

# Digitalization of long distance nationalism, diaspora and their on-line political participation via internet

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## I. Introduction

As stated by Oiarzabal and Reips (2012), “The study of how migrants utilize computer-based and mobile technologies to communicate, interact, exchange information, promote cultural and religious practices, and enhance political mobilization across borders is becoming a substantial body of theoretical consideration and empirical research.” (p. 1334). It can be understood easily that the wide spread of Internet usage began from 1990’s and the proliferation of its use due to the development of technology changed the way of lives of the transnational groups. Opposite to the conventional media tools such as radio, television or newspapers, the Internet has enabled the potential audience to be remote and not a location determinant in other words, by its nature, the Internet has given the migrants the opportunity to reach and create knowledge and content in a broadened manner. Accordingly, as stated by Kissau and Hunger (2008):

“The internet offers immigrants possibilities -more than traditional print and audiovisual media can- to publish their opinions online and contribute to the formation of public opinion. Since migrants today lead a life between two poles which is speaking multiple languages, moving between two cultures and feel part of more than one society and pursue interest in regarding politics in two countries, internet as an alternative public sphere has potential to influence the public opinion and initiate social change.” (p. 5).

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Thus, the increasing number of using the Internet as a communication tool by diaspora, has caused a big turn in migration research and the scope through which we look at mobilization around the globe. The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time (Castells, 2007). As a matter of fact, -with reference to two case studies in view- this paper intends to highlight the possible effect of ICT's on certain diaspora groups' political participation to their homeland by focusing on the 'WHY's and 'HOW's. It is crucial to emphasize that the Internet is not only about information gathering or sharing, but also it is a creative space that includes emotions; diaspora online may create new forms of citizenships, community and political practices. (Bernal, 2006, p.161)

In light of this information, this paper aims to examine two certain diaspora groups, which are Kurdish and Turkish. However, since these two specific groups are quite broad, especially the Turkish diaspora who are secularist-nationalists, namely Kemalists, and the Kurdish diaspora which demands a national territory for Kurdistan will be focused upon. Furthermore, their engagement with on-line tools in terms of political participation will be exemplified and an attempt will be made to support it with the theory of long distance nationalism, which was introduced to the literature by Benedict Anderson in 1992; thus, with the innovations of technology, the concept is highly digitalized. Additionally, political participation, in general, can be understood in two dimensions: electoral and non-electoral. When diasporic participation in politics is considered, this paper focuses on non-electoral participation. By non-electoral participation, what is meant is demonstrations, digital activism through social media tools, online campaigns, e-mail initiatives, lobbying and so on.

## **II. The Transformation of Diaspora as A Dynamic Concept**

To begin with, it is essential to touch upon the definition of the concept of 'diaspora', which was transformed by different scholars by using it indifferent scopes. The short section of diaspora definition will be followed by the introduction of the two groups of the diaspora who are the core of the paper. "Diaspora" can be interpreted as a concept of a core debate in transnational and migration related studies as it was mentioned above. Although lots

of scholars work on this concept, by its definition, it may sound blurry, simply because its earlier and current uses are different from each other. What is seen in a literature review is that, during its use, the term diaspora has transformed dramatically and there is no consensus in terms of its definition in the scholarship. Diaspora was originally an ancient Greek word used to describe the Greeks that were dispersed. Even though it is a common concept which is debated among contemporary scholars, the word has not been used in another language but the Greeks, before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Additionally, until mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, the term was only used in relation to theology or religious studies; namely, the Jewish diaspora (Dufoix, 2003). When one looks up a dictionary, diaspora is defined as “to disperse” commonly. It means that the diasporic groups are scattering from their homeland to various destinations. Also, the Bible also refers to the Jewish diaspora who were exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. Moreover, starting from 1950’s, there have (been) occurred a change in terms of not limiting the concept only with religion or the Jews; so, the concept started to be secularized. In other words, “diaspora” is now used more commonly to describe any migration pattern. Thus, following this secularization, various studies were conducted in the 1960’s such as: Asian diaspora (by examining Chinatowns), the black diaspora and the Palestinian diaspora. Following the increase of transnationalization; Armenians, Turks and Indian diasporas were also studied in 80’s and in 90’s when diaspora studies made its peak, the Tibetan, Caribbean, Algerian, Iranian, Latin American, Russian and Afghan diasporas were also researched. Furthermore, “diaspora” as a concept has broadened itself with the rapid rise in the chances of mobility of various groups throughout the world and used for more than one group of migrants. As also claimed by Dufoix (2003):

