‘*KEBAPCIS* DO NOT HAVE LIVES’:
MIGRANT NETWORKS AND IDENTITY AMONG TURKISH LABOUR MIGRANTS IN ST ANDREWS

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‘*Kebapcis* (kebap shop workers) do not have lives’ – Metin

‘Write this down Lara, *kebapcis* do not have lives.’ – Ali

‘I’m lucky that I have a day job, *kebapcis* do not have lives’ – Ahmet

While spending time with Turkish migrants working in kebap shops in St Andrews, it was repeated to me many times that ‘*kebapcis* do not have lives.’ Nevertheless, my intention was to examine and to become part of their lives, or to discover why they were conceived as having ‘non-lives’. By focusing on two kebap shops in St Andrews, Dervish and The Empire, I will focus on migration in an attempt to understand the strategies and forces that shape labour migrants’ experiences. For the first part of this paper I will follow the process of migration, first talking about separation from the home country, then integration into the host country, and finally I will focus on my informants’ plans for the future. By looking at the reasons why they left Turkey and how they settled down in the UK, I will examine the networks migrants create during the migration process, and how these networks both facilitate and maintain migration. In the second part, I will focus on how migrants have established themselves in the UK, and through examination of the hierarchy within the restaurant I will study the identities they have created for themselves. In the last part, through reflection on my own position among the Turkish migrants I spent time with, I will argue that migration, instead of being one directional and static, is a multidimensional and dynamic process.

Being Turkish myself, my initial reaction to the project was to conduct my ethnography with a Turkish group in St Andrews, as I believed that my familiarity with the cultural context would help me connect and identify with my informants easily as well as making it easier for me to analyse my observations. This assumption proved to be partially true, as I will discuss later. Over the course of the project I worked a night shift at Empire and day shift at Dervish. I also interviewed Kemal and Metin, two employees at Empire; Ali, the owner of Dervish; Ayse an

employee at Dervish; and finally Ahmet, a close friend of Ayse and Ali who spends most of his time at Dervish. All of the interviews were conducted in Turkish except with Ahmet who switched back and forth between English and Turkish as he said 'sometimes I feel I can express myself better in English.' I have translated all interviews, however at points I have chosen to keep certain words in Turkish and explain their meanings and implications, as I believe translating them would reduce their power.

Turkish migration to the UK can be categorised into three waves. Atay (2010) explains that Turkish migration to the UK started in the early 1970s to fill the need for cheap labour in the textile industry. The second wave of migrants arrived in the 1980s seeking political asylum after the military coup in Turkey and the third wave of Kurds from Southern Turkey in the early 1990s (Atay, 2010: 124-125). Even though the exact reasons for leaving Turkey varied between the Turks I talked to, an economic concern always made up part of their decision to migrate. Metin, the manager of Empire, left Turkey and came to London in 2001 after he got married in Turkey. He told me, 'when I got married and had kids I realised that I had to support them and offer them a good life. I came to the UK because of economic reasons. Because the laws are established here and you are safe'. Ahmet, who came to Scotland six years ago and now runs a mobile phone shop in Cupar, repeated similar ideas: 'I'm happy here because I'm safe. You work and you get paid for the amount of work you do.' Everyone mentioned how the UK was more organised, the laws more established and the legal system fairer. Therefore, I believe that my informants are not comparable with the first wave of Turkish migrants, who came to the UK solely to provide manpower. Rather, they are part of a fourth wave of labour migrants who started coming to the UK in the early 2000s in the hope of creating a better life for them and their children, not just in economic, but also in social terms by fostering an entrepreneurial spirit.

Over the course of my interviews it became clear to me that all my informants knew someone in the UK before they decided to migrate. Kemal, who works at Empire, decided to move to the UK because he had a brother who lived in and owned a café in London. Similarly, Metin had a friend who lived in London who sponsored his visa. Interestingly, Metin then sponsored his nephew's visa when his nephew migrated to the UK. Although Ayse differs from other Turks in terms of her motives for migrating - she moved to Scotland sixteen years ago after

marrying a Scottish man - her husband nevertheless served as a contact for her in the UK, in a similar way that family members did for others. Her brother, Ali, came to the UK two years after Ayse. This pattern supports the argument that migration is highly influenced and facilitated by close groups such as family and friends. I will call these relationships, which clearly play an important role in migration, 'networks.' Massey et al. (2010) describe migrant networks as 'sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin' (Massey et al. 1993: 448). My Turkish informants would be less likely to come to the UK if they did not have friends or family here, since through these networks they were able to have their visas sponsored as well as learn information about the host country and the migration process.

The networks migrants develop in their host countries can help them find jobs and, as my informants pointed out, big cities such as London, Edinburgh and Glasgow serve as hubs for Turkish migrants to advertise and hear about job opportunities. 'There are *kahvehanes* (traditional Turkish coffee houses) in Edinburgh. All the *kebapcis* go there and hang out. That is how they hear about jobs,' Ahment told me. Similarly, Kemal spoke about coffee shops in London and said 'you hear about job vacancies through coffee shops, and you create contacts.' He found his job at Empire through his networks, as he explains: 'I came to Scotland because I had friends here that knew the owner of Empire, and through those connections I found this job.' This suggests that the networks he is part of shaped his economic strategies. These examples further suggest that migrant networks not only benefit individuals economically, but also play a role in creating a sense of home and support in the host country. For example, *kahvehane*s clearly serve as spaces where Turks can gather and replicate their culture in a new setting.

