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Cultural Proximity or Cultural Distance? Selecting Media Content among Turkish Diasporic Audiences in Germany

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This study focuses on the consumption of Turkish cultural products (TV series) among second- and third-generation members of the Turkish diaspora. It provides a comparative analysis of diasporans aged between eighteen and thirty years who have higher education with those who have undergone a vocational education. It attempts to determine whether basic education is heightening an audience's preference for Turkish television content and if receiving a higher education leads to a greater interest in German media. Focus group discussions conducted in Hamburg, Germany, reveal that level of education is not a significant factor in determining an audience's choices. Instead, Turkish cultural products have been filling a void for young diasporans that German cultural products are failing to satisfy. This research establishes that the more Turkish diasporic audience feels ignored by German media and society, the greater their proximity toward Turkish cultural products, as these are able to satisfy their longing for a true home and sense of belonging.

Keywords: audience, diaspora, education, Germany, television, Turkish

Introduction

Turkish migrant workers first came to Germany in 1961 as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) to aid in overcoming West Germany's labor shortage following World War II (Höhne et al. 2014, 6; Luft 2014). By the time a recruitment freeze on foreign workers was implemented in 1973, 867,000 Turkish migrants were already residing in Germany, of whom the majority later relocated their families to live with them (Luft 2014). Turkish diasporans¹ today form the largest ethnic minority in the country, with 2.5 million to 4 million people who have full or partial Turkish ancestry (Conradt and Langenbach 2013, 115).

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Issues of integration into German society, and the lack of adoption of the German way of life by the Turkish diaspora has been a core focus in the area of public discourse (Christiansen 2004, 186). Politics, media, and artistic discourse appear to have created the dichotomy between German-Turks and Germans by suggesting “the existence of pure Turkish culture and pure German culture and making a distinction between them as black vs. white, good vs. bad, at the same time praising and marginalizing these constructs” (Dronyak 2012, 30). The gulf that exists between the two groups has provided German-Turks with the label *Turkish*, provoking a resistance against this labelling and a struggle for recognition (30).

The increasing accessibility of Turkish satellite television in the late 1990s raised further concerns about members of the Turkish diaspora in Germany detaching themselves from German society by entering a private media world (Neubert 2012, 246). Scholarly and political arguments about problems associated with integration have been linked with Turkish media consumption among the diasporic community (Linder 2007, 26; Müller 2005; Weber-Menges 2008). The consumption of Turkish media by these migrants was perceived as their turning away not only from German media but from integrating into German society as a whole (Eckhardt 1996, 461). A study conducted more than a decade later for the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees established that Turkish migrants were more likely to consume media from their country of origin than other migrant groups now residing in Germany (Babka von Gostomski 2010, 120). Terms such as *parallel societies* and *media ghetto* have been used to describe Turkish television as a kind of cultural ghetto for Turkish diasporic audiences (Schatz, Holtz-Bacha, and Nieland 2000; Hafez 2001; Geißler and Pöttker 2005; Butterwegge and Hentges 2006; Schneider and Arnold 2006). Furthermore, Turkish media has been criticized for negatively affecting integration rather than fostering it (Müller 2005). Scholarly work on Turkish media has shown that it is nationalistic, Turkey-centric, and representative of a dogmatic Islamic sentiment. Germany and the Turks in the country are scarcely covered, and when they are referenced, they are mostly portrayed in a negative light. However, Aksoy and Robins (2000) have offered a dissenting view, criticizing such assessments of transnational Turkish media and stating that they have predominantly focused on how to best “domesticate/associate/acculturate Turks who seem to be threatening to create their own separate cultural order” (344).