“In this way, “diaspora” has become a term that refers to any phenomenon of dispersion from a place; the organization of an ethnic, national, or religious community in one or more countries; a population spread over more than one territory, the places of dispersion; any non-territorial space where exchanges take place, and so on.” (p.2)

Nevertheless, it is essential to mention that even though its use in literature and media tools is widened, not all scholars agree with the expanded use of diaspora such as Medam (1993), claiming that the concept loses its distinctive character when it includes more than it was intended originally (cited in Dufoix,

2008). However, this paper uses the broadened definition of diaspora while mentioning the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora, who are scattered with specific political views and ethnic belongings.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

Benedict Anderson, whose work “Imagined Communities” in 1983 argues the origins of nationalism, introduced the concept of “Long distance nationalism” in 1992 and this concept gave social scientists a base to study the political actions of diasporic groups. The concept is identical to the classical understanding of nationalism as seeing nation which people share a common history and the land. However, the only difference that long distance nationalism differs itself from the classical notion is the situation of being remote from the country of origin; thus, long distance nationalism can be interpreted as the action of diasporic groups in terms of the effect the politics of their country of origin without actually being in there. This certain group of diaspora is politically active regarding the country of origin and not only migration but the force of nation state establishments created these long distance nationalists (Thobani, 2018).

As explained by Schiller (2005):

“Long distance nationalism is a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various locations to a specific territory that they see as their ancestral home; moreover, forms of actions taken by those nationalists may range from ‘voting, demonstrating, lobbying, contributing money, creating works of art’ to ‘fighting, killing and dying’ (p.570).

According to Anderson (2001), politics no longer depends on territorial location in a home country (p.42). It can be said that the phenomenon of long distance nationalism becomes even more common and digitalized with the development of Internet based communication technologies, which enables the political participation easier without territorial considerations. In this way, it can be stated that within cyberspace, nationalism finds ways to arouse. Mainly the Internet, cheap communication, travels and money transfer technologies helped the diasporic groups to practice long

distance nationalism commonly. With the digitalization aspect of long distance nationalism, opportunities such as gaining political information, participate political discussions, creating political contents and running political campaigns online and even, organizing and gathering become possible.

As Anderson explained in 1998 (cited in Dieckhoff, 2017 ), long distance nationalism has two specific characteristics: unaccountability and instrumental function. As Dieckhoff (2017) further explains it, the unaccountability refers to the fact that the long distance nationalist are enjoying democratic states that they are living in and they can - but not necessarily- celebrate some excessive political ideas without being scared of any sanction. Thus, the instrumental function gives a self confidence to the diaspora since it helps to make the ethnic identity stronger and take up arms against the ones who are oppressed. In other words, the long distance nationalists have freedom of speech and are proud of their ethnicity.

Furthermore, by globalization and transnationalized world and the ways of lives, diasporic groups are carrying their languages, culture and ideologies with them along their mobility paths. Thus, combined with the opportunities of the Internet based technologies, the diasporic groups' possibility of engaging with their country of origins became a part of daily life. The rapid development of the communication tools eased the contrast of the inside and outside and differed the dimension of belonging. Therefore, the practical part of belonging is political participation offline and online, which made possible with the ICT`s that create digitalized long distance nationalism (Dieckhoff, 2017). By using online tools, diaspora creates a "virtual community" or "virtual neighborhoods", as Appardurai (1996) discusses, in cyberspace.

Moreover, due to human motion and the emergence of virtual communities, political struggles are no longer territorially bounded. Thus, most scholars agree upon the fact that migrant communities maintain a considerable impact on the politics of the homeland. (Bock-Luna 2007, p. 20 & Demmers 2002, p. 91). Although "whether the political participation of diaspora has an effect into the home countries or not" is a huge debate and carry importance, what this paper tries to see is "in what ways the internet may affect the specific diasporic groups' political participation". The main questions are that does the internet has an effect on political participation

of diaspora, if yes, in what ways and with which reasons the internet and online participation is preferred by certain groups. The concept of long distance nationalism combined with ICTs' are creating a recipe in order to answer this question.

