there I was full of hope. Because I was a bit angry, I had a row with the Head of the Department and left his office. Then upon the watchman's request, I returned and apologised. The Head of the Department said "We can't recruit you here but you may work in the subsupplier company of this plant." and I was told to go and see the engineer in the construction area. I would serve hot drinks and guard the machines. Otherwise there was no job for me. I knew nothing about serving hot drinks. I never did anything like that in Bulgaria. I was a mechanical engineer there. Moreover, it was so humiliating to guard the machines. I asked whether I could decide the following day. He said "We'll find someone else immediately. There are many people to work. It's up to you". When I heard these words, I decided to work there because I was desperately in need of work. That was the turning of my life in Turkey. (Male, 61, born in Kazanlak-Stará Zagora, retired, Tekirdağ-Saray)

Another emigre, who stayed in İstanbul when he first came to Turkey, had to work in a different sector although he was a veterinarian. He said that he never complained about this:

(What was your job in that textile factory?) I was working in the quality control department. Because I was a veterinarian there was no suitable work for me in that factory. It was in Sefaköy¹⁹ and there was no livestock breeding, so I had no right to work as a veterinarian there. They were unrolling and cutting the fabric and I was filling the hopsacks with the remnants and cleaning up the workplace. I worked in that textile factory for three months. (Was that job emotionally hard for you?) No because working as a veterinarian is also hard. Before coming to Turkey, we said "We'll work in any sector. What is important is going to Turkey". Some of the emigres returned to Bulgaria. They couldn't manage here. I can't blame them for returning. (Male, 56, born in Shumen, veterinarian, Tekirdağ-Çerkezköy)

Secondly having a house is of utmost importance. It is a sign of being settled in Turkey. That is basically why the 1989 emigres tried to do their best to have their own houses. It was a priority for them. They struggled with various difficulties. They had a single aim: to possess a house. As two of the interviewees mentioned, some of the emigres bought plots to build houses while staying in a flat they rented:

(When you came here to Saray, did you stay near your relatives?) No, we had already built one floor of our house. We didn't have much, we slowly did everything on our own. (So you stayed in Ayvalık for six years and came here in 1995. Is it the case?) Yes, we came here to our house. (Did you start building your house while you were staying in Ayvalık?) Yes, we bought the plot and slowly built our house. We invested in this house. We bore the hardships but today we are well off. (Female, 56, born in Kardzhali, retired, Tekirdağ-Saray)

At that time the most suitable prices were in Yeniköy²⁰, so my father bought a plot there. He laid the foundation of our house and we built the house on our own. In the morning we were laying the groundwork before going to work. When it rained we were draining the wells. We were trying to do everything on our own. It was very hard but we tried to do our best. We didn't want to hire workmen in order to save money. It was our effort to build a two-roomed house. Then we finished building and lived in that two-roomed, small house for about five years. There was no door, so we had to use blankets instead. For two years we had to live in that doorless house. We didn't have a washing machine and since we were crowded—5 people in the house—it was very difficult. Then we got a washing machine but I don't remember how we got it. Living in a doorless house was difficult, especially in winter. After 5-6 years, we built the second and third floors. ... (Female, 33, born in Razgrad, self-employed, Tekirdağ-Saray)

¹⁹ Sefaköy is a district known with its inhabitants who came mostly from the Balkans in late 19. and early 20. Century. The district is in the town of Küçükçekmece, located in the western side of İstanbul.

²⁰ Yeniköy is a district that belongs to the municipality of Kapaklı in Tekirdağ.

