



On the move in search of health and care: Circular migration and family conflict amongst older Turkish immigrants in Germany



Tolga Tezcan*

Department of Sociology and Criminology and Law, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on circular migration amongst older Turkish immigrants to investigate two main questions: (1) How do perceived health and available healthcare systems in Turkey and Germany determine the structure of circular migration? (2) How is eldercare shaped by intergenerational conflict and exchange relations amongst older immigrants, their adult children in Germany, and their extended families in Turkey? Through the analysis of 40 in-depth interviews, this study finds that while Turkey offers healthier physical, psychological, and religious options, older circular migrants are more drawn to Germany because they perceive its healthcare system to be superior. Furthermore, contrary to conventional accounts, eldercare has mostly been navigated through intergenerational conflict and exchange relations, instead of family solidarity or traditional filial roles, and these conflicts and exchange principles around eldercare regulate family living arrangements across the two countries. In short, older Turkish immigrants encounter unique challenges in both their home and host countries, which promulgates their circular migration.

Introduction

This study focuses on first-generation Turkish immigrants who came to Germany to fulfill the demand for short-term labor in 1960s, remained in Germany, and then, following their retirement, engaged in circular migration. In particular, it deals with the circular movements of older Turkish immigrants who travel back and forth between Turkey and Germany and their familial conflicts as they seek to improve their health and the quality of eldercare¹ they receive.

Given the number of older immigrants who are settled in host countries, aging is one of the most urgent social policy topics on these countries' agendas. To promote quality of life for the older, policy-makers have sought to facilitate *aging in place*, which entails independence, control over one's environment, and a sense of safety (Cutchin, 2003; Hammarström & Torres, 2010). Essentially, aging in place emphasizes the functional, symbolic, and emotional meanings of homes, neighborhoods, and wider communities (Gardner, 2011; Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012). The primary questions it raises concern *when* and *under which circumstances* older immigrants tend to return to their countries of origin following their retirement (Byron & Condon, 1996; Duleep, 1994; King, Warnes, & Williams, 1998; Klinthall, 2006; Malcolm, 1996; Yahirun, 2014). However, greater

attention has recently been paid to older immigrants who construct dual lives: one in the home country and one in the host country (Baykara-Krumme, 2013; Bolzman, Fibbi, & Vial, 2006; Coulon & Wolff, 2010; Hunter, 2011; Ley & Kobayashi, 2005). This new avenue of research suggests that the migratory pattern of some of the older immigrants is to move back and forth between two countries. In other words, aging takes place in two countries, home and host, each of which comes with its own unique set of challenges.

Approximately three million in number, Turks constitute the largest immigrant population in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016). Most of the first-generation Turkish immigrants in Germany are currently retired (Himmelreicher & Keck, 2016). Prior research has provided insight into the transnational living preferences of retired immigrants, but little research has been done on the relationship between immigrants' perceived or self-reported health, the quality of available healthcare systems, and their circular migration patterns. Moreover, studies have not examined the ways in which eldercare is associated with tensions amongst three parties: (a) older immigrants, (b) adult children in the host country, and (c) relatives in the home country.

To fill these gaps, this article explores the circular migration dynamics through perceived health, healthcare systems, and eldercare. First, it analyzes how perceived health and available healthcare systems

* Corresponding author at: Department of Sociology and Criminology and Law, University of Florida, 3219 Turlington Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611-7330, USA.
E-mail address: ttezcan@ufl.edu.

¹ Unless indicated otherwise, eldercare refers to “demands driven by the needs of older persons and met by informal help from other family members” (Pei, Luo, Lin, Keating, & Fast, 2017, 360).

encourage circular migration. The difference between the perceived health benefits offered by Turkey (Durugönül, 2013; Razum, Sahin-Hodoglugil, & Polit, 2005) and the quality of healthcare that Germany provides (Baykara-Krumme, 2013; Bilecen, Çatır, & Orhon, 2015; White, 1997) is of critical importance. In other words, immigrants perceive Turkey as offering healthy lifestyle options and Germany as possessing a “superior” and “well-organized” healthcare system. Second, eldercare has mostly been characterized by conflict, rather than family solidarity, consensus, or traditional filial roles. Thus, the conflicts that take place amongst different kin parties on eldercare structure the living arrangements within each country.

For the older, immigration inevitably introduces a variety of challenges not only for health maintenance, but for the continuation of traditional family practices. This study investigates how Turkish immigrants decide whether to reside in Turkey or Germany upon retirement, how perceptions about these countries' health benefits and healthcare systems affect this choice, who is responsible for giving care to older immigrants, and where the care will be given. These questions deserve greater attention than they have currently received so far. First-generation older Turkish immigrants are socio-economically able to return to Turkey permanently but prefer not to do so. Given the massive wave of retirements of former guestworkers in Germany and other Western European countries, where the demographic landscape is undergoing rapid, visible changes (Henkens, van Dalen, Ekerdt, Hershey, Hyde, Radl, van Solinge, Wang, and Zacher, 2017), older Turkish circular migrants can provide indispensable insights into later-life arrangements that other aging immigrant populations also experience.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, it starts with a brief history of Turkish immigration to Germany and Turkish immigrants' circular migration behaviors. Then, it presents an overview of the theoretical arguments and existing empirical research on perceived health, healthcare, and eldercare. After describing the methods and sample, the study's findings are introduced. The final section summarizes and discusses the study's main contributions.

