

Chapter 2*

The Migration of Turkish Speaking Communities to the UK

By AYDIN MEHMET ALI

It is not possible to give a full socio-political and historical account of the Turkish Speaking Communities (TSCs) within the confines of this book. There are a number of studies dealing with these aspects, including that of identity, in English (Mehmet Ali, 1991a; Papadakis, 1997; Küçükcan, 1996; 1999; Canefe, 1999; 2002; Robins and Aksoy, 2001). This brief summary highlights aspects impacting on educational experiences in Britain and on the needs and aspirations of the communities.

The communities came originally from Cyprus and Turkey and had different immigration patterns. There are smaller communities scattered around Britain but the majority live in and around London (Mehmet Ali, 1989; Ladbury, 1977; Oakley, 1979; Anthias, 1983). There are no accurate statistics on the size of the communities but reliable estimates suggest that with the recent arrivals of Turkish speaking Kurdish and Roma/Gypsy refugees from Cyprus, the population may be around 180,000 - 200,000.

Difficulties with Statistics

The inaccuracy and inadequacy of statistical data both in the collation and interpretation makes it very difficult to rely on the statistics available and make meaningful comparisons with other European Union countries. The colonial office statistics did not distinguish between Cypriotgreek and Cypriotturkish communities although statistics on women show that half of those arriving in Britain between 1955-1966 were women (Oakley, 1979). It is thought that this balance has not changed in the communities with the exception of the increase in the number of women in the older age groups, which is a trend throughout Europe. The Census statistics collected once every ten years, in 1981 referred only to "Cypriot born" head of household, ignoring the second and third generation born in Britain and failing to distinguish between the Cypriotgreek and Cypriotturkish communities (Mehmet Ali, 1989). The 1991 Census ignored the Cypriots as a category for providing detailed information and the 2001 Census seems set not to address the anomalies despite representations from the communities. Some local authority statistics, e.g. Hackney, Enfield, Southwark, Lewisham and Haringey, are detailed; others may refer to "other" or "other European" or fail to distinguish between the communities from Turkey and Cyprus. Official statistics do not include the "undocumented" (a better term than "illegal"). The diversity of approaches has led to a situation where...

... the TSCs have been poorly documented and researched. ... Turkish speakers are grouped with other Europeans, masking the extent of their educational

underperformance. The increasing incidents of racial attack ... go largely unreported. Turkish Speaking people in Britain thus emerge not only as a silent minority but very much a silenced minority (Mehmet Ali, 1991b).

Immigration Patterns

Immigration patterns from Cyprus and Turkey are different.

The first Cypriotturkish communities as distinct from those from Turkey in the UK can be traced to the 1920s. Increased numbers arrived in the 1940s as young single men and women, on their own or as couples, came to work in specific trades such as catering, garment and shoe-making (George and Millerson, 1967; Oakley, 1979; Anthias, 1983). For this group seeking economic betterment, education may not have been a priority until their children arrived.

The 1931 census gives the figure of 1,075 Cypriots in Britain, increasing to 10,343 by 1951. The marked increase in the late 1950s is directly related to the active recruitment of labour by the British government as well as the conflict between the communities in Cyprus promoted by colonial politics of divide and rule. The next large wave from Cyprus came in the 1960s after the island became independent. Many Cypriotturkish people in particular had been loyal to the colonial administration, serving as officers, policemen, commandos, and auxiliary policemen and were rewarded with British passports, paid passage to Britain and a lump sum to settle. The 1962 and 1968 Commonwealth immigration legislation was an added impetus for families to settle in Britain in fear that the gates might close as well as the fresh inter-communal conflicts in 1963 and 1967-1968. The next large wave came as a result of the 1974 military intervention and occupation of the island by Turkey which led to mass population exchanges and emigration. Thousands came to Britain but were not recognised as refugees unlike the Vietnamese who arrived at the same time (Mehmet Ali, 1989). Recognising the Cypriots as political refugees would have forced the British government into a political position it was trying to fudge as one of the guarantor powers in the Cyprus conflict alongside its NATO ally, the invader, Turkey. In contrast, the Vietnamese had to be accommodated, if not welcomed, because they had fought against the Viet Cong and communism on the side of Western powers.

