Serving the Evolving Communities:
Functions of Turkish Diasporic Web Sites in Germany

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The central objective of this research is to shed light on the role of the diasporic web sites in terms of fulfilling various needs and expectations of diasporic communities, in which an evolving hybridity in structure has been revealed in recent years. In this context, it is aimed to investigate the functions of Turkish diasporic websites addressing the German-Turkish community. The study is undertaken by means of a content analysis of the main services provided in the five most popular Turkish web sites in Germany and through complementary semi-structured interviews with the moderators of these sites. The findings reveal that these web sites aim to undertake a unifying mission for the Turkish community in Germany. At the content level, nationalist references to homeland in these web sites are found to be limited. Homeland image is adopted only as an authentic reference or identity, which assures a familiar platform for an audience who in fact want to define themselves as settled members of the German society. Rather than presenting a platform to answer community needs in the context of traditional community communication paradigm, the focus is oriented to the individualistic expectations of the users through interactive tools like event calendars and friend finders. Diverse virtual individualities proposed by interactive technologies on Internet seems to bring out the emergence of a new, syncrenic, hybrid culture among the German-Turkish, which is based on three main axes: Homeland, diaspora and technology culture.

Keywords: Diaspora, internet, migration, identity, Turks, Germany

Especially for the immigrant communities which live outside of the homeland, the ability to organize as a community whereby members share common interests was seen by them as an important issue for being able to cope with the problems deriving from their minority situations. In addition to many other tools used to unite the members of a diasporic community around a distinctive identity, media played a very important role through the history of emigration. In this process, the role of media was

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strongly related with keeping alive the relationships between the immigrant groups and the homeland in terms of protecting a strictly established ethnic identity. Research has shown that this function of media seems to be more valuable especially for those diasporas which tend to deny integrating the national discourse of the host country such as is the case with the Turkish Diaspora (Cormack, 1998, Frachon and Vargaftig, 1995, Cankaya, Güney, Köksalan; 2007).

Today, thanks to the developments in communication technologies, media use has increasingly become an activity which enables diasporic communities to maintain continuous contact with home. But today the passive reception of the homeland image imposed by the hierarchical structures of traditional broadcast media seems to be transformed into a more 'active, simultaneous process of maintenance and negotiation between the poles of an original home and a newly acquired host culture' (Sinclair and Cunningham, 2000; 15). It can be said that one of the key factors supporting this transformation is the development of Internet technology. Research has shown that one of the most important productions formats involving Internet users in the diaspora are diasporic websites. In this sense this study aims to explore the role of the diasporic web sites which have the purpose of answering the changing needs and expectations of diasporic communities revealing an evolving hybridity in recent years. In this context, it is focused on the investigation of the various functions proposed Turkish diasporic websites addressing the German-Turkish community. The study is realized through a content analysis of the main services provided in the five most popular Turkish web sites in Germany and through complementary semi-structured interviews with the moderators of these sites. The next section presents the theoretical background of the study, followed by the methodology, discussion of the findings and conclusion.

Theoretical Background

It is difficult to agree on a distinctive defining criterion for 'diasporas' because various diasporic situations have been experienced over time. For this reason the term 'diaspora' today seems to be increasingly used for defining several categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities. For a simple and overarching definition of diaspora, Connor proposes the criteria 'living outside the homeland' (Safran, 1991: 83). In this sense the term diaspora is primarily related with migration, which creates a sense of belonging to a transnational community (Kalra et al., 2005: 14,). In summary, the notion of diaspora acquires the general meaning of 'a group of people dispersed from their original place' (Barnard and Spencer, 2002: 601), that is to say a group of people who have migrated and are residing out of their homeland.

One of the most important characteristics of diasporic communities is homeland idealism, which determines mostly the diasporic behavior and myths (Lee, 2004; 59). The centrality of homeland also implies a "magical belief" in the past and motivates the diasporic communities through a sentimental pathos reflecting respectful characteristics of the homeland (Cohen, 1997; 105). However this is not to say that the homeland myth has been the only driving force for immigrant communities, while they try to maintain the link and share the ideologies of the homeland. This has also been the way that they nurture the need to recreate old memories in their present setting (Brah, 1996). According to Clifford (1994), modern Diasporas can not be explained by referring only to the traditional definitions of the concept of diaspora.

