

## **Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora.**

Edited by Touraj Atabaki and Sanjyot Mehendale Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, 235 pp. ISBN 0-415-33260-5

Muhammed EKŞİ\*

The book titled *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora* mainly focuses upon the transnationalism and diaspora in the Post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus in terms of historical perspective. The book also sheds light upon the role of diaspora in the process of the re-emergence of national identities in the regions of the Central Asia and the Caucasus. It particularly deals with the geopolitics of the regions and transnational linkages in regional and multinational interests globally in the formation of the new nation-states.

The book consists of 11 chapters written by 10 different mostly prominent academicians on their fields.

In the first chapter of the book as an introduction, Touraj Atabaki presents an excellent brief background for the formation of diaspora communities in the regions within a theoretical framework. He argues that population dislocation; mass migration and immigration were among the consequences of the dissolution of both the Tsarist Empire and Soviet rule on socio-political terms (p.1). Tabaki also analyzes the demographic consequences and the formation of new independent nation-states.

In the context of the population dislocation process, Soviet rule applied the adaptation of ethno-administrative division policy which staunchly divided the entire region into three national territorial entities (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Turkmens) at first in terms of historical aspects of the former three khanates (Bukhara, Kokand, Khiva). Nevertheless, this demarcation led to the betrayal of Tajiks and Kyrgyz. Additionally, this situation engineered the partition of the national identities within the territorial base. Thus, Soviet policy of nativization created the recognized ethnic minorities utilizing cultural freedom.

On the other hand, gradual constructed and sovietized titular ethnic cultural distinctiveness tended to encourage non-titular ethnic groups for declaration of national identities. In other words, Soviet regime's 'sovetskij Chelovek' (Soviet person) the ideological embodiment, concealed and stimulated gradual developing ethno-nationalism which is one of the Soviet paradigms (p.2).

Briefly, ethno-nationalism is the outcome of this peculiar ethno-federalist administrative structure. For that reason in this local administrative hierarchy, ethnic minorities strove to consolidate their presences. Further upon industrialization policy, displacement of labor migration created gigantic population dissolution.

---

\* A.Ü. SBF. Global and Regional Studies, Master, 2007.

The other point is that the reformed identity by soviet policy caused 'the otherizing' (p.6). It means that this policy displaced and alienated ethnic groups from Soviet and Russian communities. In this way, it would be said that this alienation crafted new diaspora identity and, it traced and created a new form of ethno-communal allegiance that accentuated into the reconstruction of a homeland for minorities (p.7). As mentioned above, alienation among ethnic groups led to crafted new separate diaspora identities.

In a nutshell, Atabaki analyzes how the ethnic minorities were formally recognized by that way they utilized partly restricted cultural freedom and titular groups were granted a *de facto* privileged status, while smaller ethnic minorities and those without formal recognition deprived of the same rights (p.2-3).

In chapter two, Jolle Demmers finds out the role of diasporas in the process of de-territorialization of conflict (p.10) and discusses the forms of diasporas with the political weight of diaspora in intra-state conflict that had increased drastically throughout the late twentieth century and they often play a further critical role in contemporary conflicts (p.11). Hence, she theorized the role of diasporas in contemporary debate on the basis of the conflict theory.

What's more, she argues how and why diaspora communities are involved in intra-state conflicts, and endeavors to classify the units of analysis to understand the role of diaspora in the transnational aspects (p.10-11).

Besides, in making an effort to venture to define diaspora term consequently, she puts forward that challenging the dispose of 'ideal-type' for diaspora term, preferably seeking to identify groups as 'more' or 'less' diasporic (p.13). To a certain extent, it ought to be understood as signifier of political struggles to define the local as distinctive community in the historical context of displacement.

More to the point, she attentively distinguishes diasporas from transnational communities with the former being 'globally dispersed', while also maintaining a 'triadic relationship' between groups, territorial states and homelands (p. 13).

Demmers examines that how we can conceptualize the process of de-territorialization and delocalization of conflict on diaspora term. However, she analyzes diaspora in terms of conflict, locality, long-distance nationalism, and conflict dynamics. For instance, in the context of the locality, the political struggle, she scrutinizes socio-cultural networks in the new forms of communication with globalization on a global scale within social formations term.

