

INTER-DIASPORIC RELATIONS: THE TUNISIAN DIASPORA AND ARAB/MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

As the study of human cultures, traditions, and the way communities develop their cultural identities, cultural anthropology analyzes how various groups develop and evolve in different socio-cultural environments. The primary focus of this scientific field of studies is the investigation of migration, diasporas, and cultural exchanges which represent the main factors contributing to identity creation and adaptability within heterogeneous contexts. Within this framework, this paper explores inter-diasporic relations. More specifically, the Tunisian diaspora in Hungary and its contacts with other Arab and Muslim populations, particularly Turkish, Moroccan, and Syrian groups, in addition to their interactions with locals and other different groups.

Keywords: Tunisian Diaspora, Inter-Diasporic Relations, Hybridity, Cultural Identity, Acculturation, Migration and Integration

Diszcipline: Cultural Anthropology

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Absztrakt**INTERDIASZPÓRIKUS KAPCSOLATOK: A TUNÉZIAI DIASZPÓRA ÉS AZ ARAB/MUSZLIM KÖZÖSSÉGEK MAGYARORSZÁGON**

A kulturális antropológia, mint az emberi kultúrák, hagyományok és a közösségek kulturális identitásának kialakulását vizsgáló tudományág, elemzi a különböző csoportok fejlődését és alkalmazkodását eltérő társadalmi-kulturális környezetekben. E tudományterület egyik központi kutatási területe a migráció, a diaszpórák és a kulturális cserefolyamatok vizsgálata, amelyek meghatározó szerepet játszanak az identitásformálásban és a heterogén kontextusokban történő alkalmazkodásban. A tanulmány az interdiaszpórikus kapcsolatokat elemzi, különös tekintettel a Magyarországon élő tunéziai diaszpórára és annak kapcsolataira más arab és muszlim csoportokkal – kiemelten a török, marokkói és szíriai közösségekkel –, valamint a helyi társadalommal és egyéb kulturális csoportokkal folytatott interakcióira.

Kulcsszavak: tunéziai diaszpóra, interdiaszpórikus kapcsolatok, hibriditás, kulturális identitás, akkulturáció, migráció és integráció.

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

The concept of Diaspora developed from the Greek word “diaspeirō”, (to scatter) referring to displaced groups, to describe migrant communities which although left their homelands still try to preserve their original identities engaging in a complex and endless process of identity construction. Within a multicultural setting, this preservation mission seems to be a far reach. To survive in a heterogeneous world cultural identities rely heavily on the social formation provided by diasporic structures. Diasporic studies in this case represents the framework within which we can explain the complex challenges facing these groups; ranging from cultural preservation, to hybrid identities until a seemingly total assimilation. Consequently, the mass movements of people in a highly globalized world, throughout the lens of diasporic studies, incorporates the interaction of several migrant groups with different settings, cultures, and communities. The importance of the concept of diaspora lies in its ability to dig into the dynamics surrounding these cultural ties including social networks, economic opportunities, and cultural adaptations.

Throughout a qualitative research method, we managed to uncover some aspects of this complex

process by investigating one of the potential groups which are involved. Combining semi-structured interviews and participant observation among ethnographic techniques, the Tunisian community living in Hungary led us to some valuable results. Our research was centered on Debrecen and Budapest which are the most attracting locations to this group. We chose as our specific fieldworks mosques, restaurants, and universities since they are the earliest spaces in which this group forms its early inter-diasporic relationships then we moved to other spaces such as workplaces, mixed social settings, and multicultural public spheres, which mark an advanced stage of their socio-economic integration. These different settings helped us track the process of identity construction in the host country. The former, were places in which Tunisians attempt to preserve their national identity by maintaining similar traditions, language use, and religious practices. However, the latter were places in which there is more exposure to new languages, cultural norms, and social dynamics. Consequently, a space in which the multicultural contact happens allowing the gradual construction of a blended identity, which may later develop to a new identity

different from the original one. The collected data revealed some correlation between these different spaces and the Tunisian identity development. We found several reoccurring themes in line with our theoretical framework, which is mainly targeting the concepts of inter-diasporal cooperation, hybridity and assimilation.

