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İKİ YER VE ONLARIN ARASINDAKİ HAYAL ALANI- ZAHİT GÜNEY'İN “ÖZLEM-2”, “GÖÇMEN KADINLARI” VE LATİF ALİ YILDIRIM'IN “YAŞLI GÖÇMENLER” ŞİİRLERİ

PLACES AND SPACES IN ZAHIT GÜNEY'S LONGING-2 [ÖZLEM-2], THE IMMIGRANT WOMEN [GÖÇMEN KADINLARI] AND LATİF ALİ YILDIRIM'S THE AGED IMMIGRANTS [YAŞLI GÖÇMENLER]

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ÖZ

Bir yere ‘ait olma’ duygusu göç edenler için sorunsal bir olgudur. Özellikle bu göç zorunlu olduğunda, Bulgaristan Türklerinin 89 göçü gibi, ‘ait olma’ ve özlem duygusu değişik boyutlar alır. Bu göç bir ‘ana vatandan’ diğer ‘ana vatana’ gitme olarak algılansa da (bunun nedeni ise, bu makalede tartışıldığı gibi, Bulgaristan Türkleri için bu göçün onların doğduğu, büyüdüğü, anılarının, mal varlıklarının olduğu yaşadıkları yerlerden zorla- onların etnik olarak, dil ve din olarak, bağlı oldukları yurtlarına göç etmesi gibi görülmesidir), özünde 89 Göçü bir sürgündür, zorla yaşadıkları yerlerden koparılmadır. Bu nedenledir ki, Zahit Güney ve Latif Ali Yıldırım gibi göçmenlerin yazdığı özlem şiirleri ‘iki vatan arasında kalma ikilemini’ ele alır. Şimdiki çalışma, iki yurda ait olma hissiyatının getirdiği çelişkileri yaşayan göçmenlerin, fiziksel olarak bu iki yerde bulunamamanın imkânsızlığını bir yerden – diğer yere hayali yolculuklarda bulunarak aşma çabalarını inceler. Bu mecazi yolculukların gerçekleştiği ‘ara-alan’- düşler, hatıralar alanıdır. Şiirlerde de görüldüğü gibi, çoğu zaman onların fiziksel sınırları aşıp, gündelik zorlukları bir kenara bırakıp, özlem duydukları evleri, geçmişte kalan mutluluk ve saadeti çağrıştıran anılarını tek canlı tutabildikleri ve tekrar tekrar yaşayabildikleri alandır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk Göçmen Şiirleri, Vatan Olgusu, Ait Olma Olgusu, Özlem, Yer ve Ara-Alan Olgusu

ABSTRACT

Since home for the displaced immigrant is simultaneously ‘here’ and ‘there’, in the present and in the past, the following paper discusses how the forcefully deported from Bulgaria to Turkey immigrants in 1989 deal with the existential dilemma of *belonging* in the Turkish immigration poetry. Both places: The Republic of Turkey – the home of ethnic, linguistic and cultural roots and Bulgaria – the natal homeland of youth, sacred memories and belongings are of emotional significance for the immigrants. Facing the challenge of the physical impossibility to be simultaneously ‘here’ and ‘there’, the immigrants indulge in daydreams in the imaginary spaces of memories. The poems are approached in the context of the Turkish immigration literature and the theoretical frameworks of Yi-Fu Tuan’s book **Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience** and John McLeone’s work **Diaspora Identities**. The main focus of the paper is the representation of the liminal spaces of the immigrants’ imagination. Themselves immigrants, Zahit Güney and Latif Ali Yıldırım, the two poets whose poems are analysed, express deep understanding of the immigrants’ experiences. With the use of figurative language, they draw vivid scenes of their everyday lives, thoughts and feelings; with artistry imply their longings for the far away homelands and address universal themes such as the notions of belonging and nostalgia. Although the theme of migration has been popular for decades; surprisingly, there is scarcely anything written about the Turkish immigration literature. This paper sheds light on the importance of discussing the works of migrant authors such as Zahit Güney and Latif Ali Yıldırım, not only because their poetry is pleasurable to read but also because they have unique approaches to fundamental themes.

Key words: Turkish Immigration Poetry, Displacement, Home, Belonging, In-Betweenness

This disjunction between past and present, between here and there, makes 'home' seem far-removed in time and space, available for return only through an act of the imagination.