Today's capitalist, labor diasporas, contrary to traditional ones, seem not to be disposed to return to the homeland, but rather adhere strictly to the myths of homeland and return. Besides the ambition of return and the sense of belonging, shared ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may also affect the formation of the modern diaspora. (Clifford, 1994: 306). Until fairly recently, diasporic communities were obliged to obey the legislative and political hegemony of the host land because they could not produce tight and sustainable ties with their homeland. But today, as Kaya (2000) has pointed out, the conditions keeping alive the myth of return, such as lack of communication and transportation possibilities, have been made obsolete by the globalization process and developments in transnational communication technologies. More recently, the idea of a transnational community has supplanted the old idea that migration meant a sharp break from the home community (Castles and Davidson, 2000).

Around such homeland idealism, the diaspora seems to have the will to recreate the memories of the past, that is to say to reproduce the past either through association with others of the similar background or by keeping in contact with the homeland. This will has been substantially related to having a defined and assuring identity. At this point, ethnic origin presents a potential to fulfill this need. An effective way to build and maintain ethnic identity is to form a community, because a community creates 'not only individual benefits for participants but also a group strength (Watson 1997: 102).

At this point communication technologies carry out an important role by facilitating the relationships between diaspora and the homeland where this identity is derived from. By transferring cultural products via video films, satellite TV and audio-cassettes, the broadcast media of the late 20th century kept alive the homeland

image in the memories of immigrant communities (Appadurai, 1996). However, according to Appudrai, 'electronic billboard communities' of the broadcast media period changed increasingly towards virtual neighborhoods in light of new forms of electronic mediation (Appudrai, 1996: 195). Today the passive reception of homeland image imposed by the hierarchical structures of traditional broadcast media seems to have been transformed into a more 'active, simultaneous process of maintenance and negotiation between the poles of an original home and a newly acquired host culture' (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000: 15).

One of the main reasons of this 'ebb and flow' is related to the phenomenon of globalization, which highlights individual cultural identities, while calling a halt to the hegemony of national cultures. Moreover, as Stuart Hall (1995) has pointed out, the cultures, particularly in the process of diasporas, never remain static, pure and true to their origin and this makes diasporic cultures a mixture of both the original home and host cultures, and this hybridity provides an appropriate atmosphere for emerging new syncrenic cultures. It can be said that one of the key factors supporting this transformation is the development of Internet technology. Thanks to computer-mediated communication, homelands are no longer just a memory nurturing constantly the myth of return, but can be an intimate aspect of daily life due to the choices that are available in participating in virtual communities in cyberspace (Hiller and & Franz, 2004: 735). Additionally, they can also be seen as a space for cultural adaptiveness and innovation which can be described around the phenomenon of 'hybridity' peculiar to diaspora cultures. The communal identity of this 'extra-national' situation is no longer the old one, the traditional community interlocking around static ethnic identity; instead it is a hybrid of past alliances, the re-establishment of relations through the newsgroup, as well as the experiences of

negotiating real life in the new country of settlement and interaction with other individuals/groups in that society (Karim, 1998).

The research on diasporic uses of ICT demonstrates that the Internet has had important effects on traditional communal identity and its reproduction. Through the expansion of Internet use among diasporas, conventional needs and expectations of the past seem to be carried to an individualistic but more complex level with different layers. For example, according to Mandaville (2003:144) the hybrid discursive spaces of the Islamic Internet addressing European Muslims have given rise to new formulations and critical perspectives on Islam, religious knowledge and community. He also points out that this new arena has had an important effect on the weakening of extremes. In his research on Internet use among Muslim diaspora, Jon Anderson comes to a similar conclusion. According to Anderson (1997: 2), 'Internet forums permit bypassing traditional gatekeepers and adjudicators of interpretive rights, procedures and adequacy'.

Further research results on the Internet-diaspora relationship argue that any computer-mediated community is a 'hybrid one as it lives in the global-local nexus that characterizes contemporary societies' (Tsaliki, 2003: 162). Tsaliki's work concerning the reconstruction of Greekness on the Internet have demonstrated that diasporic people are using CMC technologies to re-create a sense of community through the rediscovery of their own commonality by being 'citizens of the world' and this represents a break away from traditional, space-bound understanding of identity and community. The Internet use among distinct cultural identities that are under the threat of disappearing or undertaking a freedom project even displays an eclectic character. For example in Tibet's case CMC has lent itself well to a movement which hinges on maintaining a distinct cultural identity through

communication across a dispersed population, *and* constructing new communities through a process of cultural exchange and inclusion, to bolster and legitimate its project. In other words, the Tibetan freedom movement has provided testimony to the multiplicity of identities and communities that can be constructed online, while using Internet for a concrete objective derived from a solid community formulation (Santiani, 2003; 2000-2001).