#### **IV. How to Become a Diaspora? Turks and Kurds**

In this paper, two distinct groups of diaspora engagement with homeland politics via online communication tools are intended to be discussed. These two groups are the Turkish diaspora who are Kemalists that idealize nationalist and secularist political view, and the Kurdish diaspora who calls for a national territory. These two groups are particularly chosen since as Şenay (2013) argues, "Kemalist long distance nationalism is different than standard forms of diasporic activism" which is going to be explained further; in addition, since the Kurdish people are one of the major stateless nation in the world.

The Turkish diaspora, which dispersed throughout the world, is concentrated in Germany. The main reason of this density is the "guest worker" agreements between Germany and Turkey, which was signed in the 60's and applied until the 1973 oil crisis. The temporary agreement of guest workers due to the lack of labor force in Germany did not stop as it was planned, but just the contrary, mass migration to Germany and further policies such as family reunification was implemented. Furthermore, in 70's and 80's due to the political crisis in Turkey because of the military coup, political exiles also flee to mainly Europe and also to overseas countries. Another reason of the diaspora who are Turkish is the so-called "brain-drain" of certain elite population. There exists a significant number of researches in literature about the working class Turkish migrants, who are from rural areas and have low education levels, in terms of their behaviors about cultural preservation, integration and problems of identity construction. However, the scholars did not touch upon the political exiles or the brain-drain diaspora as much as it was done with guest workers.

This paper particularly centers upon the diasporic elites who are carrying the values of the founder of Turkish Republic, Atatürk, by emphasizing secularism, modernity and westernization. This specific group is identified as "Kemalists" which is the ideology of the Turkish republic since its foundation. This group of diaspora is known as having contrary views as

opposed to the current ruling political party (AKP) which was elected in 2002. AKP, a political party which identifies itself as a conservative and religious thing has been criticized and even protested by Kemalist diaspora about certain policy implementations, actions or even about any political speech of AKP members which sounds non-secular. Kemalist long-distance nationalists fear that the current state institutions are affected and corrupted by religious reactionaries. (Şenay, 2013, p. 377).

Moreover, according to Skrbiš (cited in Şenay, 2013), long-distance nationalism develops only if an emigrant population contains a critical mass of political exiles that has experienced a loss of status in their homeland. Kemalist diaspora and Kurdish diaspora are differentiated exactly at this point by Kemalists for not being an exiled community. Unlike the Kurdish diaspora, Kemalists diaspora is not an ethnic minority group that was repressed previously, but a group that is not satisfied with the current political agenda of Turkey and migrated due to different reasons such as education.

Further, the Kurdish people, who have no valid and official national territory, are mainly living in four different countries, which are Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Their own history consists of constant fights for their autonomy; however, due to the signed treaty of Lausanne after First World War by the new Turkish Republic, their hope for autonomy declined dramatically since the borders of Turkey were drawn certainly and no referendum was done about Kurdish autonomy. At the same time, it is essential to mention that the majority of Kurdish people is living in east Turkey are exposed to high rates of discrimination and repression by the government and the society for decades as a minority. Thus, due to the xenophobia they have experienced, economic reasons and the political climate in Turkey, since 1970's, mass migration to Europe has occurred. The migration of Kurdish people -who were living in Turkey- to Europe made to its peak when "Guest worker" agreements was signed, however, they were considered Turkish since they were holding a Turkish citizenship. In addition to the guest worker contracts, another wave of migration has happened after 1980's military coup since they were basically responding the political crisis of Turkey because of the increased repression.

Moreover, Başer (2013) mentions that there are no reliable statistics about the population of Kurdish people in Europe. The major consensus about

the estimations is around 850,000 Kurds who live in Europe, although other sources claim that the number is closer to one million with 85 % of them coming from Turkey and some states that number of Kurds living in Europe is even far more than two million. Therefore, until further empirical research is conducted to produce an accurate census of the Kurdish population living in Europe, the numbers will lack full credibility (p. 8). Even though the population of Kurdish people in Europe is uncertain, this does not change the fact that while they were not able to live their culture openly and speak their language freely in Turkey; thus, they gained freedom abroad by gaining the chance to express their existence without repression. This fact shows that this specific diasporic group earned the possibility to speak out without pressure, get organized without fear and be active politically about their “call for nation- Kurdistan”. Furthermore, the situation of being active as creating associations, gatherings and protests has been expanded beyond the approximate audience of the Kurdish diaspora due to the rapid development of Internet and computer-based communication technologies. In other words, the Internet gave the Kurdish diaspora the opportunity to gather in virtual neighborhoods within the cyberspace which has a much broader audience throughout the world.