– John McLeod, **Diaspora Identities**

The conventional notion of home is often problematic for migrants. It is particularly complex for the forcefully deported or the ones who had no choice, but to leave. Far from the places of their birth, childhood, youth, adulthood, the displaced by the communist regime in Bulgaria Turkish and Muslim minorities in 1989 – since then have been confronted with the dilemma of belonging. Even though the new residence - the Republic of Turkey - by no means has been unfamiliar to them or unloved by them, the loss of the original home brought together with it the existential lack of rootedness, the feeling of something missing, the sense of in-betweenness. The following paper approaches three poems written by immigrant poets about immigrants' longing for the lost origins. It is argued that the only way out of the dilemma of their simultaneous experience of here and there, of present and past, is the immigrants' escapes from the mundane activities through the abstract recreations of homes (and all they stand for) in the liminal spaces of their imagination. Within the historical context of the mass expulsion of ethnic Turks and Muslims, the Turkish immigration poetry is firstly approached in the thematical framework of Migrant Literature. The immigrants' problematic notions of places, spaces and time as well as belonging and in-betweenness are then discussed in the theoretical contexts of Yi-Fu Tuan's book **Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience** and John McLeon's work **Diaspora Identities**.

Sandra Vlasta in the **Introduction** to her book **Contemporary Migration Literature in German and English** focuses on how literature written by immigrants or/and about immigrants has recently been accepted as a distinct genre with its distinct forms and thematic features (3-4). Throughout her study, she emphasizes the point that "migrant and multicultural literature are mainly defined by the authors and their (migratory) backgrounds" (39). Zahit Güney and Latif Ali Yıldırım are prominent authors of the Turkish immigration literature, a genre thematically defined as literature about the forced migration of the Turkish and Muslim populations from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989 (Kahraman & Güneş, 2015). The historically specific literary genre is divided into three major distinct periods – Before the Immigration, The Immigration Process and After the Immigration (Kahraman & Güneş, 2015). Cahit Kahraman and İlhan Güneş classify further the Turkish immigration poetry into ten categories in accordance with their themes, conveyed messages and aroused emotions: Tarihi bir olgu olarak göç [Immigration as a historical phenomenon], Göç öncesi adalet arayışı ve mücadele olgusu [The demand for justice and the notion of resistance before the immigration], Göç etme nedeni olarak Türklük, Türkçe ve "Kimliğe" kavuşma olgusu [The reasons behind the immigration: Turkishness, the Turkish language and the recovery of

“Turkish identity”], Göç şiirlerinde vatan sevgisi olgusu [The notion of love towards the homeland in the immigration poems] (‘homeland’ stands for the Republic of Turkey), Özgürlük olgusu olarak göç [Immigration as a notion of freedom], Göç sonrası özlem olgusu [Expressing feelings of longing after the immigration], Göç’ün getirdiği acılar, sıkıntılar ve zorluklar [The sufferings, hardships and difficulties of immigration], Göç sonrası ayrılık ve yalnızlık olgusu [The notions of loneliness and separation after the immigration], Göç ve iki vatan arasında kalma olgusu [Immigration and the notion of being in-between two homelands], Göç sonrası boş ve sahipsiz kalan yerlere ağıt [Lament for the empty and unowned properties and places]¹.

Although many of the headings of the listed categories point at the difficulties the immigrants have been through after the immigration to Turkey in 1989, Cahit Kahraman and İlhan Güneş claim that none of the poems deals with the sufferings of the displaced immigrants. According to them, “the poems does not address any adaptation problems after the immigration. As it has already been stated, the immigration has been perceived as a “bayram”[celebration] or a “gift”[reward], [and] the faced hardships have been forgotten²” (529-530). To support their claims, they refer to Ali Bayram’s poem **My People [Benim Halkım]**(530). Despite the provided useful information about the Turkish Immigration Literature and the brief commentaries on the poet Zahit Güney’s life and his poetry in general, the conference paper apparently contradicts itself. Particularly problematic about inauthentic statements like these is the ignorance of historical facts, ignorance of immigrant tragedies and sufferings³. First of all, it is unacceptable to make fundamental thematic assumptions about all poems in a specific literary genre, such as the Turkish immigration poetry, by neglecting to consider a considerable number of poems, among which are the poems this paper is to discuss. I would agree that there is great poetry by immigrant authors such as Ali Bayram, Niyazi Hüseyin Bahtiyar, Nevzat Yakup Deniz and many others who in one way or another celebrate the arrival to the beloved Turkish Republic. However, this does not mean that there are no poems about the mental and physical hardships of the immigrants in Turkey or about immigrants’ longing for their lost natal homeland Bulgaria –

¹ The Turkish and Bulgarian references are translated from their original languages into English by me in the present paper.