This dissolving of traditional ties in the conventional diasporic community and segmentation of identities also have given rise to a new perception of the diasporic situation. Some research shows that among different identities one has becomes prominent in cyberspace: the consumer. As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000: 15-16) pointed out, diasporas have increasingly been using media as global narrowcast markets. In his recent research on diasporic websites addressing some diasporas settled in Germany, Androutsopoulos (1996: 259) affirms substantially this argument. He finds out that 'they (diaspora websites) all feature advertising banners of German-based ethnic businesses or German companies; some offer their own merchandising, and a few include a fully–fledged online shop'. Among them, especially the more professional Turkish websites seem to differ from others especially at ethnicizing mainstream entertainment genres such as e-cards, voting, horoscopes, and online games thereby adapting them to the cultural codes of their ethnic group (Androutsopoulos, 1996: 529).

We can say that especially during the past decade the use of Internet has become very popular among the diasporas who want to maintain ties with their homeland, as well as to answer the need of 'cultural translation' (1), by which the hybrid subject of diaspora negotiates cultural difference in a performative interplay between home and host. However, the diasporic uses of Internet has varied from

community to community according to needs and expectations they want to nurture through this relationship. A great deal of research on computer-mediated communication points out that Internet uses in diaspora diversify in terms of reception and production formats (Mandaville 2003, Miller and Slatter 2000). For example online mass media has created a linkage between diaspora and homeland by providing news and popular culture which is peculiar to place of origin (Sinclair and Cunnuigham, 2000: 15).

Another tool mostly used by diasporas in computer mediated communication, e-mail facilitates contact with relatives and friends (Miller and Slatter 2000). According to Hiller and Franz (2004), especially in the case of settled immigrant situation, e-mail signifies the communication with people from home particularly to share life histories and genealogies. The function of e-mail seems to reconnect with family / community ties. In Hiller and Franz's categorization the search tool denotes researching for connections to place of origin in multiple forms. The function of search tool is defined as rediscovering an eroding identity in diaspora. Yang (2003) points out that newsgroups, mailing lists and chat channels provide diasporic groups an opportunity to establish transnational networks with active production of discourse. The role of the chat can be associated with finding old friends based on shared background. Seeking the warmth of personal observations and assessments of others is indicated as the function of chat (Hiller and Franz, 2004: 739).

One of the most important production formats that are involved in Internet uses in diaspora are diasporic websites. Diasporic websites have allowed immigrant groups to reach cultural resources such as directories, event listings and news (Mandawille, 2003, Yang, 2003), and to build bridges between people who were separated and unknown to each other by offering 'a safe and comfortable place'

where they can 'digitally "hang out" and share their stories' (Mitra 2003: 1999). Diasporic websites differ from newsgroups in that they are owned by natural or legal persons, and that their sustainability depends on continuous engagement (Androutsopoulos, 1996: 521). Diasporic websites also have the functions of promoting viewpoints-for example, propagating political reform in the homeland (Lee and Wong 2003), building a community sharing distinctive interests, providing virtual interaction platforms such as discussion forums, and fostering community awareness (Qiu, 2003).

Methodology

This study examines the characteristics of diasporic websites addressing the German Turkish in terms of the functions they have undertaken for fulfilling the expectations and needs of Turkish immigrant community. The main structures of diasporic websites mentioned in the theoretical framework are adopted as the analytic framework of this study. Accordingly, our analysis is managed through a three-step investigation. The first step concerns the 'motivations' that led to the design and implementation of these sites. The second analyzes the 'services' presented in these sites. Four main axes are designated in computer usage of immigrant groups around diasporic web sites. Diasporic web sites are assumed to fulfill the function of (i) providing cultural recourses such as directories, event listings, and news, (ii) offering spaces for interaction where diasporic groups share their stories and providing virtual interaction platforms such as discussion forums, (iii) fostering awareness on community issues, (iv) promoting viewpoints on different issues peculiar to homeland. Finally, we examine the 'content' of these sites by referring to their role in the re-shaping of the Turkish diasporic culture in Germany.

In short, this study aims to investigate exactly how and to what extent Turkish diasporic websites actually do serve for German Turks. To which expectations and needs do diasporic web sites addressing German Turks aim to answer? Our research is managed through a multi-method approach comprising both a content analysis of a variety of web sites through the main features they provide, such as search tool, e-mail, forum, message board, chat, and semi - structured interviews with the moderators of these sites with the purpose of investigating the motivations for establishing such web sites.