These migrations put education on the agenda for both the communities and the British authorities, as many came with their children. Most parents believed that education was important for the social mobility of their children (Townsend and Brittan, 1972; Taylor, 1988). However, evidence suggests that in the case of the TS young people, success in education has not been realised (Mehmet Ali, 1985; 1997a; Ladbury, 1977). Recent economic success amongst some layers in the communities does not seem to be a factor in overall educational achievement levels.

In these migrations women moved with their husbands. Most had no say in the matter but a few moved on their own either for education, marriage or economic reasons. Inter-communal conflicts and wars and the continued threat of war is one of the unrecognised factors impacting on the lives of Cypriots, whether they live in Cyprus or London.

Migration from Turkey to Britain began in the early 1970s, with men arriving on their own and bringing their wives and children in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This created a different social position for the women who were left behind for many years to look after children and run the life in the villages without recognition and the men who lived on their own. Anthropological and social research exists mainly in Germany, Scandinavia, Belgium and the Netherlands which examines the impact of migration on family, village and social relations.

The arrival of men in Britain coincided with the closing of the gates across Europe following the recession of 1974, which was exacerbated by the oil crisis. Although the initial immigration to Europe was recorded as from the cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir and from Western Turkey, the initial immigrants to Britain were from the countryside. My argument in the early 1980s, that this fact was obscured by internal migration from the countryside to the cities before moving on to Europe, has been confirmed by others (CTS, 1993).

The military coup in Turkey in 1980 caused many intellectuals and highly educated professionals to flee to Europe, some seeking political asylum in Britain. Since the recent changes to legislation in Turkey, particularly the notorious sections 141 and 142 of the emergency regulations outlawing membership of particular political parties, some have returned. In Britain, initially, many were forced into menial jobs below their qualifications and experience, and others had to change careers and start again. Some found jobs in local authorities which were developing and implementing equalities policies as interpreters, advocates, lecturers, teachers, health workers and funded community organisation and project workers. Women filled a significant proportion of these posts. Lutz (1993) suggests, however, that posts only open to members of specific ethnic groups, in short term projects, lead to the ghettoisation even of the most educated, fostering exclusion and prevents the intended social integration.

The 1990s saw the arrival of the Turkish Speaking Kurdish communities with the intensification of military operations against Kurdish fighters and civilians in southeast Turkey. Many villages have been destroyed, civilians killed or forced off their lands creating large numbers of refugees in both Turkey and Europe. The estimated death toll in the area is 30,000. While some have moved to the larger cities in Turkey, enlarging the already established ghettos of "*gece konu*" settlements, thousands left for Europe to stay with friends or extended families and have sought political asylum. The Kurdish political asylum seekers are a substantial group in the TSCs and this has implications for

all aspects of the life of the communities, including education. Similarly, a large group of Roma travellers from the north of Cyprus arrived in Britain in the mid-1990s seeking political asylum. Although small in number compared to the size of the Turkish Speaking communities in Britain, they constitute a large proportion of the Cypriotroma people. The uncertainties and insecurities of living as refugees in the present political climate of racist immigration and asylum legislation particularly affect women. No accurate figures or estimates are available for either the Kurdish people or Cypriotroma (*Gurbet*).

The Turkish, Cypriot and Kurdish communities are working and living in the same areas of London and involved in similar economic, political, social and cultural activities. Although Cypriots who settled earlier had set up businesses where workers from Turkey had worked, that trend has been reversed. Children attend joint Saturday bilingual schools and women attend joint centres. But in the community centres and clubs where men dominate, the communities rarely mix. Inter-marriages do take place amongst the communities but the tendency is to keep to one's own grouping, true of especially the Kurdish communities. Politically the communities are separated by their affiliations to their own organisations and groups based on parties and political movements back "home".