As a matter of fact, as Shiller categorized (2005) that while Kurdish diaspora belongs to the “separatist movement” which has the aim to have autonomy in a desired territory or a completely new state order; also, Kemalist diaspora belongs to the “regime change” which is not about territorial boundaries of a state but about a change of a certain political power or a party who is in power. Hence, diaspora communities can easily participate in conflicts in their homelands and live their politics long-distance thanks to the speed of communications as stated by Demmers (2002, p.88). In the next section, the effect of Internet on Kurdish and Turkish Kemalist diaspora and their political participation will be illustrated; also, how and why they utilize computer-based communication technologies will be exemplified.

## **V. On-Line is The New Politics: Two Case Studies**

In 1996, Georges Prevelakis stated that the networks are inherent and fundamental elements of diaspora since they clarify their actual resurgence and their growing importance on the international arena (cited in Therwath, 2012). Thus, now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it can be observed that on-line communication tools become widespread in the various spheres of life,



such as political activism and the long distance nationalism became even more possible and progressive to practice. The Internet as a cyberspace constitutes an area for diasporic communities where they can freely express them and speaks for the ones who are censored in their country of origin. It is a certain fact that access to the Internet can be banned or use of any social media can be prohibited by some nations. Also, the conventional media, which is dominated by certain power holders may also not reflect the ongoing situations of a country or do not picture the issues of minorities. By giving the opportunity of being anonymous, serving the alternative of freedom of expression and being relatively safe, the Internet is a great source for political participation online. Moreover, the usage of the Internet among diasporic communities increases with the possibilities of access; thus, throughout the internet, what one can see commonly are online platforms such as websites, on-line newspapers, Facebook groups or Twitter pages that are created by diasporic communities in order to actively participate into politics. In other words, the dispersed population of diaspora in a way creates their nation on-line once more by gathering in cyberspace and practices the digital long distance nationalism by participating in politics through the Internet.

### **(a) Call for a nation on-line –Kurdistan**

Kurdish people due to the ongoing political crisis about their autonomy in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, has been repressed, lost their freedom of expression and remained nationless since ages. The conventional and also contemporary media tools are mostly banned in order them not to promote any views about Kurdish autonomy and their territory claims. While the TV channels are not giving any space to Kurdish voices, the same situation is valid in other media sources such as newspapers and radios. Hence, the usage of the Internet is sometimes undergoing controls and prohibitions by the governments. Such websites that carry the idea of autonomous Kurdistan and the cultural celebration of Kurdish people has the possibility to be restricted in terms of access. In the light of these circumstances, it can be understood easily that the Internet offers the Kurdish diaspora freedom of speech, a free platform to express themselves politically without fear. By also giving the users anonymity, digital communication tools became inviting to the ones who have access and literacy. Also, according to Georgiou (2002), the Internet expands the space of community communication, self-expression and self-representation, challenging boundaries and

restrictions, which is crucial for diasporic and excluded minority groups.  
(p. 1)

Long distance nationalism, which is discussed above, is not a new phenomenon as Kurdish nationalism. As Tas (2017) explains, the Kurds are diverse group and a great amount of them believes that the only way to terminate the situation of statelessness and put an end to the crisis is to have unity via nationalism from a long distance. Therefore, solidarity among Kurdish dispersed people can be seen first in the form of unions, NGO's and organizations such as the Kurdish Institute Paris, which was founded in 1983. Nevertheless, with the opportunities that internet gives to the users, non-electoral political participation has gained more contributors who are following or creating certain web-sides, on-line newspapers, joining to online platforms, chat rooms or bulletin boards, using social media tools, such as Twitter and Facebook, creating blogs or YouTube channels. Kurdish diaspora who "calls for a nation", who is a minority and has been prejudiced, has started to have the ability to reach others by being online, by being everywhere.

When the on-line platforms that are established by the diaspora are searched, one can find thousands of websites that share information about the Kurdish history, culture, population and politics. The main aim of these websites are to eliminate the bias about the Kurdish community and to inform the potential audience. Also, it is possible to find various social media accounts and on-line newspapers, which gives updates about current Kurdish politics. It is significant to emphasize that the news that are shared are mostly the ones that are not transmitted in the country of origin.

