CHANGINGAND SHIFTING CULTURAL PRACTICESAND SELF-IDENTIFICATIONS OF KURDISHAND TURKISH CATERING AND RETAIL BUSINESS OWNERS IN LONDON

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Abstract - This paper focuses on the changing and shifting cultural practices and identifications of Kurdish and Turkish (KT) communities in London. It explores the research question that how the occupational shift from industrial waged labour to self-employment effect the identity construction processes of Kurdish and Turkish business owners in catering and retail sectors in London. Depending on a field study consisting of 65 in-depth interviews, including, restaurant, off-licence, kebab-shop, coffee-shop, supermarket, wholesaler owners and various community organisations, this paper draws the conclusions that identification of shared interests and interest alignment in Britain promote bonds of solidarity, new forms of ethnic attachment, which is not salient in the home country and may be helpful to overcome various problems of the KT communities in London.

The study is structured in four sections. The first section sets out the contextual link between British political economy and KT shared interest and experiences in business formation in London. The second section sets out gaps in migrant entrepreneurship literature and explains the rationale for adopting a dynamic, shifting and non-essentialist view on migrant entrepreneurship. The third section discusses the methodological approach. The fourth section presents the empirical findings. The paper concludes with key research findings with implications for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords - constructivism; entrepreneurship gender roles; interest alignment; Kurdish and Turkish Communities in London

I. POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

From Industrial Waged Labour to Self-employment

In the mid-1950s the UK had been perhaps more industrialised than any other country in history, with more workers in industry than in all services; yet by 1983 there were almost two service workers for every industrial worker (Turner, 1995, p.3). It used to be a common view of the UK that it was the 'workshop of the world'. This phrase was used to indicate that the UK was the centre for manufacturing and exporting of industrial products throughout the world.The whole array of manufacturing areas has witnessed de-industrialisation, and manufacturing is no longer a defining characteristic there. For instance, “the percentage of the world export of the manufacturing captured by British companies has halved in thirty years, from 16.3 per cent in 1960 to 8.4 in 1990” (Turner, 1995, p.1). Employment in the manufacturing industry has also decreased by more than 50% from 8.5 million in 1994 to 4 million in 1966 (Turner, 1995). The economic and industrial change has mostly affected the steel, motor vehicle, textile, engineering and defence industries. One effect of the economic restructuring was the creation of an unemployed surplus population from the previously employed, and the elimination of employment plans for future generations as in both the coal and steel industries. Consequently, anxiety and uncertainty about the future work prospects of the younger generation dominated as economic security had been disrupted by economic restructuring. The profit maximising strategies of capital affect the opportunity structures for immigrants. It is important in understanding the changes in the labour market and new paths of immigrant labour market incorporation. It can be the driving force behind immigrant entrepreneurialism. People strive to make a living by running their own businesses as self-employed entrepreneurs as a response. The case of the Thatcherite era, characterised by de-regulation and de-industrialisation in the UK, was a starting point for the support for the self-help enterprise culture. It was a period that wage-labourers turned into self-employed business owners in large numbers.

Towards a Non-Essentialist Account on Migrant Entrepreneurship

Within this provided context above, shared interests, particularly economic ones have activated networks of solidarity and instrumental ethnic ties. Economic interests and networks of solidarity mutually enforce each other. Thus, emerging interests in the host society may foster the development of instrumental ethnic identities and attachments which do not exist in the home country. The following sections discuss the ways in which shared interests within the KT communities paved the way to shifting and changing ethnic attachments and cultural practices. However, accounts on migrant entrepreneurship view cultural practices and ethnic attachments fixed and unchanging (e.g. Altinay, 2008; Altinay & Altinay, 2006; Basu & Altinay, 2002; Basu, 1998; McEvoy & Hafeez, 2007; Srinivasan, 1995; Werbner, 1984, 1990). This study, however, opposes both primordialistconceptualisations of ethnic identity and