Migrant networks not only include ethnic networks but also relationships with individuals from the host country, and these relationships serve as important influences in migrants' lives. Ali is married to a Scottish woman, Gaye, who works at Dervish during the day with Ayse. 'When I first came to the UK I was illegally here, so I had to marry someone to get a visa. But now we get along very well and run a family business together' Ali told me. Although I would not want to limit their relationship simply to socio-economic benefits - I observed a very loving

and caring relationship between them while working at Dervish - their marriage does benefit Ali greatly as it gives him indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Their relationship can be understood through the examination of the notion of social capital, which Portes describes as the 'capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their memberships in networks or broader social structures' (Portes 1998:12). Because Ali gained his legal status through the intimate relationship he had with his wife, their marriage can be seen as a strong form of social capital. Metin and Kemal's friendship with Allan, a grocer from St Andrews, can also be seen as a form of social capital. Thanks to their relationship, they were able to buy vegetables from him for a cheaper price than he would give to others. Another interesting aspect of Scottish-Turkish relationships I observed was that Turks gave their Scottish friends Turkish names, as a way to incorporate them into their own cultural context. Even though Gaye was originally Gaye's surname, and clearly an English name, when pronounced as it would be in Turkish it became a common Turkish name. By pronouncing her name a certain way, Ali gave his wife a Turkish identity and put her into a Turkish context. Similarly Metin and Kemal call Allan 'Iblis', which means devil in Turkish. They said he used to always try to make the most profit, which in the eyes of Metin and Kemal was the product of an evil genius. By relating to the inhabitants of their host country in ways such as these, my informants created closer bond between the two cultures.

The next step of the migration process deals with the integration of migrants into the host country. When I asked Ali why he went into the kebap business he said, 'I had no other option. When I first came into the country I didn't know the language.' Kemal's words echoed him, 'nearly all Turks I know are in the kebap or food business. What else can we do? You come here but you don't know the language.' Irdan (2013) conducted research with Turkish-speaking migrants in London, and classified them into two groups: low-skilled and high-skilled. In Irdan's conception, migrants with primary and secondary education working in the kebap business would be classified as low-skilled. I will adopt this term to describe the Turkish migrants I worked with since, in their own words, they described going into the kebap business as 'the only option' they had, as a result of their low-level English skills.

Since most informants I talked to worked in kebap shops owned by their relatives or friends when they first came to the UK, they did not have opportunities to move out of the Turkish

network and integrate with members of the host country. When describing his first years in the UK, Kemal said

> 'It was really hard when I first came here. I didn't know anything. So at first they made me cut the doner. The tops of my hands were all burnt because of the heat. My face was always red. It was the worst job. I was really alone. But then a few people at work started giving me directions, telling me to do things this way or that way. We then started going out together and became friends. That's how I got used to living here.'

As well as showing the support networks offered, this highlighted that since Kemal's life was limited to his workplace; all his friends were Turks from the same business, so their lives were bound not only by economic ties but also social ones.

Portes calls this 'overlapping multiplexity', which refers to 'the degree to which relations between participants include overlapping institutional spheres' (Portes[1995], cited in Irdan 2013: 34). Another example of this multiplexity is Ayse working in her brother's business, since they are bound by kinship ties, as well as economic activities. Ali told me, 'when my sister got married to a Scottish guy I had to come here to *goz kulak olmak',* which in its literal sense means 'to be an eye and ear to someone', but is used to mean 'to take care of someone'. Ayse's husband did not let her work before her brother opened his own business, and as a result Ayse felt very isolated in her first years in the UK. Irdan (2013) argues that 'women from working class families are usually not allowed to work in non-family based enterprises' in Turkey and therefore feel more isolated (Irdan 2013: 38). Ayse only being able to work in the family business shows that family relationships play an important role in maintaining and reproducing 'ethnic identities and values in host societies' (Irdan 2013: 38), as well as limiting the scope of interaction with individuals outside ethnic networks.

Due to being limited to their ethnic networks, low-skilled Turkish migrants are strongly identified with the jobs they do. Some of my informants referred to themselves as *kebapcis,* and repeated several times the assertion that '*kebapcis* do not have lives' by which they meant that their whole lives were centred around their jobs. Ayse explained this further: 'they never have a day off, they close the store at three am and start work at two pm the other day.'

Kebapcis were therefore left with little or no time for any other activities. Kemal explained furthermore that there was a hierarchy within kebap shops and that newcomers started doing jobs that required no interaction with the host country such as cutting the *doner* meat. According to Metin 'once you learn the language and the ways of the new culture you can start serving customers.' The highest position you can achieve is owning a kebap shop and serving customers, as this implies a good level of adaptation to the host country and good language skills. Even though this is the highest position within the social hierarchy, and the person in this position does interact with the customers of the host country, they still do this through their *kebapci* identity.