The web sites that are published for the Turkish community especially who live in Germany were chosen for the case study, as German Turks still constitute the biggest population in Euro-Turks. With the 4th generation dating back to 1960s, there are approximately 2 700 000 Turks living in Germany (Perşembe, 2008: 192) whereas the total of Turkish population living in France, the Netherlands, Britain and Belgium is only around 1 million (RTÜK, 2007). According to a recent research realized by the Supreme Board of Radio-Television (RTÜK) in 2007, the Turkish community is the largest immigrant community in Germany with relation to the population as it constitutes 25,8 % of the total immigrant population living in Germany. In recent years this huge community now has drawn the interest of social science researchers, especially from media studies in the communication discipline, resulting in various studies on conventional media reception. However, the number of studies on the relation of Turkish immigrant communities with new media is very limited. By focusing on the use of the new media and especially the web sites of Turkish community in Germany, this study aims to fill this gap by making a direct contribution to the relevant literature.

The five most popular Turkish web sites targeted to German Turks which were chosen for this study are: turksesi.de, alem-online.de, bizimalem.com, kesmeseker.de, delidivane.de. Google statistics and Alexa Rank (ranking metrics of a web information company providing free web traffic metrics) have also been used to prove the popularity of the sites. Each of the above mentioned sites are located at the top in the first SERP (search engine results page) of Google after a regular search on "Turkish community in Germany". Statistics derived from the interviews made with moderators on the user profiles and daily traffic of the web sites and also "Alexa Traffic Rank" have justified the reason for the preferences of these web sites for the study (Table 1). Each web site has at least 16,000 registered users with a minimum average traffic of 40000 hits/day.

	Established in	# of registered members	Distribution of members due to sex	Distribution of members due to age	Daily visit traffic (per day)	Alexa Traffic Rank
bizimalem.com	2001	560000	% 59 M - % 41 F	18 - 45	60,000	153,578
kesmeseker.de	2003	80000	% 60 M - % 40 F	18 - 35	40,000	352,104
alem-online.de	2007	38000	% 60 M - % 40 F	25 - 45	90,000	3,222,278
turksesi.de	2001	27000	-	15 - 55	35,000	3,782,431
delidivane.de	2001	16000	% 30 M - % 70 F	20 - 25	15,000	5,307,281

Table 1: Brief statistics on the user profiles and daily traffic of the web sites

Results and Discussion

The discussion will be made in conformance with the analytic framework proposed in the previous section. The findings will be evaluated through the aspects of the web sites by mainly focusing on the motivations that led to the emergence of these sites, the services provided in these sites and finally as the core of discussion the context in which the content of each web site has been rooted.

Motivations: Community Communication vs. Ethnic Marketing

At the content level, most of the sites seemed to lean on different contexts and adopt a varying rhetoric, which will be discussed in the last part of this section. However, as a common aspect, they seemed to undertake a unifying mission for the Turkish community in Germany by proposing virtual interaction tools such as a chat and discussion forum. Every web site is found to have an assertive goal towards Turkish community in Germany, which is emphasized either as a tagline in the form of a banner or under separate links like "mission" or "vision". In addition to this, in the debriefing interview, the moderators were also asked to express their main goal for publishing these web sites. Some of the taglines were in line with the statements made by moderators whereas some revealed a contradiction. Therefore, the evaluations of the motivations will be made by referring both to the taglines located in the sites and to the actual statements of the moderators. The contradictions observed were mostly associated with the commercial intentions and strategies embedded in the site. Albeit the motivations associated with community issues, at the background, most of these sites were designed and implemented as commercial projects targeting an ethnic market.

For example, 'kesmeseker.de' has a tagline addressing the young Turkish community with the promise of a new high-class lifestyle: "Kesmeseker is a new young Turkish community which heads for carrying the life to a high-class virtual level. Membership is realized in a cultivated and open way. Membership in Kesmeseker is for free". The 'Kesmeseker' web site employs instant messaging as a major tool for its members without a demand for any subscription fee. However, this free service is actually provided for creating a potential of consumers. When asked about the goal of the site, the answer of 'Kesmeseker's moderator supports our idea: "Developed for commercial cooperation over Internet".

'Bizimalem.com', 'alem-online.de' and 'turksesi.de' offered variations for expressing the intended message towards the Turkish community in Germany. Bizimalem.com offered "an interactive platform for a community of 5 millions of Euro-Turks" whereas 'alem-online.de' intended to become "a platform responsible for the correct and efficient representation of the Turkish community in German media by presenting successful Turkish figures in the German business and art world". The moderator of 'alem-online.de' supports his motivation by referring to statistical information: "Any search in Google.de on keywords of "Türk" or "Türkisch" will result for 90 % with negative news and information. Alem-online.de is a positive resource".