essentialist conceptualisations of culture in ethnic entrepreneurship literature and engages with the constructivist approach. As Craig Calhoun (1997, p.18) asserts; Essentialism refers to a reduction of the diversity in a population to some single criterion held to constitute its defining "essence" and most crucial character. This is often coupled with the claim that the essence is unavoidable or given by nature. It is common to assume that these cultural categories address really existing and discretely identifiable collections of people. In addition, primordialism is a concept that contends "identities or attachments are 'given', a priori, un-derived, prior to all experience or interaction – in fact, all interaction is carried out within the primordial realities" (Eller and Coughlan, 1996, p.45).On the contrary, this paper promotes the central ideas of constructivist account on culture and identity. The paper focuses on the changing and shifting cultural practices and identifications of Kurdish and Turkish (KT) communities in London.This study's main research question is that, how did changes in the political economy and KT shared interests and experiences in London pave the way for the construction of a new self-identification, and transposition and/or dissolution of cultural practices brought from the home country within KT communities?It argues that the re-enactment and dissolution/persistence of cultural practises are dependent upon structural changes characterising British cities and the structure of the groups.

III. METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The paper draws on qualitative research methodology. The results of this study are based on the data gathered from preliminary and main fieldwork studies on Turkish speaking business owners and key persons in various community organisations -including cultural, faith based and political organisations –, and business consultants from Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot origins (see Karan, 2015). The field study generated 65 semi-structured face-to-face interviews in London in total. The following sections discuss the findings of this study.

Turkiyeli

The aim of this section is to examine the ways in which shared interests and experiences within the Turkish and Kurdish communities instrumentally paved the way for the construction of an identity called "Türkiyeli"(People from Turkey). It argues that self-identifications and identities brought from the home country are not fixed, but that ethnic identities are socially constructed and open to redefinitions.One of my interviewees explains how situational problems, grievances and interests in their daily lives paved the way to a socially constructed shared identity and networks of solidarity:

Massey

Ethnic groups strategically redefine their attachments according to whom they cooperate with (Bonacich and Modell, 1980, p.3). Turkish and Kurdish communities facing similar problems and sharing meanings and definitions around their situation strategically form ethnic ties in order to achieve common ends. This perspective underlines the constructivist idea of ethnicity in a sense that the assertion of "Türkiyeli" or "our people" by Kurdish and Turkish communities is instrumental in acquiring power and advancing interests.

Changing gender roles in waged labour and self-employment

Patriarchal relationships attached to the mode of production have initially been largely dissolved and restructured according to the changes in the British economy. It is asserted that the woman's role and position within the family is affected when they find employment as a waged labourer. However, the shift from factory work to small household level businesses in the Turkish speaking communities affected women members of the KT communities, where women's labour is unpaid and consumed within the family. Women started to work in coffee shops, restaurants, and off-licences mainly helping their husbands. Thus, many women have lost their economic independence. It is possible to say that "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels, 2004), but that which has melted into air may once again become solid. That is to say, the home town culture may be dissolved in time due to changes that have taken place in the political economy, but once dissolved it is also possible that the practices may once again be reproduced.

Imece/Zibare

One of the most crucial traditions that has been re-enacted after immigration was imece/zibare. The evidence gathered in this paper defends the idea that such home country village scale practices, such as imece/zibare and solidarity in various forms, have been transposed to the host country. These are the Turkish and Kurdish names given to village-scale collaborations for harvesting, constructing a water pipeline, providing security for village's grazing borders with neighbouring villages. Several interviewees stated that the re-enactment of imece/zibare played a role in overcoming various problems in starting-up and maintaining businesses (Pear, chair of a tradesman association and wholesaler; Gorki, coffee shop owner; Sword, shop consultant; Lotus, shop designer; Fish, restaurant owner). The evidence gathered in this study defends the idea that such home country village scale practices, such as imece and solidarity in various forms, have been transposed to the host country.

CONCLUSIONS

In a similar vein, patriarchal relationships attached to the mode of production have initially been dissolved and reproduced according to the changes in the British economy. The structural shift from the textile industry to catering and retail businesses in the KT communities led women not only lose an independent source of income, and a large network of often female colleagues in the textile industry, but they also find themselves sucked backed into the kinship system which emphasisespatrilaterality.

Finally, the use of interest alignment enables us to understand how the salience of many cultural practices is open to erosion and re-enactment. The cultural practices transposed to the host country are understood as instrumental in overcoming adverse circumstances. While being wage labourers in the textile industry contributed to the dissolution of imece/zibare in the work place, small business ownership has led to the re-emergence of this collective practice.

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