Consequently, she provided an analysis of diaspora with conflict theory focusing on locality, minority nationalism and the construction of transnational communities in the historical and theoretical standpoint.

In chapter three, Shirin Akiner regulates her essay as three parts such as the first part about the ethnic survey, the second part regarding the analysis of ethnic diaspora formation and the third (last) part concerning a typology of diaspora. In such sense, Akiner studies the formation of diasporas in Kazakhstan and provides a distinguished analysis of the patterns of the multi-ethnic construction of Kazakhstan in the historical experience (p.21).

Likewise, she differentiates diasporas on the subject of type, cause, and chronology of formation in the historical background and reference (p.55). In view of that, she systematically analyzes the formation of diaspora and the extraordinarily complex demographic structure in a broader framework. She additionally puts forward the difficulty of the establishing an organizational framework to serve an analytical implement for examining group dynamics (p.21).

In the first part, Akiner surveys the formation of Kazakhs entity in the formation of diaspora in a historical spot. In the second part, she analyzes the diverse varieties of diasporas such as administrative diasporas in the formation of transnationalism and different parameters of diaspora. In the third and last one, Akiner provides a typology of diasporas, which she categorizes it such as the formation of diasporas and chronology to convey an insight into the dynamics of minorities.

In order to set this in a broader context, Akiner confers comparison with the British Empire which analyzes similarities and differences within the European colonial era. That's why, she proceeds a new typology including four categories such as imperial agents, settlers, auxiliars and deportees in a broader dimensional and conceptual framework (p.56-57).

Consequently, Akiner presents an explanation of a post-Soviet diaspora pattern of behavior in the reconfiguration of socio-political space in contemporary Kazakhstan. Akiner concludes with several clarifications upon the typology of diasporas in former Soviet Kazakhstan as analogized with the British Empire and thus she analyzes various unique features of Kazakhstan.

In chapter four, Kulbhushan Warikoo analyzes the Russian Diasporas in Central Asia and challenges that these have experienced as a consequence of the loss of their privileged status in historical context (p.67). That is to say, he evaluates drastic demographic changes in the Russian minorities of Central Asia throughout the seventy years of Soviet rule.

Moreover, he emphasizes demographic structure drastically altered with the re-emergence of Central Asian states with the national rediscovery and the process of cultural revivalism which led to the balance of power shifting throughout the dissolution of the Soviet Union (p.69). In addition, Warikoo supportively utilizes the statistical data upon the Russian migration and an analysis of migration patterns between Russia and Central Asia would have indicated that Russian migration began to decline in the early 1990s (p. 72). He furthermore asserts on the one hand, there was a visible declining in Russian community; on the other hand there was a noticeable increasing ethno-centrism in Central Asian states with the Russian disengagement in Central Asia.

Notwithstanding, the inter-ethnic tensions and disharmony created a tenancy situation for the Russian diasporas in Central Asia. As a final point, Warikoo assesses a diverse sociopolitical indigenization and how the Russian community perceived as a reluctance to assimilate, and their impact upon the gradual decline of Russian diaspora (p.77).

In chapter five, one of the most interesting essays, Stephan Astourian notices an introductory debate on the concept of diaspora and its functioning definitions. In

that case it followed by a detailed study on the formation of the Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora and their functions. Besides, he propounds that political and religious polarization provided as a means of structuring the diaspora communities (p.83). On the case of Armenia, diaspora had a long history in its agenda and diaspora was reasoned by the genocide to some extent (p.86).

Astourian also deals with the relationship between Turkey and Armenia on the matter of genocide and Karabakh. It follows that these issues are shaping the relationships and they are the preconditions to diplomatic ties (p.89). Therefore, disregarding the genocide is impractical, but it is achievable to leave it to historians for the normalization of the relationship (p.87).

On the other hand, the main distinction between the Armenian and Azerbaijani diasporas is that Armenian diaspora is developed in the absence of a state and tends to be fairly autonomous from the Armenian state. On the other hand Azerbaijani diaspora is shaped in the context of Azerbaijani independence and state, in other words Azerbaijani diaspora is the state-sponsored mobilization (p.103). The other point is that Azerbaijani diaspora is a late- phenomenon. As a consequence of distinction from the Armenian circumstances, Azerbaijan is a paradigm of state-centered diasporization or even diasporization from above (p.103).