² “Göç şiirlerinde, göç sonrası acılardan veya zorluklardan bahsedilmemiştir. Göç sonrası adaptasyon sorunu da şiirlerde konu edilmemiştir. Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, bu göç bir “bayram” ya da bir “ödül” olarak algılanmış, çekilen sıkıntılar unutulmuştur. Ali Bayram, “Benim Halkım” şiirinde göçmenlerin keder dolu kaderlerine göç ile çare bulduklarını belirtir” (529-530).

³ Zeynep Zafer, one of the most erudite scholars who have addressed a wide spectrum of historical, political and literary themes on the communist regime in Bulgaria and its oppression on Muslim minorities, discusses both the goals of the ethnic Turks and the political aims of Todor Jivkov before the events of 1989. Based on documented historical data, she reveals that unable to assimilate the Turks, Jivkov’s plan was to psychologically and physically force them to leave Bulgaria and to confiscate their properties. On the other hand, having realised the real possibility of getting back their names and human rights with legal means through legal organisations and protests, the Turkish population in Bulgaria did not aim to emigrate and leave behind their homes and lives (**Bulgaristan Türklerinin**, 229-232).

themes elegantly engraved in the poetry of Ibrahim Kamberoğlu, Osman Azis, Recep Küpçü, Zahit Güney, Latif Ali Yıldırım and others.

One of the most distinct features of the Turkish immigration literature as a genre, in my view, is the highly complicated notion of 'homeland' for the Bulgarian immigrant from Turkish descent. Historico-geographically and socio-politically both lands have been linked for centuries. The direct and indirect linkage of the two places must have brought about the formation of ambiguous proximities of relatedness of the Bulgarian ethnic Turks to Bulgaria and Turkey. Both places have been homes to them for hundreds of years: the Republic of Turkey – the far away home of their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural roots; Bulgaria – the physical home, the place of birth and youth, the home of belongings and memories. Thus, the 1989 immigration can be approached as a migration from one 'home' to 'another'. Nevertheless, this is not a peaceful migration. The brutalities of the communist regime in addition to the physical and psychological force of the displacement, are literal causes for the disruptions to the Bulgarian ethnic Turks' notions of home and senses of belongingness. From the position of displaced subjects, the Bulgarian ethnic Turks have been left with two main options: first, to metaphorically shut themselves off from the place of birth, to reject and banish Bulgaria from their everyday lives; or second, to face the challenge of finding a way to accomodate both homes – the land of ethnic origin (which is now the place of residence) and the lost natal land of memories. Zahit Güney's poem **Longing-2** is an artistic commentary on the existential impossibility of this challenge:

When there
I was 'called' by
Here;

Here
I am in pain for
There;

To save myself
The trouble
To Kapikule

Should I border gate become?⁴

Himself an immigrant, the poet can closely relate to the immigrants' feelings about the two homelands. The Speaker is tormented by the hopeless situation in which he cannot be at both places at the same time. In his book **Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience**, Yi-Fu Tuan draws attention to the differences between 'places' and 'spaces'. He defines space as a "symbol of freedom". It "lies open; it suggests the future and invites action"; whereas place in comparison to space is "a calm center of established values", an "[e]nclosed and humanized space" (54). The 'here' and 'there' in the poem **Longing-2** are the Speaker's two homelands, which are geographically fixed places. His inability to be both 'here' and 'there' is due to the physical impossibility to occupy them simultaneously. 'Troubled' and 'in pain', the Speaker humorously expresses yet how the only way out is to become a "border gate". An object for physical contact, a threshold - the border gate symbolizes the qualities of 'space'. It frees the Speaker of the physical limitations. Metaphorically, it allows him to be in the liminal space of here and there without the need for constant back-and-forth wanderings.