The motivation of the moderator of 'alem-online.de' corresponded with the findings in Kaya's research (2000) in which the efforts of young German Turks who fought for representing the Turkish community in German media were explored. As Kaya mentioned (2000: 135), especially the 3rd generation of German Turks who were born and raised in Germany felt uncomfortable with the identity crisis fed by the negative representation of the Turks in German media as an introverted and isolated community stuck between two cultures. They struggled for creating a new image for the Turkish community in German media through open-air organisations like festivals in order to promote Turkish community as social actors in German society. It is obvious that this approach has still been adopted today and was eventually carried to new media. This finding also corresponds to that of Karim (1998), which is stated in the literature review above. By deviating from the traditional community structure that is interlocked around static ethnic identity, the 3rd generation of German Turks prefer to adopt the web as a space for cultural adaptiveness and innovation, which

enables the experience of negotiating real life and interaction with the German society.

At the motivation level, 'turksesi.de' is an original example, which focused all his messages mainly on homeland references. Mostly emphasizing "the longing of the Turkish community for homeland", 'turksesi.de' (i.e. "voice of Turks") aims to become "a bridge between the homeland and gurbet (abroad)". In order to achieve this goal, 'turksesi.de' offers content based on the culture, religion, language, folkloric art and kitchen of Turkey.

However, besides the variations in all these noble messages addressing the target audience, -especially led by 'turksesi.de'- most of the moderators easily declared the same motivation in simple words for establishing these sites: Ethno-marketing. Separate e-commerce pages and links for placing advertisements on these sites also concretized this idea. This finding seemed to correspond to the findings of previous studies on ethno-marketing in Europe. As mentioned in a previous study of Cankaya et al. (2008: 99), in Europe, community media has been highly preferred by commercial entrepreneurs as they can present a more efficient method of addressing potential specific audiences rather than reaching as many users as possible. By representing significant segments sharing the same domain of characteristics and interests, communities can be defined as an audience available to be marketed. In this sense, diasporas are easily addressed as global narrowcast markets (Sinclair and Cunnigham 2000: 15-16). It is evident that the same approach has been carried to the Internet, which is clearly the new popular community medium. Our findings match directly with those of Androutsopoulos (1996; 259) who studied diasporic websites addressing some diasporas settled in Germany. As Androutsopoulos (1996; 259) stated in his study, the Turkish websites investigated in this study also ethnicized

mainstream entertainment genres such as e-cards, voting, horoscopes, and online games by adapting them to Turkish cultural codes.

In brief, whatever the dominant reference and context adopted is, either diaspora or the homeland, most of the motivations are ruled by 'economical consciousness'. Presenting a promising potential, the Turkish community is inevitably defined as a market for both German Turks and the remaining part of the German society. In this sense, even the motivations declared to ameliorate the image of Turkish community in German media is interpreted as an effort to present this segment to German global market more properly.

Among the five web sites chosen for the study, 'delidivane.de' should be evaluated as an extraordinary example, as it is truly focused on community needs. Departing as an individual initiative, 'delidivane.de' was designed as an interactive platform for the Turkish gay and lesbian community living in Europe. The web site seemed to achieve the goal to create "a platform for bringing together individuals who are identified –by being both an immigrant and homosexual- as marginal figures of the society". Both at the motivation and content level, 'delidivane.de' was evaluated as a non-profit and political effort to deal with definite community issues and support community communication like the examples given the literature review on diasporic websites above. However, although 'delidivane.de' seemed to prioritise Euro-Turk gay and lesbian community issues, it was observed that they were not able carry the medium to an political and activist level which would enable interference in the activities of daily social life on the behalf of the community members. A detailed discussion on this finding will be made in the last part of this section entitled as 'content'.

Before presenting an in-depth view on the contexts that each site is rooted, it will be appropriate to analyze the services proposed in each web site and present a comparative panorama on the structure of the web sites.

Functions: From Virtual Interaction to Tools that Serve Ethnic Marketing

Each site presents mostly interactive services for meeting new members like chatting, discussion forum and messaging boards. Besides, most of the sites try to act as an information resource for its users by providing various news services, direct links to Turkish TV and radio channels, some information links on various subjects like health, sports, religion, fashion, diet, law and e-government. Entertainment links like videos, games, e-cards, animations, puzzles, caricatures, horoscopes, which are mostly based on user-generated content, are also popular features of these web sites. In the Table 2 below, functions proposed in each site is presented comparatively.