Background

A brief history of Turkish immigration to Germany

Beginning in the 1960s, Western Europe began to welcome mass migration to fulfill its need for labor and to revitalize the postwar economy. Due to its unprecedented industrial growth, Germany was one of the most attractive countries for immigration at that time. To promote the influx of cheap labor, Germany signed bilateral agreements with multiple countries, with Turkey eventually becoming its main supplier of foreign-born workers (Sayari, 1986).

Germany's recruitment system was based on the issuance of one-year work permits, renewable for an additional year (González-Ferrer, 2007). Germany also provided only limited residency rights for immigrants, who could be sent back to their home countries if necessary (Rudolph, 1996). Nevertheless, since the constant recruitment of new workers proved costly for German industry, the rotation principle was abandoned in 1964 (Worbs, 2006). This represented a critical turning point for the demographic composition of the country: Between 1961 and 1973, > 1.3 million Turkish citizens immigrated to Germany.²

Following the oil crisis and subsequent national economic recession in 1973, Germany prohibited all further recruitment of foreign workers. Immigrants who had already been recruited were also expected to return to their home countries (Abadan-Unat, 2011). Most of them, however, decided to stay, and the number of immigrants increased exponentially due primarily to family reunification (González-Ferrer, 2007). Over the last decade, as many first-generation guestworkers in Germany have reached the age of retirement (Himmelreicher & Keck,

2016), migratory behavior has increasingly become a subject of interest for policymakers and academics.

Turkish immigrants' circular movement

Under the assumptions of new economics labor theory (Stark, 1991), retiring immigrants who have accumulated their target savings have no reason to stay in the host country. If the benefits of staying are greater than the costs of returning, however, neoclassical economics theory expects them to stay (Constant & Massey, 2002). Beyond economic considerations, however, first-generation immigrants' social and cultural ties with their home country tend to be well-established, so return appears as a desirable option to them (Bolzman et al., 2006; Klinthall, 2006). In the age of globalization and technological advances, circular migration also serves as a way to maximize the upsides of both staying and returning. Therefore, over the last couple of decades, numerous groups of immigrants, including immigrants to the United States from Puerto Rico, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic (Acevedo, 2004; Bustamante, 2016; Duany, 2002; Duany, 2010), immigrants to Switzerland from Italy and Spain (Bolzman et al., 2006), and immigrants to Italy from Albania (Mai & Paladini, 2013), have engaged in circular migration.

A considerable amount of literature sheds light on Turkish immigrants' circular movement. Using fourteen waves of the German Socio-Economic Panel (from 1984 to 1997), a nationally-representative survey, Constant and Zimmermann (2011) found that Turkish and ex-Yugoslav immigrants were the least-mobile groups in terms of the frequency of exits and the number of years spent outside of Germany. This is because, due to legal restrictions upon their ability to return, their re-entry into Germany is not guaranteed (Constant & Zimmermann, 2012). However, in a study based on biographical interviews of Turkish retirees residing in Germany, Krumme (2004) found that most of them preferred to divide their time between the two countries. Utilizing data from the 2000 Families project, which consists of 50,000 members of immigrant and non-immigrant cross-generational families in Turkey, Baykara-Krumme (2013) found that 54% of retired, older (65 years and older) Turkish immigrants to Europe had returned to Turkey permanently, 11% stayed in the host country, and 35% went back and forth between the host country and Turkey on a regular basis.³

The studies above provide evidence that circular migration amongst older Turkish immigrants is a common practice. Some qualitative studies have also sought to explain the reasons for this “in-between situation,” or, more specifically, why immigrants do not consider staying or returning on a permanent basis. Several studies have suggested that subsequent generations prevent first-generation retirees from permanently returning. For many immigrants, circular migration seems to strike the best balance between time spent in Turkey and time spent with their adult children in the host country (Ciobanu, Fokkema, & Nedelcu, 2017). Indeed, many first-generation Turkish immigrants tend to travel back and forth on a regular basis, especially if their children are married and unwilling to return to Turkey (Kunuroglu, Yagmur, Van De Vijver, & Kroon, 2018). This back-and-forth movement is also spurred by the need to assist with the care of grandchildren and perform housekeeping duties (Rittersberger-Tılıç, Çelik, & Özen, 2013; White, 1997). As Nedelcu (2017, 377) explains, circular migrant grandparents “contribute to the transnational socialization of their grandchildren, perpetuating cultural traditions, language abilities or culinary habits from their country of origin.”

Other studies have provided insights into the living arrangements of older circular migrants. For example, qualitative findings suggest that Turkish circular migrants in Germany generally prefer to live in Turkey during the spring and summer months due to the warmer weather

³ Throughout the article, home country refers to Turkey, while host country refers to Germany.

² Official data from the German Federal Statistical Office.

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