The Transnationalism of Turkish Politics or the Politics of Transnationalism? The Case of Turkish Migrants in Australia (Banu Şenay)

This research project is a study of Turkish political transnationalism in the Australian context. It explores the production of various forms of Turkishness and Turkish nationalism by elucidating two different but related processes: first, the political transnationalism engineered by the Turkish State to nationalize and politicize Turkish migrants in Australia. Secondly, the bottom-up transnationalism employed by the Turkish immigrants themselves in their production of long-distance nationalism. Let me give one brief example. On 16th November 2008 the Australian state-funded television station SBS broadcast a programme in which certain remarks about the ‘Armenian genocide’ were aired. The next day the Turkish embassy in Canberra and the Sydney Consulate emailed their long list of Turkish contacts in Australia asking them to complain to the television broadcaster. The result of their mail out was a large number of standard letters send to the television station.

The main hypothesis of the study is that the forms of “trans-nationalism” that emerge in this diasporic context are best understood by bringing together migrant-initiated and State-initiated forms of transnationalism and by investigating the possible overlappings and conflicts that emerge between the two. The study argues that a theoretical and empirical approach is necessary when seeking to unpack the diasporic identity formation of Turkish immigrants in Australia (and elsewhere).

The research will make a significant contribution to Turkey-related migration studies in a number of ways. Firstly, although there is a wide literature on the Turkish migratory flows to European countries, Turkish migration to Australia and the constitution of a transnational space in this context are very much understudied. The study will therefore fill in the gap in available literature by providing insights into Turkish political transnationalism from an Australian perspective. Secondly, with its distinctive immigration and citizenship policies the Australian politics of multiculturalism facilitates the emergence of a Turkish political transnational space which might be very different to that in Europe. By incorporating insights into the politics-making of the Turkish State as well as the Turkish migrants in two European countries, the research will also provide a comparative dimension concerning Turkish political transnationalism in different national settings.

A particular strength of this project will be that it will involve anthropological fieldwork in Sydney. This fieldwork will be supplemented by other qualitative data to be collected in Turkey, Germany and Holland, thereby providing a comprehensive basis for the examination of the topic.