In the case of the Turkish diaspora, old and discredited ideas of media influence and effects have been used as a suitable framework to understand members as media consumers (Aksoy and Robins 2000, 345). In a similar manner, Christiansen (2004) argues that ethnic minorities in Europe are seen as vulnerable and particularly open to influence from transnational media. She underlines that simply focusing on the intended effects of media remains insufficient, as media consumers

do not react passively to manipulation by media industries and may respond independently to such influences (187). For Christiansen, media consumption is a social practice in which a complex issue such as multiculturalism and immigrants' social integration is displayed in a concrete form, as this practice reveals the cultural-geographic orientation among individual consumers (186).

Turkish-German Relations and the Situation of the Turkish Diaspora

In order to understand the situation of the Turkish diaspora, it is important to briefly explore the current relations between Germany and Turkey, as well as the recently reignited debate centering on the integration of the Turkish diaspora in Germany. It would be accurate to say that Turkish-German relations hit an all-time low in recent years, particularly following the July 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey. Germany criticized the disproportionate measures taken by the Turkish government under the proclaimed state of emergency. The imprisonment of German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yücel caused a further rift, with Berlin using diplomatic means for the journalist's release. The next crisis ensued prior to the 2017 constitutional referendum in Turkey, when German municipalities banned Turkish politicians from campaigning for the referendum in the country (Kulaksizoglu 2017). The ongoing political tension between the two countries further emphasized the issue of Turkish media consumption in the diaspora and its potentially negative impact on the integration of Germany's largest minority group into public discourse (Escritt 2017; Leubecher and Naumann 2017).

A representative survey conducted in 2017 for Northern German Broadcasting (NDR, based in Hamburg), which sampled 2,800 "German-Turks," clearly identified that they were more likely to turn to Turkish media than German alternatives for information about politics and economic and social issues (Data 4U 2017). The study also highlighted strong links between one's level of education and the diaspora members' general integration into German society. Individuals that were more highly educated felt more at home in Germany and were more critical toward the policies of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan than those with lower levels of education. The study also established that the majority of survey participants identified Turkey, as opposed to Germany, as their homeland (Data 4U 2017). Furthermore, Mencutek and Baser (2018) found that since the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti [AKP]) government came to power in 2003, it developed a number of policies to maintain, cultivate, and deepen relations with Turkish emigrants in order to create a mobilized and transnational community supportive of its political agenda. However, Mencutek and Baser (2018) question whether the Turkish government's intervention in diaspora policies, specifically in Germany, has

proved helpful. They established that by seeking to increase the number of AKP supportive groups, and by constantly intervening in Turkish diaspora-German relations, this intervention inadvertently created a negative image and perception of the Turkish government in Germany, which was reflected in the media coverage of former prime minister and current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The increased level of engagement by the Turkish government with the diasporic communities has been seen as a key factor impeding migrant integration (Mencutek and Baser 2018, 100).

The unprecedented backlash witnessed over a picture of German national footballers Mesut Özil and Ilkay Gündogan with Erdoğan in May 2018 reignited the debate over national identity, belonging, and dual citizenships, but also the integration of migrants. The two footballers, born and raised in Germany by Turkish migrant parents, were highly criticized for meeting with President Erdoğan. World Cup winner Özil received a prize in 2010 for “integration,” only to face harsh criticism eight years later and questioned about his loyalty to Germany (Oltmann 2018). Özil resigned from the national team via a letter posted on Twitter, where he cited “racism and disrespect” for his decision. He also stated that “when we win, I am German. When we lose, I am an immigrant” (Özil 2018). Özil’s resignation letter incited a ferocious debate in Germany on racism, Islamophobia, and whether the German “model of integration” had failed. (Fröhlich et al. 2018).

It is important to note that the ongoing integration debate was not solely driven by Germans without migrant heritage. Nor did it focus solely on language issues or honor killings among migrants. Instead, it addressed the more complex question of who decides what belongs to Germany or German culture and society, as well as who can judge when someone is fully integrated or not. According to El-Mafaalani (2018), the integration of migrants in Germany has now reached a new level where people want to speak up, be part of the conversation, and decide for themselves when they want to be German or identify with their migrant heritage. For El-Mafaalani, successful integration creates even greater levels of conflict, as people no longer desire to be told what to do or how to be, but they instead want to decide for themselves.