Inter-diasporic cooperation refers to the earlier phase in which a migrant or a migrant group tries to preserve or reestablish a parallel home-like setting by seeking interaction with similar group. In our case the concept is embodied in Tunisians interacting, to some extent, exclusively with Arab or Muslim groups. They do so through social media connections, community gatherings and meetings in spaces which directly reflect their national identity such as mosques, Tunisian or Arab owned restaurants, and events. According to David Carment and Ariane Sadjed (2017) the defining quality of a diaspora is a dynamic linkage with the country of origin. This is exactly what we observed during our investigation of the early migrant(s) experience.

Although the initial phase is characterized by some sort of isolation it serves as a necessary transitional phase to the more advanced ones in which they start to diverge from “niche-identities” which links them to their origin” (Carment and Sadjed, 2017). afterwards, migrants start to establish multicultural links with other groups either locals or from different social backgrounds. At this stage a hybrid identity starts to build up. They tend to oscillate between two identities depending on the social setting or the required social norms of the particular group they are in contact with. As described by Homi K. Bhabha (1994:164) “The hybrid object [...] retains the actual semblance of the authoritative symbol but revalues its presence by resisting it as the signifier of *Entstellung* – after the intervention of difference.”. This highlights the way in which migrants start to adopt some features of the

hosting culture. although the migrant at this stage is more open to “difference” there is still some degree of agency in the sense that they exert some change on the borrowed cultural items. In addition, this hybrid phase is but a coping mechanism that allows migrants to have access to areas that are not accessible in the first isolation phase. The final phase, a relative one, which depends on the degree of openness to integration and the social and economic motivations, is the phase of assimilation. Assimilation defines as the “process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, [which] are incorporated with them in a common cultural life [...] assimilation, is central in the historical and cultural processes.” (Park and Burgess, 1921: 736).

In order to understand the correlation between the above mentioned concepts and the processes by which the selected community for this research, develop, interact and negotiate their identities we must first have a close look at this group, their specific characteristics, background, and aims which can be potential variables guiding our research development.

The Tunisian Diaspora in Hungary

Although a small community The Tunisian diaspora in Hungary is a potentially dynamic group, shaped by many personal, economic, and political influences. Tunisians in Hungary, unlike other larger and more established groups are engaged with a special socio-cultural landscape that merges their background with the central European realities. The main push factors for Tunisian migration to Europe, especially to Hungary, are educational advancement, work, and social mobility. Socioeconomic and geopolitical aims primarily influence these migrations.

Whether they are laborers, settled professionals, entrepreneurs, or employees in Hungary's growing

service sector, immigrants add to the country's diversity. Hungary becomes appealing for Tunisian students due to its broadening scholarship opportunities, most especially under scholarships like the *Stipendium Hungaricum*, under which both material assistance and academic sponsorship are provided for in various disciplines. These students engage with the wider Arab and Tunisian communities in pursuit of familiarity and cultural continuity, as they are mainly occupied by their studies. Entrepreneurs and professionals therefore form businesses to cater to the local and expatriate communities and thereby create an economy of interdependence. Restaurants and shops refer to the need not only in maintaining cultural identity but also in creating a niche in Hungary's economic life. Besides economic and educational interests, diaspora people's personal and family relationships further reinforce their feeling of belonging. Family members in most cases remain extremely connected to Tunisia with frequent visits to the country or even ongoing regular communications notwithstanding physical separation. Remittances serve not only as a source of financial sustenance but also as an affirmation of remaining tied to home. Hungarian families are likely to maintain traditional values like social responsibility, religious affiliation, and cultural identification. Generational experience also plays a role in identity formation as younger Tunisians struggle with a mixed culture formed by their family background and living with Hungarian society.