As can be seen from the table above, most of the features focus mainly on functions of virtual interaction and information resources. Referring to the relevant literature, all of the sites seemed to provide resources such as directories, event listings, and news (Mandawille, 2003, Yang, 2003); offer virtual platforms for interaction where diasporic groups share their stories (Qiu, 2003) and foster awareness on community issues (Lee and Wong 2003). Besides these functions, which have been referred to by Lee and Wong 2003, 'delidivane.de' also promotes viewpoints on community issues peculiar to the homeland as it directly focuses on targeting a specific audience with specific needs.

			turksesi.de	alem-online.de	bizimalem.com	kesmeseker.de	delidivane.de
FUNCTIONS	VIRTUAL INTERACTION	Membership	√	√	√	√	
		Finding friends		√	√	√	
		Chat	√	√	√	√	√
		Forum	√	√	√	√	√
		Groups			√		
		Blog			√	√	
		Message board	√			√	√
		Poll			√		
	NEWS - INFORMATION	News		√	√	√	√
		Weather Forecast	√				
		Radio	√			√	√
		TV	√			√	√
		Event Calendar		√		√	√
		Sports			√		√
		Fashion			√		√
		Health	√		√	√	√
		Sex	√			√	√
		Religion	√			√	√
		Law					√
		E-Government	√				
		Consolate issues	√				
	ENTERTAINMENT	Video			√		
		Games	√		√	√	
		E-card			√		√
		Poems	√				√
		Animation	√				
		Puzzles	√				
		Caricatures	√				
		Horoscope	√				√
	COMMERCE	E-Commerce		√	√		
		Advertisement	√	√		√	√

Table 2: Functions proposed in each web site.

Commercial functions were also found to be a significant function category in each
site. Most of the sites also proposed commercial functions like separate e-commerce
pages for purchasing products and links for enabling the placement of advertisements
on the sites, which seemed in line with the findings on motivation in the previous part
of this section. In this context, all the web sites revealed similar features of ethnic
marketing as proposed by Androutsopoulos (1996: 259) in the recent literature:
Advertising banners of German-based ethnic businesses; merchandising; fully–

fledged online shops; etc. Every site seemed to create an income with advertisement, but 'alem-online.de' and 'bizimalem.com' also included e-commerce sub-sites. In addition to that, moderator of Turksesi.de also declared that an embedded e-commerce site was an issue in their long-term agenda.

Content: From Conventional Diasporic Community to A New Hybrid Bricolage

'Bizimalem.com', 'kesmeseker.de', 'alem-online.de' and 'delidivane.de' mostly presented content which was based on community events and member interaction and was fed mostly by the individual user contributions. The web sites were defined as an interactive communication platform through which people can deal with their loneliness, get in touch with each other, and find new friends, perhaps even new partners. In this sense, as a new form of community communication, the interactive nature of the Internet brings out a deviation from the classical definition of traditional community, which is based on a space-bound understanding of community and identity. The classical conventional communities are defined to be a group of people who share common characteristics, needs and/or interests (Mtimde et al., 1998: 13, Gibbons et al., 2001: 12). Accordingly, community communication is developed to support the collective needs of the community. However, through the interactive participative experience proposed and adopted on the Internet in these web sites, individualistic needs and demands such as finding new friends displace the conventional needs of a community resulting in the dissolution of traditional ties in the conventional diasporic community and the establishment of a new virtual community made up of diverse individualities.

Of course, homeland image is a significant feature employed in the content of these web sites. As mentioned before, almost every website emphasizes the

importance of Turkish identity by making concrete references to Turkey and points out to the importance of mutual relationship with the homeland. However, in most of the web sites investigated, the references to homeland are observed to be limited. When asked about the role of their web site on the relation of their users with the homeland, the moderator of 'alem-online' presents a rational and realistic approach: "I don't think that it will play any role. Besides we don't have such an editorial capacity to provide latest info from Turkey. We can only try to provide some limited information on historical and cultural characteristics of Turkey".

Content on member interaction seems more important. However, this approach does not bring efforts to present topics focused on community benefits. Focus is rather oriented to tools like event calendars and friend finders for satisfying the individualistic expectations of the users. Similarly, the findings derived from the feedback of the users of 'bizimalem.com' led us to the same idea. When asked the same question above, the moderator of 'bizimalem.com' addressed users for the answer and suggested us to make an online poll on the question. 69 members of the web site attended the poll and 64 % of them told that the web site enabled the Turkish people in Germany meet together in a platform and find new friends.