Global Success of Turkish Television Serials

At this point, it is important to highlight that not only have Turkish cultural products (serials) been a successful television format in Turkey and among its diasporic and migrant audience, but they have also gained global popularity. In the former Ottoman territories, in particular, they have managed to rekindle an affinity among countries that were not known for retaining fond memories of their Ottoman past (Berg 2017). Turkish cultural products are sold to more than seventy-five countries

and estimated to reach over 400 million viewers across the globe (including the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Scandinavia, and Latin America), making Turkey the second-highest exporter of television serials after the United States (*Al Jazeera Türk* 2014; Özdemir 2015; Vivarelli 2017).

Research Objective

The aim of this article is to explore if and why second- and third-generation Turkish diasporans are watching Turkish or German cultural products or a combination of both. At the same time, it seeks to achieve a comparative analysis between Turkish diaspora members who have received/are receiving a higher education with those who have undertaken/are undertaking vocational training to determine whether levels of education are an important factor affecting audience choice and proximity or the distance they feel toward Turkish or German content.

Diaspora and Audience Research

Diaspora is a term that is often used to describe “any population that is considered deterritorialized or transnational—that is, which has originated in a land other than that in which it currently resides, and whose social, economic, and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe” (Vertovec 1997, 277). Diasporic identity and existence can be characterized by belonging to both one’s original home or nation and the place one has relocated to. The departure from an original homeland is often traumatic, largely because it is often as a result of expulsion or because one is fleeing bad economic conditions, seeking work and a better life in another country. These experiences become significant elements of diasporic identity. Voluntary or involuntary migration can lead to an idealization of the country left behind (Cohen 2008, 17). Cohen (2008) argues that there is often a difficult relationship with the host society but also suggests that it is possible to have “a distinctive creative, enriching life” within a tolerant and pluralistic host country (17).

Audience research exploring the importance of race and ethnicity is still a relatively new approach, but it gained increasing momentum in the 1990s thanks in part to the growth of diaspora and transnationalism theorization led by the likes of Stuart Hall (1990) and others (Ang 1990; Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Gilroy 1997), as well as the closely related notions of *hybridity* and *imagined communities*. They have all become significant to the study of human migration, including (but not limited to) migrant workers, political exiles, refugees, and minorities (Naficy 1993; Gillespie 1995; Morley and Robins 1995; Robins 2000; Georgiou 2001). Scholarly work on diaspora and media has shown the expansion of communication across the transnational diasporic space and its

support of diasporic identities and communities (Sreberny 2005; Georgiou 2006, 2011; Karanfil 2009). Madianou and Miller (2012) argue that as migration develops, a new public discourse occurs that represents “the proper” narrative (7). Yet, the key conceptual challenges that have been faced in media studies are the status of homelands and their media industries, their connection with the public sphere, group versus individual diasporic trajectories, and the complex relationship between nation, ethnicity, race, and diaspora. Georgiou (2011) argues that despite literature on media and diaspora having addressed the tension between origin and diaspora, the question remains as to whether diaspora is “contained in the cultural space of its region of origin, or . . . positioned in a parallel—or even competing—space” (872). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the diaspora and diasporic audiences are not homogeneous groups. As Hall (1991) argues, it is important to understand the complexity of individuals; he notes “the politics of recognizing that all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not one” (57).

An important issue that Sreberny (2005) underlines is that it is often assumed that people belong only to a single minority ethnic group that exists in a single national public sphere. She argues that “a processual model might suggest that involvement in a variety of socio-political spaces may encourage a richer and more varied set of identifications that go beyond simple and single minority position” (446). These differences should be considered not only when theorizing and examining contemporary cultural formations but also among the various audiences and the multiple publics that are living within these formations. Sreberny also suggests that beyond the notion of *hybridity*, it is important to pay attention to the notion and experience of *mixedness* as an important mode of being in the world.