Zahit Güney's poem **The Immigrant Women** lyrically exposes the immigrant women's longing for their lost homeland and their imaginary ways of coping with the physical challenge of distance. The poem consists of three parts and each of them depicts the immigrant women involved in different activities, in different locations under different circumstances, which makes the parts appear, at first sight, as distinct poems under the same title. Part **I** draws a vivid picture of a Saturday rain and the working in the fields immigrant women's welcoming the rain with a joyful fertility song. The poem opens with the description of the end of a "sweaty Saturday", which from the very beginning implies the start of leisure time, when the women would be free to daydream. The only reference to the far away homeland in part **I** is in the last stanza of the poem:

Who brought remains obscure
The Balkan
Fragrant wildflowers
On their faces;⁵

⁴ Zahit Güney's **Özlem-2**: Oradayken / Burnumda tütüyor / Burası;

Burada / Ciğerlerimi ütüyor / Orası;

Kurtulmak için / Bu dertten / Kapıkule'de / Kapı mı olayım?

⁵ The stanza in the original Turkish: Konduran kondurmuş işte / Balkanlar'da yetişen / Mis kokulu kır çiçekleri / Şimdi yüzlerinde; (Güney, 2006, s. 10-13)

The extended picturesque metaphor for the smiles on their faces, suggests that happiness for the immigrant women comes from the Balkans. The Balkans – a symbol of their lost homelands – are the reason behind the moment of bliss, which has come with the rain. Raining as a natural phenomenon figuratively becomes the physical threshold that brings together both homelands in the immigrant women's imagination. The literal touch of the raindrops with their faces indicates the two places/countries getting together in the rich storehouses (spaces) of memories and reveries.

Part II of **The Immigrant Women**, in contrast to the first part of the poem, does not draw a serene pastoral picture. Instead, the Speaker depicts the sobering reality of the immigrant cleaning women and their escape from the grim life conditions in memories, dreams and imagination. The first stanza starts with the Speaker's rhetorical question: "Don't I know the immigrant cleaning women"⁶. The Speaker firmly states his full awareness of their hardships, silent thoughts and hidden feelings and narrates short scenes of the women's experiences. In the 2nd stanza of the poem, for example, the readers are told of how unbearably painful it is for them to be in front of foreign doors, and how they fall into a state of reverie in the spaces of imagination when humiliated:

Don't I know the immigrant cleaning women
Don't I know what they are talking about
Without doing any talking;

As if sitting on thorns in front of foreign doors
Dreaming in the spaces of imagination
Once victims of humiliation; (1-6)⁶

The "sitting on thorns" symbolizes the pain and annoyance these women feel awaiting to clean the houses, which are not their own. Forced to leave Bulgaria almost without any belongings and financial means⁷, the immigrants often occupied low rank positions to earn their livings in the first years of their arrivals in Turkey. Once cleaning up their own houses in Bulgaria, now they had to make someone else's homes neat and tidy. Psychologically and

⁶ In the original Turkish:

Bilmez miyim temizlikçi göçmen kadınlarını ben / Bilmez miyim ne konuştuklarını / Hiç konuşmadan;
El kapılarında diken üstünde durduklarını / Düşsel evrenlerde düş kurduklarını / Onurları kırılınca; (Güney, 2002, s. 1-6)

⁷ Check Zeynep Zafer's **Bulgaristan Türklerinin 89 Göçünü Hazırlayan Eritme Politikasına Karşı Direnişi** [**The Resistance of the Bulgarian Turks to the Forced 89 Migration Politics of Melting**], p. 232.

financially under pressure, the cleaning women feel undeserved shame and their only safe-space away from the current position and place has become “the space of imagination”.