However, he explores the tensions between the Armenian government and the diaspora over the function of the latter to support not just Armenians in the homeland, but the political administration and its policies.

In chapter six, Armine Ishkanian scrutinizes the impact of transnational diasporic activism on Armenia's post-Soviet transition within the framework of globalization and global civil society in a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, she notices Armenian diaspora created the genocide that shaped the identity construction in the transformation process of this diaspora.

Subsequently, she examines the impact of American-based non-profit diasporic organizations on Armenia. Although she argues that NGOs assisted Armenia's transition from communism, there was an ambivalent relationship between Armenia and diaspora communities regarding cultural, ideological and political priorities (p.113). To sum up Ishkanian analyzes the impediment confronting Armenian diaspora activists in proceeding its agenda.

In chapter seven, Natalya Khan analyzes the relationship between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and evaluates Uzbekistan's refugee policy in the course of the case-study of Afghan refugees. More importantly, she argues that 'the absence of refugee legislation in Uzbekistan, together with strict regulations on foreign and stateless citizens' legal status, resulted in almost no legal protection and difficult living conditions for Afghan refugees in a republic with a struggling transnational economy (p. 141)

Khan concisely surveys on the drastic and catastrophic political changes in Afghanistan which have had far-reaching effect for Russia and the Central Asian states. In that case, there was a gradual formation of Afghan diaspora community in Uzbekistan and it could be understood by focusing upon the inter-state relationship in the region.

In chapter eight, Ablet Kamalov analyzes the Uighur diaspora in the context of Sino-Soviet relationship and by focusing upon how the demise of Soviet had fractured the ties among the Uighur communities in Central Asia. Subsequently, he scrutinizes how the Soviet collapse modifies the Uighur's communal identity both in the former Soviet Central Asia and in China within historical background.

He puts forward that the Uighur communities and diaspora are the de-territorialized nation and, they are still decisive factor both in Chinese-Russia relations and in Central Asian states. The other point is that Islam began to play an interesting role in the cultural and ethnic identity of Uighur communities (p.165).

In chapter ten, Dru Gladney attempts to comprehend the circumstances of Muslim by taking into consideration for their 'transnational and transgressor identity in terms of their accommodation to or resistance against the dominant Chinese host culture and political milieu' (p.184). Moreover, he provides an introductory comprehension on the roots of Islam in China and he asserts that Islam was profoundly influenced by exogenous trends. Subsequently, he argues that Muslims acutely menaced in terms of preservation instinct with an Islamic identity in China.

Gladney concludes his insightful analysis that post-modern contraction of time and space stimulated by the prospect of further brisk accommodation to the diasporic circumstances does 'not bode well for the integration of Muslims into the Chinese Leviathan' (p.211).

In chapter nine and eleven, Eden Naby initially analyzes the Afghan diaspora by providing general background and he underlines that the Afghan community, fragmented society, are ethnically and religiously fractured with the communal divisions.

Furthermore, Naby emphasizes that there are gradual patterns of Afghan identity in diaspora and mutual correlation with the host country. Nevertheless, their possible role is reshaping the political process in Afghanistan.

Naby lastly examines the Assyrian diaspora that they confronted with losing their culture and language due to being stateless. For this reason, the Assyrian diaspora is in danger and their survival is doubtful without a homeland. Nevertheless, Naby used the outdated census and migration data along with he could not explicitly clarify content of the essay.

In conclusion, this volume is a vital source of collections in analyzing the role of diaspora in the emergence of national identities within the theoretical conceptualization of transnationalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Nearly all authors virtually agree that the role of diaspora is exceedingly significant for the transnational linkages and the formation of national identities in the region.

As a critique, it is probable to state that several essays depend upon the outdated data. This collective work proceeds the language problem that is common in its equivalents; by doing this it secured its probability of artificiality of analyzing.

In general, this book is highly recommendable to academic circles and also it sheds light upon the less researched empirical cases.