Cultural Proximity and Its Importance in the Selection of Content among Diasporic Audiences

La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) explain *cultural proximity* as something that migrant audiences across the world “continue to have which is a strong layer of identity linking them to their ‘home’ country or culture” (274). For Qureshi (2007), “cross-cutting physical, cultural and emotional proximity and distance are characteristic of migrant and diaspora identities and belonging(s)” that can become manifest in all aspects of life (294). Straubhaar (2003, 2007) argues that the more familiar people are with the cultural capital of a nation, the more likely they are to prefer media from that culture or the most similar culture. An audience’s first preference tends to be content produced in their own language and linked to their local or national culture, because of elements such as the appeal of local stars, knowledge, topics, issues, environment, and ethnicity of people in the media (La Pastina and Straubhaar

2005, 273; [Straubhaar 2007](#)). The cultural proximity theory has often been applied in an international context to explain the pulling power of foreign and domestic media and is predominantly based on language, but aspects of similarity or proximity based on cultural elements are seen as equally significant ([La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005](#), 274). It is, however, important to recognize that audience choices can be dynamic and relational in nature as audiences respond to the limitations of national productions, and to social and historical subnational and supranational differences that influence different groups' media selection ([Sinclair 1999](#)).

The media and the state have a significant impact in shaping a sense of belonging. Experiences that involve local authorities (such as local governments, police, and educational institutions), as well as other broader encounters, can impact peoples' feelings of belonging. Individuals are not passive in their reactions to institutions' capacity to draw them closer or to push them away. Therefore, media can enable them to change and shape the relationship between distance and proximity, as well as to become selective and creative in negotiating a comfortable distance between themselves and the world around them ([Qureshi 2007](#), 296).

Moreover, cultural proximity has been connected with the broader concept of *cultural capital*, which focuses on a person's education (knowledge and intellectual skills, as well as behavioral skills—i.e., knowing how to behave in specific circumstances) ([Bourdieu 1984, 1986](#)). Building on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, [Straubhaar \(2003\)](#) argues that the preference for local cultural products is not a given because cultural proximity is limited by social class stratification; groups that might be united by language and/or culture can be fragmented by both economic and cultural capital. These are likely to define what audiences' cultural identities and cultural capital leads them to prefer, such as “humor, gender images, dress, style, lifestyle, knowledge about other lifestyles, ethnic types, religion, and values” ([Straubhaar 2003](#), 78). [Straubhaar \(2003\)](#) suggests that “cultural proximity is more of a disposition or tendency towards the use of cultural capital in a certain way” (85). He additionally notes that the ethnic makeup of a television program can also impact its visual appeal to an audience (87). If the viewer can recognize oneself or, alternately, a familiar or desired ethnic type, this could add to the cultural proximity of a program; thus, ethnic appeal can stem from actual ethnicity or ethnic ideals (87).

Method

This study uses focus group research to examine the factors that contribute to the preference and selection of television content among the Turkish diaspora. A total of twenty focus groups were conducted in Hamburg, Germany, between 2017 and 2018: ten groups consisted of

current university students or those who had just recently completed their degree, and ten groups consisted of individuals either still completing their vocational training or who had completed their qualification.² The focus group participants were recruited via a mix of personal contacts and a snowballing method. They came from similar socioeconomic and religious backgrounds (Muslim). The majority of research subjects had parents who were either born and raised in Turkey and emigrated to Germany as young adults or who were born in Germany but grew up with their grandparents or mother in Turkey and were later reunited with their families. One third of research subjects had a parent who came to Germany as an adult following marriage to a Turkish diasporan. None of the parents of the participants in the study had received higher education. Only one third of the participants had one parent or both parents who had undertaken vocational training. Relatively small focus group sizes of six to eight participants were conducted to facilitate a comfortable environment for discussion. The full age range of study participants was eighteen to thirty years. Most participants had access to a variety of media sources (e.g., cable, satellite, paid TV). However, most of them accessed entertainment content online, predominately on either mobile phones or laptops.