Part **III** of the poem invites the readers in the immigrant women’s dream-world while they literally return to their lodgings. It opens with a vivid metaphor for the process of imagination which is compared to a weaving of colourful swings to the rainbow that will make them fly to their homes in Bulgaria. The activity of weaving recalls a symbolic representation of the craft of storytelling that dates back to Penelope’s weaving in Homer’s **The Odyssey**. The immigrant women fashion their own swings - signs both of freedom and childhood - and begin to swing in the sky of daydreams – the in-between space of imagination. The movements of the swing forwards and backwards imply their imaginary journey from here - the present homeland to there - the lost, but very much dear to them Bulgaria. As they literally walk towards their lodgings, the women reach their abandoned houses in Bulgaria. The repetition of “kendi [their]” more than ten times in the poem, stresses their longing for the things that belong and relate to them. Aware of the ‘backwards’ movement of the swing, the immigrant women enjoy the blissful dream. With the use of figurative language, Zahit Güney not only paints with artistry the everyday lives of the immigrant women but also implies their longing for the places of their birth, their homes, sacred memories to which they simultaneously journey in the space of in-betweenness.

Latif Ali Yıldırım’s poem **The Aged Immigrants**, similar to Zahit Güney’s **The Immigrant Women**, deals with the immigrants’ imaginary wanderings to the homelands of sacred memories. The poem is figuratively formed as a series of reflections upon the elderly immigrants’ possible daydreams. Different from the dynamism of the working immigrant women, the elderly immigrants are literally static. The Speaker describes them sitting with “dooping shoulders” (l.9), with wrists - having lost their youthful power (l.11-12), with exhausted bodies (l.46) holding their loneliness in their palms (l.4-7). Although their bodies remain still like trapped ‘animals’ in the park with the symbolic name *Avcılar* [The Hunters], the old immigrants’ hearts are said to beat for their homes with hand-woven walls and memories of comfort and joy (l.16-27). The poem firmly establishes the dichotomy between the physical body of the elderly immigrant men and their imagination as the only source of life. The physical restrictions of the old age does not make it possible for them to literally visit the houses of their dear memories; thus the Speaker says that these places are “far awaaaay”:

Their homes from them
Were so far awaaaay... (l. 28-29)

Nevertheless, continues the Speaker:

And so near were they,

Similar to the prayer hall Musalla
In the mosque yard...
If they stretch,
They would reach it. (l. 28-34)⁸

The metaphor of the prayer hall Musalla, implies how the inevitable forthcoming death would make the hardly possible – real; and free the elderly immigrants from the bodily restrictions. In his study, John McLeod states that “[b]orders are important thresholds, full of contradiction and ambivalence. They both separate and join different places” (217). Unlike Zahit Güney’s border gate in **Longing-2**, which is a link between the two places, Latif Ali Yıldırım’s figurative border – the body – is the barrier that separates the old men from their dreamlands. In contrast with the imagination, which suggests a temporal freedom, death for the elderly immigrants, represents ultimate freedom.

Having come with the “trains of shame” (Yıldırım, 2001), the immigrants in Zahit Güney’s poems **Longing-2** and **The Immigrant Women** as well as Latif Ali Yıldırım’s **The Aged Immigrants** share the same cultural and historical narrative of forceful displacement that does not allow them to relate both physically and mentally to one place. As the Speaker of **The Aged Immigrants** states in the last stanza of the poem:

Having their bodies in one place
In another the beats
Of their hearts...
And above all their dreams...
Their direction and location
Do not try to guess. (l. 59-64)⁹

It seems to be the immigrants’ fate to constantly wander, shift between here and there in the liminal spaces of imagination. This paper has approached the poems within the context of Turkish immigration literature and suggested that the most peculiar characteristic of the immigrants with Turkish descent coming from Bulgaria is their complicated notions of home

⁸ In the original Turkish: Evleri şimdi onlardan / O kadar uzaaaak... / Ve o kadar yakın ki, / Cami avlusundaki / Musalla taşı... / Uzansalar, / Erebileceklerdi. (Yıldırım, 2001, s. 28-34)

⁹ In the original Turkish: Bedenleri başka yerdedir, / Bir başka yerde çarpar / Yürekleri... / Hele hele düşleri... / Yönünü ve yerini / Saptırmaya çalışmayın. (Yıldırım, 2001, s. 59-64)

and belonging due to the centuries of cultural, historical and geographical inter-dependencies of both countries. Themselves immigrants, Zahit Güney and Latif Ali Yıldırım, similar to their Speakers in the poems, deeply understand and address the everyday existential problems the immigrants face. Denying the loss of home, the immigrants simultaneously reconstruct idealized utopic versions of their past lives and frequently engage in daydreaming, which brings them temporal joy and has the peculiar power of healing and soothing.

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