Briefly, the referred homeland image is mostly used just as an integrative cultural identity, which comes to the fore rather as an authentic reference that assures a confidential collective platform for the community. In this diasporic context, these web sites address an audience who accepted to live in Germany as settled members and even social actors in the German society, but also as users who want to benefit from their origins as a dependable and collaborative base that can facilitate life in practical means. By referring to the work of Kaya (2000) on Turkish hip-hop singers living in Germany, this finding can similarly be interpreted as the expansion of the

hybrid structure of the Turkish diasporic community by a new dimension. A new, virtual Turkish immigrant community indicating a syncretic, third culture based on three main axes seems to emerge in Germany: Homeland, diaspora and technology (Picture 1). The 3rd generation of German Turks, with an optimal level of knowledge and experience on computer and Internet, reveals a new cross-border virtual and individualistic identity over Internet fed by symbolical references from the diaspora, homeland and technology culture as well. Perhaps rather than an immigrant community with double-consciousness leaning only to homeland and diaspora, a cultural bricolage with a new triple-consciousness -who is aware of multi-localities including Internet as a new one- has evolved.
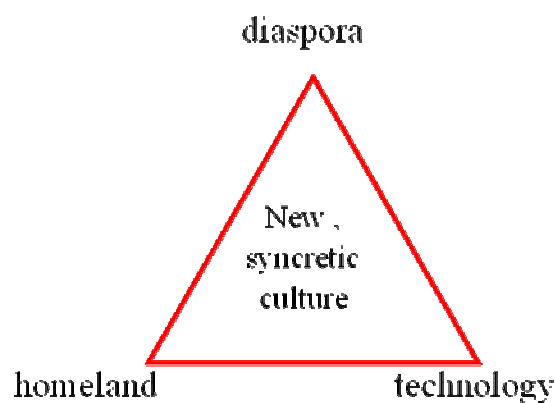

Figure 1: A model of a 'third' culture among the Turkish community in Germany

It seems possible to generate diverse opinions on the emergence of this new hybridity in the Turkish diasporic community. By referring to a critical perspective based on community communication paradigm, it was found out that this transformation in the immigrant community through the use of interactive technologies did not result in a more participative and solidarist reflex on the behalf of the community. The interactive services seemed to be adopted as simple functional tools to satisfy individualistic and pragmatical demands. Even in 'delidivane.de', -

which is addressed to a specific community that needs participation and collaboration more than any other community and therefore can be easily defined as a conventional community- the users only preferred to use tools for finding new friends and partners, though the site proposed various other tools to provoke in-group discussion and solidarity on community issues. Thus it can be stated that despite the liberating potential it indicates, the virtuality proposed through these websites can contrarily bring the recreation of isolation peculiar to conservative diasporic communities. Though the medium is new, active participation is limited at individualistic initiatives with well-known old references of the diaspora. Even an insight on the user-generated content 'delidivane.de' can lead to this idea: The insistent desire for contacting only the Turkish people, the emergence of conventional subjects in the forums like the longing for the homeland, the use of codes and references peculiar to homeland like the religion and traditions, etc.

The unintended but resulting user experience in the example of 'delidivane.de' was defined and adopted as a leading strategy for the example of 'turksesi.de'. Among the five web sites chosen for the study, 'turksesi.de' takes attention with its conservative content dominantly based on homeland context. Established with the goal to become "a bridge between the homeland and gurbet (abroad)", 'turksesi.de' aims to provide a communication network for Turkish immigrants in Europe. The main strategy is developed through creating strong ties with the homeland image. As being told in the debriefing interview, all the possible needs and expectations of Turkish community are defined through moral and traditional values of Turkey. Although he has not ever visited Germany once, the moderator of 'turksesi.de' feels the capacity to design and manage this platform from Istanbul, Turkey. Firstly the problems are defined in order to define the possible needs: The German Turks are

evaluated as a dispersed and disorganized community and 'turksesi.de' is up for providing a sort of connection for this community. The need for teaching and reminding the traditions is ascertained: "There is no respect for the parents… When the children become matured, they don't have any respect for the elders in the family. Especially the 3rd generation… Or for example the breakfast issue. There's no breakfast tradition at abroad. As soon as they wake up, guys put some cornflakes in a plate, pour some milk in it and that's it… Let's go to work, school". Subsequently content based on Turkish local social life, folkloric music, art, dance and kitchen is developed and served.