Findings

Turkish Television Content More Culturally Proximate than German

Despite none of the study participants being born, being raised, or having lived in Turkey, other than spending time there during extended summer holidays, both educational groups agreed that they felt Turkish television programs were more culturally relatable and identifiable than German content. Turkish content was most often the first choice of females, whereas male diasporans' first choice was often American television programs, followed by Turkish. Male and female diasporans expressed significant differences in their preferred genre selection. Most female focus group participants stated that despite predictable storylines and overly long episodes, they enjoyed watching romantic shows and family dramas. The genres that male participants preferred were Turkish period dramas, gangster serials, and comedies. Female participants in particular felt that the Turkish language was more suitable for romantic storylines as it represented a warmth that the German language was not able to replicate, despite all those in this study being bilingual (speaking German and Turkish). Many participants felt a strong proximity toward Turkish cultural products. Characters, family lives, and issues presented in Turkish shows were more similar to participants' lives and worldviews, yet many criticized the overly Westernized and liberal takes on societal issues. Though the participants'

religious orientations were not the focus of the discussions, responses that were highly critical of Turkish cultural products (TV serials) for being overly Westernized illustrate that the majority of participants had a more conservative worldview than the subset of people who produce TV shows in Turkey. However, what made Turkish programs significantly more relatable was how the resolution of issues portrayed were always achieved in a far more conservative manner:

Turkish serials are too Westernized for my liking, and in many ways, it goes hand in hand with how Turks are in Turkey. They traditionally see themselves as more Western, where we German-Turks are more conservative. But unlike German shows, they still show that certain things are not acceptable in our culture. In German series, everything is normal. (Female university student, 22)

What many study participants also collectively agreed on was that Turkish TV shows were not only more relatable culturally but also more visually appealing, having greater production values than German programs. At the same time, being able to watch content with individuals who looked physically more similar to participants held a strong attraction. They found viewing Turkish serials more physically pleasing, even though many complained that the shows predominately cast extremely attractive and, at times, far too Western-looking actors, rather than having a broader spectrum of people who would better represent the general public.

Turkish Television Programs Represent a Longing for a True Home

For me they are a bit of home away from home. We are not at home wherever we are. An Almanci³ in Turkey and German-Turk in Germany; no one wants you or gets you. (Female vocational trainee, 21)

Turkish television programs satisfy second- and third-generation Turkish diasporans' longing for a sense of belonging and a true home, unlike first-generation Turks, who appear to have used this content as a bridge to their home country. Members of both educational groups expressed strong emotional proximity toward Turkey, which was largely driven by a feeling of being constantly discriminated against and a need to justify their existence in Germany, despite being born and raised in the country. Turkish serials offer a fantasy world where individuals do not feel out of place and appear to reinforce, legitimize, and normalize experiences German-Turk individuals encounter with their own cultural heritage. This is in stark contrast with the feeling of being ignored or, at times, unwanted by German media and society:

As a German-Turk I have always a feeling of not fully belong to Germany even though I am German, and I know most people in my family and circle of friends feel the same way. Turkish television is a way to dive into a different world and connect with your heritage. (Female university graduate, 30).

Despite the fact that focus group discussions did not primarily focus on questions of integration, the overwhelming majority of focus group participants addressed issues of acceptance and discrimination into German society in connection with their reasoning for consuming Turkish content over German. Higher educated participants in particular noted that despite being born and raised in Germany, and receiving a higher education, they still didn't feel accepted. For both groups, integration was seen as a two-way process: "It really doesn't matter how hard you try and how much you study or work because at the end of the day, you are always an immigrant" (Male university student, 26).