Cypriots came to Britain with the intention of settling and applying for British passports if they did not already have them. The communities from Turkey seem to have arrived with the intention of making enough money to buy property or land or set up businesses in Turkey or, if they were political refugees, to wait for the right time to return. Yet even the original political asylum seekers, although free to return, have chosen to stay in Britain. The increased efficiency in communication and transport between Britain and Turkey, the relative cheapness of labour there and the possibility of European Union membership has led to the establishment of parts of Turkish-owned British business in Turkey. Many who were thinking of returning are not doing so mainly because of the dire economic situation and political instability in Turkey. It is clear that the presence of the communities in the UK is not temporary and the implications for service providers and educators are that they need to have long-term plans rather than short-term ineffective projects.

There are Kurdish, Turkish and Cypriot TS young people amongst Britain's 46,000 refugee children of differing immigration status, educational experiences and social and economic backgrounds (Rutter, 1998). The changes in the immigration and asylum legislation which determines their access to welfare benefits, coupled with the general hostility and the increase of racism and xenophobia towards refugees and asylum seekers has pushed many below the poverty line, and some to go "underground" and become "undocumented". Rutter argues that teachers and educationalists must consider the long term aims of education for children who may only be in the UK for a limited period, and effective ways of supporting children develop, whatever their legal status. The education of refugee children has attracted attention and recent studies focus on school practices as

well as initiatives to address the needs of young people in extremely vulnerable positions (Rutter and Jones 1998; Rutter, 1997; 1994; Refugee Council, 1994; Richman, 1998).

Little research has been done on children's perceptions of the refugees among them. My experience of working with refugee young women in two secondary schools supports findings that they experience persistent and violent bullying and their needs are ignored by the system. Sometimes they attract negative attention and some have reported that teachers have caused difficulties and tensions between Turkish and Kurdish young people by intervening inappropriately and misinterpreting the situation in Turkey. TS refugee young people develop strategies for dealing with such situations by sticking together and hardly having any relationships with young people from other Black and Bilingual communities. The fact that family kinship also plays a part in their coming and applying for political asylum and that the families socialise also contributes to the close relationships at school between the young people. This in itself is perceived by other Black and Bilingual (B+BL) young people as moving around in "gangs", which may lead to bullying and fights or to racist comments by school staff. Fights between "gangs" of African-Caribbean and Turkish Speaking young people have been reported in a number of schools and colleges across London causing great concern amongst Turkish Speaking professionals and others. As older brothers and sisters and cousins have also been involved and as some may have contacts with the Turkish or Kurdish mafias or the Caribbean Yardies involved in criminal activities, the danger that these scuffles may escalate to include use of fire arms is a real concern.

The Turkish Speaking Communities have a long history of presence in the UK. They have been a noticeable and sizeable language community since the early 1950s. We now have third generation Cypriotturkish young people, who have completed their whole education in this country yet the infrastructures to assess their needs and respond to them are negligible. The collection of statistics which excludes the communities, the eagerness of the first generation to become part of British society, being second in line behind the Caribbean communities who were the first on the firing line of racist attacks, and being generally "shy" may have contributed to our invisibility and silencing. However, the racist structures and attitudes in British society are responsible for that exclusion, invisibility and silencing.

Although much has changed in terms of the vibrancy of the communities in their economic, cultural, social and political activities, highly visible in London, Turkish Speaking young people are still made invisible in education.

The communities are here to stay, irrespective of their reasons for coming to Britain. Even if older generations wish to return and retire to their "homelands" and invest in homes or land, most return to the UK after a trial period. Some, like the Kurdish elderly, have no homes or villages to return to because of the savage wars in southeast Turkey.

The creation of trans-national communities and the ease of access to “homelands” in terms of cable media, daily press, food, cultural and social artefacts, and the frequency of visits across relatively short distances also contribute to a sense of settlement here and the “non-urgency” to return. While the continued economic and political uncertainties and instability in both Turkey and in Cyprus affect the decisions of some in the communities to stay, the “homeland” of others is Britain.

© AYDIN MEHMET ALI

* from the book, *Turkish Speaking Communities & education – no delight* (2001).
FATAL publications. fatal@freezone.co.uk