It is not so difficult to decode the discourse adopted by the moderator or the content presented in the site. Homeland image is employed as a strong unifying reference for keeping alive the ethnical and cultural identity in the virtual world. By referring to traditions and conventions, "an interest towards each other" is grown among members in an immigrant community. Reference to national and cultural artefacts as key codes is employed in order to enable to generate an answer for the identity crisis fed by being a foreigner in a host land. Despite the potential of Internet technologies for creating an emancipative culture, in this example, it is used for the reconstruction of locality as a surface for resistance against the risk of assimilation. However, this discourse, which is defined in terms of the "other", brings together the inevitable isolation and obliqueness of the conservative diasporic community. Turkish community is known with its disability to organize as an open modern community gathering around community needs. The strategy leaning on dominant homeland context seems unfortunately to enhance this situation: Members of a community communicating only with each other only through the subjects of the homeland rather than the issues peculiar to host country they live.

Eventually a question comes to our mind: "Why is this strategy proposed?" As being mentioned in the first part of this section, the motivation can be obviously associated with commercial strategies. A community communication model organised to work in closed circuit points out a perfect homogeneous commercial segment. "Citizenship and longing for the same homeland", which is a form of social capital for the immigrants, is evaluated as a financial capital for the entrepreneur of the web site: "They should financially support a Turk if they can. A Turk should shop from a Turk, etc… This will lead to investments in Turkey. In short, what goes from us, eventually comes back to us". Briefly, "everything is for the homeland" is transformed into a commercial discourse without considering the negative social consequences for the Turkish community in Germany.

Conclusion

Despite the adoption of different contexts at the content level and rhetoric in expressing the intended message, it is evident that the websites we have examined seemed to undertake a unifying mission for the Turkish community in Germany by proposing virtual interaction tools like chat and discussion forum. In addition, most of the sites also provide news services and information links on various subjects.

At the content level of the findings, it was evident that homeland image and references to Turkish national and cultural identity are still significant features employed in all the web sites. However, the references to homeland are found to be limited. Focus is rather oriented to interactive tools like event calendars and friend finders addressing the individualistic expectations of the users.

The interactive nature of the Internet seems to bring out the emergence of a new form of community communication in which individualistic expectations such as

finding new friends replace the conventional needs of a unified community, resulting in a new virtual community structure made up of varying and fragmented individualities. In this form of virtual community, the referred homeland image is limited to an integrative cultural identity, rather an authentic reference that assures a confidential collective platform for an audience who want to define themselves as settled members and even social actors of the German society. For these users, their cultural background is only an identity providing a collaborative base that can facilitate life in practical means. This finding can be interpreted as the emergence of a new, syncretic third culture among the Turkish immigrant community in Germany which is based on three main axes: homeland, diaspora and technology. The 3rd generation of German Turks has adopted a new cross-border virtual and individualistic identity through the Internet which leans on symbolical references from the diaspora, homeland and technology culture as well. The hybrid subject of the diaspora who negotiates his cultural difference in a performative interplay between the homeland and host culture, has now introduced a new context with him: technology culture based on the frequent use of interactive web technologies. The previous profile of the young Turkish immigrants who had a double-consciousness fed from homeland and diaspora has been emerging to a new cultural bricolage with a new triple-consciousness that is aware of multi-localities including the Internet as a recent one. This finding seemed to overlap with that of Hall (1995), who defined diasporic cultures a mixture of both the original home and host cultures and asserted that this hybridity could provide an appropriate atmosphere for emerging new syncrenic cultures.

In addition to that, despite the emancipatory potential of Internet technologies, by departing from a critical perspective, it should also be noted that the individualistic

virtuality proposed through these websites can contrarily cause the recreation of isolation peculiar to conservative diasporic communities. Moreover, web sites that focus only on the homeland context unfortunately avoid the liberating potential of Internet and re-provoke an obliqueness through isolating the community with homeland references that do not directly contribute to the daily community life.

Findings on the motivations of the web sites provide more reasons for the proposition of the recent approach. Despite the insistent emphasis on community communication, at the background, most of the web sites evaluate the Turkish community in Germany as a commercial segment and adopt ethno-marketing as a leading motivation and strategy. Whatever the dominant context adopted is, most of the motivations are ruled by commercial benefits. Even the noble motivations declared to refresh the image of Turkish community in German media is interpreted as an effort to present this segment to German global market more properly.

By focusing on the Turkish diasporic websites in Germany, this study should be evaluated as a first attempt to explore the function of the the Internet technologies for serving the needs and expectations of Turkish immigrant communities. It is evident that further user-centred studies on new interactive platforms are required in order to investigate this phenomenon in more detail.

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