An overwhelming number expressed frustration that they were perceived as Turkish and foreigners in a country where they had lived their entire lives. Many also expressed exasperation at continuously being approached about Turkish politics at work, at school, or in their social lives:

In recent years, it has been particularly bad. Everyone asked me what I think of Erdoğan, treating me like as if I am his spokesperson. (Male university graduate, 28)

If people ask me each time where I am originally from, how can I ever feel truly German? (Female professional, 27)

Turkish Diasporans Feel Misrepresented in German Programs

The majority of female and male participants from both educational groups stated that they seldom watched German television. Many noted that the storylines, characters, and lifestyles were neither relatable nor appealing. They also felt that German content failed to represent ethnic minority characters with whom they could identify. Most stated that minority characters were generally either shown as extremely German, thus shunning their heritage, or as extremely Turkish and rejecting German culture:

In German television, they would generally have a guy who is very Western, and that would be the good guy, or someone who is very conservative, and that kind of person would generally have a daughter that doesn't want to wear a head scarf and son that is a criminal or something. Basically, just negative stereotypes of Turkish migrants, never positive. (Female university student, 23)

Many did go on to state that they used to watch German television as children, such as the series *Die Pfefferkörner*⁴ or the soap opera *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten*.⁵ Their preferences have, however, changed with age and the realization that their differences were missing or underrepresented in German productions. Study participants from both educational groups felt that German television should produce more serials such as *Türkisch für Anfänger*⁶ but felt that even this comedy show was built too much around existing negative stereotypes.

The German comedy film *Fack ju Göhte*⁷ was named by the majority of study participants as the most appealing German production, while male participants also named the German drama serial *4 Blocks*⁸ as a show that they often watched and found appealing. These shows were named as the most liked and appealing given that they portrayed minority characters in leading roles. What should be noted was that study participants still felt that negative Turkish stereotypes remained a dominant theme throughout these shows:

In *Turkish for Beginners* [*Türkisch für Anfänger*], or *Fack ju Göhte*, both have the same main actor and director. It is nice to see a change but still you have Elyas M'Barek playing a bit of a dodgy and very macho male character. It's, in a way, how Germans see you. The funny thing here is Elyas M'Barek is not even of Turkish heritage. (Male professional, 25)

In addition, the reality show *Shopping Queen*⁹ and the science program *Galileo*,¹⁰ along with German versions of global television formats such as *The Voice*, *Pop Idol*, and *Germany's Next Top Model*, were named as content occasionally watched by both educational groups. These shows were not considered by most participants to be typically German, as they presented a more diverse range of individuals, making the viewing experience more inclusive. Neither educational group watched any public service broadcasting content; the programs identified by the majority of study participants throughout this study were aired on private German television networks:

I want to add to what was said already: I am not even sure if German people even watch public broadcasting. Most people I know watch more private channels, but I feel so disconnected to them. My observation is they are either not having any nontypical Turkish-German characters or show a negative image. As a woman wearing a head scarf, I find it sad that people like me are always shown as oppressed. (Female professional, 22)

These findings show that Turkish television content appears to be filling a void that German cultural products are failing to satisfy. Turkish diasporans' feelings of being constantly ignored, being discriminated against, and not being seen as part of society, in combination with German productions' use of biased and stereotypical characters and

storylines, are creating a significant detachment from German cultural products and fostering an emotional proximity to Turkish content.