Third and last strategy is providing the educational facilities for their children. Education is as important as having their own house. The emigres consider their children's education as *sine qua non* because they grew up in a country where education was attached significance. Most of the interviewees were at least secondary school graduates. There were university graduates as well. Under such circumstances, they should provide the necessary facilities for their children. The emigres were lucky in the sense that the Turkish state assisted them. In accordance with a regulation of the Ministry of Education, in the 1989-1990 academic year, about 2000 students coming from Bulgaria in the summer of 1989 were enrolled in boardingschools without paying any tuition fees (DPT, 1990). Scholarships were given to 75 primary school, 100 secondary school and 150 high school students. Moreover, Turkish language courses were given to the children who would start attending primary school that year. An example to this is as follows:

My uncle gave importance to education so he immediately enrolled my daughter to summer school. He said "This girl is smart but she doesn't know Turkish well so she needs to go to the summer school". We were all speaking Turkish in Bulgaria but at home. My daughter had to learn Bulgarian at school. So she didn't know how to read in Turkish. She learnt Turkish well in that summer school. When the academic year started in September that year, my uncle took her to primary school and she was enrolled in the first year. There was no problem with her Turkish. (Female, 55, born in Razgrad, retired, Tekirdağ-City Centre)

Last assistance of the Turkish state was for the youngsters. The young emigres, who had begun their university education in Bulgaria, were given the opportunity to continue in those departments, as well. Yet, the author have not come across with any interviewee who made use of this opportunity.

Conclusion

The article in which the social integration of 1989 emigres from Bulgaria is examined has two arguments: one is about methodology and the other is about the concept of migrant integration. The first argument is as follows: what migrants experience in process of migration that includes migrating and settling is not easy to understand and one of the major ways to understand the whole process is to listen to the migrants because how they see and narrate the migration process is quite crucial.

The second argument is that the experiences of migrants are so complicated and different from each other that the concept of integration is not convenient in describing what migrants live through. Hence, it is necessary to support the migration-related concepts with detailed qualitative data gathered in the fieldworks. The approach adopted in this article is as such. With regard to the social integration of 1989 emigres from Bulgaria, one of the concepts put forth is "settling" (yerleşmek) and "building a life" (hayat kurmak).

The basis of the present article is a qualitative research carried out to examine the migration of two groups to Turkey: the 1989 emigres from Bulgaria and Ahıskà (Meskethian) Turks. The purpose of such a study is to examine what the 1989 emigres and Ahıskà (Meskethian) Turks have experienced in their migration processes and how they see this experience. The fieldwork of the research has been carried out in the summers of 2010 and 2011 in the four cities where most of those migrants are living. Although two migrant groups are examined in the research, the group scrutinised in the article is the 1989 emigres who are living in Tekirdağ. The data used is based on the in-depth interviews conducted mostly in the emigres' homes.

The aim of this article is to elaborate what the 1989 emigres in Tekirdağ have lived in the process of social

integration and how they see the whole process. In fact, there is a considerable amount of statistical data that gives information about the 1989 emigres. However, what is necessary is to understand the meaning emigres attach to “building life” in Turkey, and what kind of an experience “building life” is for them. Qualitative research is the most appropriate way to do that.

The 1989 emigres interviewed for the present study put emphasis on “starting from zero” and “building life”. When they came to Turkey, the emigres were faced with many hardships. Despite the fact that they were provided assistance and various facilities by the Turkish government, it was not easy to integrate. The emigres came from a country different in economic, social and political terms and the migration and integration process was a real “start from zero”. They “built a life” in their “homeland” and this was much more than settling. They continued their lives in Turkey where they felt free and secure and where they belonged. It was difficult and some were disappointed however they were happy to come. That is why they attach meaning and importance to “building life” in Turkey.

Last remark is about the need for more qualitative researches on the subject of immigrant integration. As one of the migration-related concepts, immigrant integration is to be supported with detailed qualitative data gathered in the fieldworks. What kind of a process is immigrant integration? The person who should put this into words is the immigrant himself/herself. She/he should express the experience. The most appropriate way to understand what immigrants have lived through and how they see and interpret this experience is to conduct qualitative researches because in-depth interview, which is a data collection technique, helps us in doing that. During the in-depth interviews, immigrants not only share what they have experienced in the process of migration but also they interpret this experience. That is why it is necessary for social scientists, researchers and students working on immigrant integration to make use of qualitative researches in their studies.

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