As Georgiou (2002) argues, in the cyberspace, Kurds are freely expressing their demand of a territory. Thus, in the Kurdish websites, the main ruling political agenda is the "call for a nation" in terms of a recognized land, human rights, and Kurdish language and culture preservation. For instance, the [kurdishquestion.com](http://kurdishquestion.com), by saying it is not the "Kurdish problem" but the "Kurdish question", has news, opinions, interviews and article submission sections. The website is in English and also has Facebook and Twitter accounts linked to it. In the submission of article section, the website encourages activists, students, scholars or the Kurds to contribute by sending their ideas. Actually, in this way, the editors are encouraging the potential diaspora to participate the politics of origin

through online exchange of ideas. One can find different perspectives in the sections of the website about pro-Kurdish rights and pro-Kurdistan; thus, by publishing in English, it can be assumed that the aim is to reach a mass population. Also, in the news section, a transcription of an interview with Barzani, president of Kurdish Democratic Party, which was done in the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland is published. One of the main highlighted answers given by him is;

“Question: There are rumors that your dream is to have an independent Kurdistan, an independent Kurdish state. Will you declare independence?”

Answer: It is neither a rumor nor a dream. It is a reality that will come true. We will do everything in order to accomplish this objective, but peacefully and without violence.” (Washington Post, 2017)

The significance of this interview is not that the “call for a nation” is expressed in a worldwide organization, but the invisibility of this interview in any national media or broadcasting of any country that the Kurds live; Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Thus, the interview and the attendance of Barzani to the event can be found as news in the on-line newspapers, blogs or in various social media accounts, which are created, dominated and used by the diaspora. In short, the existence of Kurdish politics in this case, is only possible with the participation of the diaspora in cyberspace by sharing, debating and arguing this piece of the interview. It can also be said that, by long distance nationalism in a digitalized way, the Kurdish diaspora is an important tool to inform the ones who have no access to the news due to some restrictions and bans in the media. As put by Tas (2017), thanks to the Kurdish diaspora, the Kurdish issue was carried to the attention of international agenda.

Another example can be given from [thekurdishproject.com](http://thekurdishproject.com), with their slogan “building compassion through news, education and people” in order to create a better understanding of Kurdistan and accomplish peace. The important thing is that the website has a blog section called “personal stories and insights” which gives the possibility to the Kurdish people to speak out online. The editors of the website state that the best ways to improve cross cultural understanding is by getting to know real people and

hearing their stories. Hence, while the stories, which also include political elements, are shared and commented by other diaspora, emotional support among themselves can also be observed.

Furthermore, apart from the website that brings the Kurdish people together, the individual social media accounts also carry importance in terms of creating a free area of expression. Activists throughout the world have the possibility to share news that is not broadcasted by the various media tools with their followers. Hence, even the names of the accounts are significant since they carry the main objective of the accounts. To illustrate, “longlivekurdistan” as a twitter account can be understood by its name that it is pro-Kurdistan. Also, its tweets and retweets show that there is an aim to reflect, “What is really happening?” via social media. The account is sharing some information about the protest of the illegal arrest of Kurdish officials in Turkey, in front of the Turkish consulate in NYC. This information as it can be imagined, cannot be found in Turkish newspapers or in any broadcasting tools.

Moreover, Rojname Kurdish news can also be given as an example of the restrictions of press and freedom of speech. Established fifteen years ago, the web-side is actually a search engine for information and Kurdish news. The permanent tweet of the account states that the Turkish Government had asked Twitter to remove the account permanently. However, the account, by tweeting the situation, informs the audience about it, since this does not take place in conventional media. The comments of the Kurdish diaspora throughout the world can be seen under the tweet of Rojname Kurdish news, about freedom of press, speech, being prohibited and being controlled. However, outside of the territorial context, this information is shared online. By “retweeting” this specific tweet, the individual accounts also inform their followers and by “mentioning” this tweet, it can be said they are participating their politics online.

Furthermore, it is not unusual to see online petitions, campaigns and real events that are organized through Facebook about the political agenda of the country of origins. Thus, this is only other way for a diaspora to participate in the politics on-line. In a highly transnationalized world, the Internet provides diaspora a borderless space where they can strengthen their community ties.