Turkish Diasporic Audiences Want Their Own Channel

I know many people that listen to that Turkish radio show on Tide¹¹ because it is done by German-Turks for German-Turks. We need formats like that on German television. (Female university student, 24)

Both educational groups believed that German television content would be watched by diasporic audiences if it were produced by individuals with the same or a similar cultural background. The fact that Germans with no migrant heritage develop these characters is seen to significantly contribute to the disconnection and lack of appeal for the research participants with respect to German content. The clear majority of university-educated participants felt that they were paying for public service television without actually being provided with content that was tailored to their needs or wants: “Because German people produce shows about their reality and not ours. If they try, they only focus on stereotypes” (Female university student, 20). For the vast majority of study participants, to win over the Turkish diaspora as an audience was an unachievable task, as the lifestyles, religion, cultures, and aesthetic tastes are so very different. Yet, according to the majority of university-educated study participants, launching a channel that focuses on the needs of Turkish diasporans was seen as a feasible and realistic solution. Both educational groups expressed that consumption of Turkish media content was perceived in Germany as a negative thing, as it is seen by many Germans as showing a lack of integration. However, participants felt that the question was never asked or explored as to why Turkish diasporans did not like to watch German television content:

The argument is always: Turks watch Turkish shows because they can’t speak the language or understand the culture. I am German, and I am an academic. Can’t I just watch what I want? (Female university graduate, 28)

It is never about German producers failing to cater to all audiences in society. It is always about us not wanting to become part of their society. (Male university student, 22)

I feel like not watching German TV is seen as not assimilating enough. (Male vocational trainee, 19)

Furthermore, for many study participants, the lack of representation when it comes to the Turkish diaspora on German television, or any

consideration for their preferences, was a reflection of how Turkish diasporans are treated by society. Both educational groups felt that the Turkish diaspora is a German reality that many Germans without migrant heritage choose to ignore: “I think we need to have more German-Turks in media, but we also have to accept people the way they are. It is wrong to not allow people to be at home in two cultures” (Male university student, 21).

Higher educated study participants, such as the above-quoted male university student, overwhelmingly underlined the importance of accepting Turkish diasporans as a people between two cultures and identities who might have different likes and wants compared with non-migrant Germans. Both educational groups agreed that they would like a more inclusive society and media environment that reflected societal realities. Nonetheless, many study participants noted that it was unlikely that Germany would adopt an inclusive media environment, as Germans without migrant heritage were perceived by these Turkish diasporans as being primarily occupied with maintaining a dominant, “pure” German culture and hegemony rather than paying attention to the various facets that make up German society today. The perception was that ignoring minorities in German cultural products has become a mechanism to keep the old socio-cultural order in place:

You show on your TV what your country should look like and be like. Maybe it is normal that they don’t include migrants in their narrative? I am born and raised here and so are my parents, but if you look at any ZDF or ARD production it’s like we don’t exist. Why? (Male vocational trainee, 19)

Conclusion

Empirical findings drawn from the focus group discussions show that cultural proximity is still relevant when it comes to Turkish diasporic viewing choices, as it aides in displaying a critical and reflective negotiation of proximity and distance. Turkish television programs are perceived as more culturally relatable and identifiable than German productions, as well as being more visually appealing. Turkish cultural products are not consumed to function as a bridge to one’s country of origin but instead represent a longing for a true home and sense of belonging. Viewing these programs reinforces, legitimizes, and normalizes Turkish diasporans’ experience with their cultural heritage, which is more often than not ignored and, at times, experienced as unwanted by German society and media.

Turkish cultural products provide an emotional proximity and sense of belonging to a society and country that German media fails to provide. Study participants expressed that they did not feel accepted in Germany and that this lack of acceptance was reflected in the negative

way they were projected in German media. I have argued that the more Turkish diasporic audiences feel ignored in German media, the more they develop a strong attraction to Turkish cultural products. Such products appear to enable diasporic audiences to change, shape, and manage their relationship with both distance and proximity, as well as to become selective and creative in negotiating a comfortable distance between themselves and German society.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the level of education attained is not a core factor in determining the choice of television content among Turkish diasporic audiences. Both education groups (university students/graduates and vocational training students/graduates) noted that their tastes and preferences were not sufficiently considered in German television; the storylines, characters, and lifestyles represented in German TV programs were not relatable. Global reality television formats were more likely to be watched by Turkish diasporans on private German television channels. These shows were not considered to be typically German and thus presented a more diverse range of characters that made the viewing experience more inclusive.