Although all of the Turkish migrants I talked to are limited to their *kebapci* identity in the UK, this does not mean that this is the same identity they had back in Turkey. In fact, none of my informants worked in the food sector in Turkey. Their *kebapci* identity is newly constructed through the re-negotiation, in the context of the host country, of the values and identities they had in the home country. While I was working at Empire and helping Kemal prepare and roll out the pizza dough he turned to me and said 'in this country we're doing what women in Turkey do. We are the ones who prepare the dough. I really found it odd at the start. It's so hard to roll the dough thin. Now I'm used to it. I don't find it odd that I'm doing what women do. I like my job.' Kemal, who had never prepared dough before in Turkey and associated it with women's work, now prepares dough on a daily basis as part of his job. In this way he has re-negotiated the values he had in Turkey, to fit the identity he has created in the UK.

Even though I have generalised both restaurants as kebap shops, they differ greatly in their structure. While Empire only serves takeaway food such as pizzas and chips, Dervish is quite popular among locals as a lunch destination as it offers seating and Turkish mezes and kebaps during the day, as well as takeaway food at night. Empire does not advertise itself as a Turkish restaurant; the sign reads: 'Empire. Pizza, Burger & Kebabhouse'. Nor does their menu mention the word Turkish, and the only items on the menu that refer to Turkish cuisine are the kebaps they serve. On the other hand, the Dervish sign reads: 'Dervish. Turkish & Mediterranean Restaurant' as well as having two Dervish figures. Dervishes are members of Muslim Sufi religious order known for their vows of austerity, and have strong connections to Turkish culture. When I asked Ayse about her future plans for Dervish, she said that they

wanted to turn the restaurant into ‘an evening restaurant where people can come in for dinner and enjoy Turkish food and not just takeaway.’ By adopting the Turkish identity and trying to change the image they have of the shop, Ayse and her brother are trying to make Dervish more respectable in the eyes of the community. This activity on the part of Ayse and Ali can be understood in terms of Fuller and Tian’s (2006) conception of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is about one’s ‘reputation and value as perceived by others’ (Fuller and Tian 2006: 290) and can only ‘exist in the eyes of others’ (Joppke [1986], in Caglar 1999: 275). It can be argued that by changing Dervish and making it a more respectable Turkish restaurant rather than a kebap shop, the owners want to draw on their symbolic capital in order to break free of the Turkish migrant-kebapci identity as perceived by the host culture.

When I asked my informants about their future plans they shared similar hopes and dreams. Metin told me that he had bought two flats in Turkey. He said he wants ‘to invest in life back in Turkey,’ since he hopes to spend half of the year in Scotland and half in Turkey in the future. ‘When you get used to living here, Turkey feels weird’ he added. Ahmet was much in agreement. He told me, in English, ‘I feel like I belong to both sides. When you get used to where you live it’s hard to go back. I like how peaceful it is here, it will be hard when I go back because of all the chaos.’ My informants’ future plans suggested that they don’t consider Scotland as their final destination. Rather they treat both countries as home and imagine a future in both of them.

Looking back at my project, I want to reflect on some of the false assumptions I made. I assumed that being Turkish would make me an insider in the lives of my informants and that through talking to them I would not only discover aspects of their life, but I would also make sense of my own position in Scotland. Even though my ethnicity did facilitate their opening up to me easily and made communication easier, I very soon realised that our experiences living in the UK were very different. As I came to Scotland to be part of a university environment and knew English very well, I was part of an international network rather than an ethnically defined network. This allowed me to create an identity not solely based on my ethnicity, but have my ethnicity be part of my identity. While I was working at Dervish, Ayse taught me how to make a traditional Turkish pastry called *sigara boregi (cigarette pastry),* feta cheese rolled in a thin pastry to resemble a long figure similar to a cigarette. While I was rolling the pastry

in my hand, to ensure mine were as tight as the ones Ayse rolled, she kept giving me directions such as '*Laracim,* just put a *wee* bit cheese in the middle.' Even though she called me *Laracim*, which means 'my dear Lara' in Turkish she would also use the Scottish vernacular word *wee*, bringing both cultures together to create a hybrid language. It was through the process of making *sigara boregi* that I came to realise Turkey and Scotland were not two totally different countries for me where I had to adopt different identities in each place. Rather they were both places I called home, as Scotland was part of my Turkish identity, and Turkey part of my Scottish identity.

This researched showed me that, through the networks they created, my informants formed new identities that were the products of renegotiating the values and identities they had in Turkey, in their new setting. I realised that migration, rather than being a one-directional movement, should be seen as a dynamic process that facilitates multi-directional movement between the host country and the home country, since my informants did not see Scotland as their final destination and hoped for a future that moved between Turkey and Scotland. Similarly the host country and the home country, rather than being two separate concepts, should be seen as interacting with each other through the process of migration and the lives of migrants, and should be seen as being shaped by these interactions.

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