Finally, as also stated by Hunger and Candan (2008), the Internet offers a freedom of opinion and freedom of speech for the Kurds which is partially

illegal in their off-line world in country of origins. Also, the Internet connects Kurdish diaspora to their home regions by daily politics. In this case, it can be said that the restriction of their on-line existence in the country of origin matters and this results in gathering online around this topic; thus, the long distance nationalism and the solidarity among the community members are practiced, in a digital way. In short, the Internet has an effect on political participation of the Kurdish diaspora due to its facilities.

### **(b) On-line Nostalgia: Secular Nationalists – Kemalism**

The Turkish diaspora, namely the Kemalists, is mainly the elite migrants with high education levels. It can be said that the reason of their diaspora status is because of the better education qualifications, also the point that they are hired in high paid jobs, westernized and far from the political tension of the past and today. In other words, the Kemalist diasporic group is not an exiled community and the reason why they are participating in politics online is not because of any historical repression as the Kurdish diaspora has gone through.

Moreover, as Şenay argues (2013), by the end of 90's, the political agenda in Turkey started to change by the victories of the current leading party, the AKP. While Kemalism being the official ideology of the Turkish Republic since its foundation, the Kemalists started to lose their positions in the society and the religious-driven policies of AKP started to take over the political sphere. This, of course, created an anxiety among the Kemalists and this situation continued to rise dramatically since today. Hence, the long distance nationalism of the Kemalists are not related to being repressed or ethnic minority, but related to the ideological affiliations; their ideological clash with AKP. In short, what motivates them to participate in Turkish politics while being abroad is simply because of an “activist nostalgia” (Şenay, 2013), a wish to transform the society as it was before. As it was imagined, their long distance nationalist acts and the digitalization process with the ICT's has also affected political participation.

Moreover, Gerbaudo (2012) argues that social media has a mobilizing role. It gives a shape to the way in which people come together and act together, or as he uses; social media “choreograph the collective action.” (p. 20). In other words, what he mentioned is the expansion of social media usage, e.g. Facebook, into the physical sphere, which is the streets. Similarly,

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have developed the concept of ‘connective action’ differing from the conventional concept of ‘collective action’. The new concept is about the society’s mobilization, linked with the modern communication tools. The main feature of the connective action is that the way activists use it. What is observed is the combination of social media usage with the real world activities such as protests and demonstrations.

Furthermore, in order to illustrate the theoretical background, which is given above, and link it to the digitalization of long distance nationalism, the Turkish case “Occupying Gezi” movement and to exemplify the diaspora involvement to Turkey`s elections, “oyveötesi.org” platform will be given as an example. To begin with, the movement has started in 2013 in May in Istanbul, in order to protect an urban space, Gezi Park from being demolished. In a short amount of time, due to the severe police attacks towards the protesters, the movement expanded through the whole country and to the world with the involvement of diasporic communities. As Gerbaudo exemplified it, stating that “Facebook event invitation” has started the Egyptian revolution in 2011 (2012, p.61), the same case occurred in Gezi Park movements too. Social media as a medium gave way to people to gather in the streets across the country via the Internet. However, since the #OccupyingGezi spread all over the country, social media usage, especially Twitter, was at its peak in order to communicate and gather information; internet access was cut by the Turkish government and some social media services were not able to be used. Thus, the mainstream media was also acting ignoring by broadcasting animal documentaries during the protests. As a reaction, stated by Imani Giglou et al. (2018) a twitter campaign #BugünTeleviyzonlariKapat (Turn off the Tv’s Today) was initiated and the tendency to use social media increased accordingly. Moreover, that was the moment when the diasporic Kemalists started to participate in the events, which are the political and went “from the web to the streets” in their host countries to raise their voice for the ones who are censored in Turkey. Long distance nationalists gathered at the streets of many European cities and other capitals and twitter analysis show severe online participation from Europe (Imani Giglou et al., 2018)

The already existing ties between diasporic Turkish communities and their social capital in Turkey led to an information exchange about what was happening on the streets in. In this way, with the help of the Internet, they are actually involved into politics. As stated by Aknur (cited in Giglou,

d’Haenens, Ogan, 2016), by mid-June, international support was growing, particularly among areas of Europe with large Turkish communities. This support was expressed through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, but also through public gatherings and protest marches (2014). Furthermore, activists in the diaspora had a major role about information sharing and raising awareness about what is happening in Gezi Park movements. With their social capital, they had the opportunity to gain information from the ones who are participating the uprising in Turkey; thus, the world’s attention has been caught and reactions from all over the world, from NGO’s, political leaders, supranational organizations’ representatives took its place on media. It can be said that, not only, but also with the participation of migrants into their country of origins’ politics; uprising movement was resulted eventually in not demolishing the Gezi Park in Istanbul.