The public and social life of the Tunisian diaspora is centered on religious institutions, businesses, and cultural networks that enable contact with Hungarian culture and other Arab and Muslim communities. Religious practice and community meeting centers, mosques and Islamic centers enable Tunisians to preserve their religious tradition, celebrate Islamic holidays, and debate religion and identity. Enabling inter-diasporal relations with Turkish, Moroccan, and Syrian

communities, these locations also serve as gateways to other Muslim groups. Tunisian businesspeople regularly engage with suppliers and customers from diverse backgrounds, thereby strengthening these connections and fostering a networked economic system. Social and cultural exchange between the diaspora thrives outside of official institutions through online networks, social circles, and underground gatherings. Maintaining connectivity, which allows individuals to share experiences, encourage activities, and provide support to one another as they travel through life in a foreign land, depends on social media. Cultural groups and community events provide the chance to participate in Tunisian cultures, for example, food festivals and Arabic-language lectures, thereby keeping a shared identity within a foreign environment. These transactions enrich the larger discourse of migration, adaptation, and identity in modern-day Hungary and aid in cultural preservation.

Acculturation, Hybridity, and Inter-Diasporic Relations

People's cultural changes and how they handle their background in a new society influences their movement behavior. Adapting for the Tunisian population in Hungary is challenging as they are retaining their traditional origins and gradually embracing new ones. Acculturation, hybridity, and interactions between individuals from several Diasporas help to define migration from Tunisia to Hungary. For instance, "In its most recent descriptive and realist usage, hybridity appears as a convenient category at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration." (Virinder et al., 2005:70). This is particularly evident when the immigrants strive to strike a compromise between their own past and the demands of Hungarian society. From the loss of old cultural traditions to the emergence of

identities combining Tunisian and Hungarian social conventions, these developments occur on several levels.

Among the Tunisian diaspora, acculturation is complete and intricate, especially in religious environments, business communities, and cultural interactions. For the sake of interaction among Tunisians and most Arab and Muslim societies, such as Syrian, Moroccan, and Turkish societies, mosques and Islamic centers take the central stage. Mosques and Islamic centers encourage familiarity and cultural continuity and thus facilitate religious activities, Arabic language, and social interactions leading to the creation of social ties. At the same time, mosques also serve as inter-diasporic contact points, hence presenting a platform for varying groups to share experiences, provide assistance to each other, and address living challenges together in Hungary. As Nielsen, Jørgen S., et al., editors highlight “While formal religiosity has increased amongst Muslims in diaspora, the growth of mosques in the 1970s and 1980s accompanied the reuniting of families, which in turn raised issues concerning the transmission of Islam to a new generation, as well as unemployment and global religious revival. (Nielsen, Jørgen S., 2010: 552)

Economic ties reveal even more the complicated nature of acculturation and inter-diasporal linkages. Particularly in halal marketplaces and Arab restaurants, Tunisian businesspeople seek to interact with Syrian and Moroccan ones. By means of these commercial networks, Tunisian companies are able to survive and flourish under the possibility of cultural values exchange. Business exchanges in commodities, business cooperation, and reciprocity of Arab immigrants create a type of economic interdependence that supports loyalty to the national heritage. This collaboration is not just financial but also a result of cultural solidarity whereby similar experiences of migration unite many people in common traditions. One of the most significant issues of migration is the

progressive erosion of the native culture, particularly over generations. The first-generation Tunisian migrants tend to remain closely attached to their country of origin, therefore retaining customs, religious practices, and language skills in everyday life. Hence we can rely on the book of “Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation”, where (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) stated: “Adult immigrants in the United States typically combine instrumental learning of English with efforts to maintain their culture and language. They also seek to pass this heritage to their children. Of all the distinct legacies transmitted across generations, language is arguably the most important, but it is also the most difficult to transmit because of strong opposing forces.” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 114-115). Born in Hungary, the second generation, however, tends to suffer from cultural dualism. Although they acquire beliefs and rituals from their parents, they also step into Hungarian standards, and therefore there is a mix of the cultural aspects. The language use clearly indicates this transformation between generations; Arabic is still the shared language used at home, whereas Hungarian and English prevail in work and school life. This change in language affects identification over time since young Tunisians integrate more smoothly into Hungarian society yet continue to maintain elements of their Tunisian identity. “The instrumental acculturation of the first generation in the United States is followed by a second that speaks English in school and parental languages at home, often responding to remarks in those languages in English. Limited bilingualism leads, almost inevitably, to English becoming the home language in adulthood”. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 114-115). Coming into Hungarian society accelerates this process of cultural assimilation even further. Frequent encounters in public life, institutions, and schools challenge the immigrants with newer social norms, work ethics, and lifestyles. While some of the