Secondly, the platform “oyveötesi” which literally means “vote and beyond” is an initiative that was established in Turkey by some volunteers to ensure the fairness of elections and to promote voting in 2014. The volunteer initiative grown rapidly that it became an official and registered association, with approximately 50.000 volunteers throughout Turkey. The initiative according to Celebi (2015), co-founder of the platform, is the voter turnout, transparency around individual candidates, and independent election monitoring. What this initiative does during the election is that to first train the volunteers about the process, distribute the volunteers to the voting centers that these volunteers check during the election day if the voting procedure is carried out properly and at the end of the voting day to witness the vote counting and make a copy of the official document states the number of votes. Therefore, oyveötesi also created a crowd-sourced confirmation system called T3 (Türkiye Tutanak Teyit – Turkey Election Results Confirmation) that the volunteers enter the picture of that official document with vote numbers to the system and anyone who has internet connection can contribute to the verification of the vote counts. In 2018 elections of Turkey last July, the diaspora had to chance to contribute the politics online via this platform. By using that, one needs to simply calculate the total and enters it in the system, thus, when the same number is entered three times, the system validates the count and it becomes clear that there is no fraud at that vote center. In this way, long distance Kemalist nationalists participated in politics and online in order to make an influence on the elections, by being remote. With the help of the diaspora through T3

system, a difference of approximately 87.000 votes are realized and the necessary steps were taken to make corrections for the official count (“24 Haziran Seçimleri Ön Değerlendirme Raporu”, 2018). The diaspora had the chance to be part of the politics and made an effect on Turkish politics.

All in all, the Kemalist diaspora who are eager to live their nostalgic past again by having the former Turkey back, tried to accomplish that via on-line tools. Their long distance nationalism has started to support the protestors in the field in Turkey by first spreading the information on-line; followed by real protest in different areas of the world. One more time, it can be said that the Internet has affected the participation into politics in a different way. A group of diaspora that is an opposition group of the current AKP government, has raised their voices through the possibilities of the Internet, created online events and gathered through social media as Gerbaudo, Bennett and Segerberg theorized it.

## **VI. Conclusion**

All in all, diasporic communities' participation in their homeland politics is not a new phenomenon. However, how it is practiced by the means of digitalization has changed dramatically. Having a variety of tools and by being connected to the Internet gives vast opportunities to users. Internet communication and social media in particular are important towards facilitating such gatherings and creating space for expressions as it was illustrated. Thus, the way in which Internet gives diasporic communities the opportunity to participate in their country of origins' politics and the possibility of having affecting the amount of participation can be considered obvious.

Also mentioned by Candan and Hunger (2008), the “imagined community” of Anderson also adapts to the fact that how the Internet works. In a transnationalized world that we live in, the Internet gives opportunities to the users, the opportunities that were once given by print media in the previous centuries. Thus, with the usage of the Internet in order to participate in the politics on-line, the communities have the opportunity to strengthen the “we consciousness”. An exiled community or not, the diaspora has gained their chance to be politically active while being distant to country of origins. Hence, while the ‘WHY’s can be identified as freedom of expression, speak for the censored ones, raise awareness and celebrate a



culture and ethnicity; the ‘HOW’s can be identified as social media usage, on-line newspaper publications, on-line petition creations and on-line event organizations that are carried to the streets. It is also beneficial to emphasize that, with the dynamic basis of politics and changing nature of technology, even more innovative ways to participate into politics via cyberspace have the possibility to come up.

However, despite the fact that the digitalization of long distance nationalism can be seen as optimistic, one should keep in mind that access to ICT’s or Internet cannot be considered equal among the diasporic groups. Lack of access to means of technology or lack of education in terms of using the technology, which is the technological literacy, is likely to exist. Thus, when these differences are considered, inequalities among diasporic communities about participation in politics can be observed. The usage of cyberspace may vary in the spheres of gender, age, socio-economic status and the education level. Further research may focus on the same diasporic groups in order to identify these variations.

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