Tunisians accept these as a welcome change and adopt some Hungarian traditions, others consciously prefer to retain their cultural identity through continued contact with the wider Arab and Muslim society. It's a flexible identity where people exchange the demands of their home country and the homeland they live in. It's not a process of linear assimilation but rather an exchange of ongoing negotiation where portions of both the Hungarian and the Tunisian ways are chosen, taken up, or modified.

Assimilation in Hungarian society significantly accelerates the integration process. Challenges in the public sphere, institutions, and schools compel migrants to adapt to modern social norms, work patterns, and lifestyles. Tunisians adapt to some extent and adopt some of Hungary's traditions as a welcome change, while others consciously prefer to retain their cultural heritage through exposure to the broader Arab and Muslim community. Individuals are still negotiating between the obligations of their birth country and host country with a fluid sense of self. This leads to an ongoing process of combining parts of the Hungarian and Tunisian cultures that have been chosen, adopted, or changed, rather than a straight-forward blending. Second-generation Tunisians, for example, combine Tunisian, Hungarian, and more general Arab identities by negotiating several cultural influences. Language, social conduct, and even lifestyle choices mirror this hybridity. Inter-diasporic relationships also help to form hybrid identities as interactions with Moroccan, Syrian, and Turkish populations bring extra cultural aspects that broaden their experiences. As Stuart Hall emphasizes, "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1990: 235).

The Tunisian diaspora in Hungary is positioned within a larger configuration of Arab and Muslim Diasporas as a community that reproduces cultural identity far beyond individual silos. In social, economic, and religious networks, Tunisians maintain heritage and exchange cultural practices, producing new dynamic formations of identity. The tradition-accommodation conversation is meant to highlight the resilience of diaspora society as it tells us how, at all times, immigrants find themselves in the ever-evolving social scene but still cling to the motherland. The use of the Hungarian language by the Tunisians illustrates the variety of ways adaptation in a language can happen, whether as a requirement of social and economic integration or an indicator of assimilation. Religion also has a significant role in preserving cultural identity, as common Islamic practice will serve as an integrating factor in multicultural Arab and Muslim societies. Public and social life for Tunisians in Hungary also involves both adapting to Hungarian culture and maintaining Tunisian traditions. Although the diaspora identity has been founded on the previous Tunisian customs, such as shared celebrations and observance of religious holidays, Hungarian culture, particularly social norms and public morals, has also found its place in life. The second-generation Tunisians especially display this kind of cultural exchange because they are weighing their parents' customs with the presence of Hungarian society.

Conclusion

The Tunisian diaspora community in Hungary is the relevant example of how intra-diasporic relations are complex in nature and how preservation and adaptation are facing each other. The first generation clings to the home country's culture, and the second generation has a dilemma between hybrid identity, which is the outcome of

both parent culture and Hungarian social norm. Mosques and Islamic community centers are indicators of cultural belonging, representative of religious continuity and inter-diasporic identity with other Arab and Muslim diasporic communities. Economic networks and social space facilitate cultural hybridity, reflective of the dynamic nature of diasporic identity. Yet language is still dominant in delineating this process, where young people use Hungarian and English as public markers but retain Arabic in the private realm. This change in language is symptomatic of broader acculturation trends, wherein host culture integration does not imply complete assimilation. Rather, Tunisian migrants build identity by selective adaptation for cultural fitness but engage in transnational exchange. Relations between inter-diasporas among Syrians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Turks also serve to reinforce diasporic identity over national ones. Economic rivalry and social hierarchy sometimes yield tensions that reveal the limits of diaspora networking. It is argued that more research may look into how social media and policy interventions influence such inter-diasporic relations.

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