This research also found that both educational groups agreed that content should be produced by people of migrant heritage, as they are better able to understand diasporic and minority positions and could create a counter-narrative of which migrants and Turkish diasporans can be a part. Therefore, it is important to highlight that popular arguments that describe the Turkish diaspora as living in a “parallel society” and “media ghetto” should be considered a unidirectional perspective. Drawing from the findings of this research, one can affirm that rather than producing content along the lines of “one size fits all,” certain realities about the diversity and mixedness of Germany’s population should be recognized and catered to in an inclusive way. It is significant to realize that the permeation of diasporic and minority groups—not only in Germany but across the world—is a social reality that must be taken into account regarding cultural products for the widest possible audience.

Miriam Berg is an assistant professor in the Journalism and Strategic Communication program at Northwestern University in Qatar. Her research focuses on Arab, refugee, migrant, diasporic audiences and their viewing habits. She is also interested in researching the popularity and influence of Turkish cultural products in foreign markets.

Notes

1. The term *Turkish diasporan* will be used in this essay to describe individuals of Turkish heritage regardless of their status (i.e., being a German citizen, dual citizen, or Turkish citizen). This study has established that all research participants have strong emotional proximity toward Turkey despite being born and raised in Germany. For that reason, the term *Turkish diasporan* remains appropriate to describe the heterogeneous research participants in this study.

2. Study participants who were still undertaking their university education or had recently graduated were studying or had studied in fields such as architecture, dentistry, business and finance, civil

engineering, education studies, journalism, marketing, medicine, pedagogy, and pharmacy. Those who were undertaking or had completed vocational training included beauticians, dental hygienists, car mechanics, electricians, hairdressers, medical secretaries, nurses, nursery teachers, paralegals, private security guards, travel agents, and welders.

3. *Almanci* is a term used in Turkey to describe Turkish migrant workers in Germany.

4. *Die Pfefferkörner* (1999–present) is a German children's television serial produced by the Kinder Kanal (KIKa, a children's channel). KIKa is a public service broadcaster for children and part of ARD (the Consortium of Public Broadcasters in Germany) and ZDF (Second German Television).

5. *Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten* (1992–present) is a soap opera on German commercial television RTL (Radio Télévision Luxembourg). The series both casts and targets young people in their late teens and early twenties.

6. *Türkisch für Anfänger* (2006–9) is a German comedy-drama series aired on Das Erste (the principal publicly owned television channel in Germany). The serial tells the story of a German-Turkish stepfamily, focusing on their everyday lives.

7. *Fack ju Göthe* (2013, 2015, 2017) (intentional misspelling of Fuck you, Goethe) is a three-part German comedy movie franchise. The story focuses on an ex-con who starts working at a school where money from one of his earlier robberies has been hidden.

Türkisch für Anfänger and *Fack ju Göthe* were both created by Bora Dagtekin, who himself has partial Turkish ancestry.

8. *4 Blocks* (2017–present) is a German drama series on the TNT Series network. The show tells the story of Ali Hamady, "Toni," a Lebanese gangster trying to leave his old life behind to focus on his family. The story is based in Berlin, Neukölln, the capital's borough with the highest percentage of immigrants.

9. *Shopping Queen* (2012–present) is a German reality show on the commercial television station VOX. Female (majority) contestants compete against each other to win one thousand euros or items such as designer handbags. In four hours, and with five hundred euros worth of shopping money, five contestants are challenged each week to put together a complete outfit that adheres to a particular theme.

10. *Galileo* (1998–present) is an educational science program on German commercial television ProSieben. Since the program first launched, it has been anchored by German-Egyptian presenter Aiman Abdallah.

11. Tide (2004–present) is a public access television and radio station is operated by Tide GmbH as a subsidiary of the Hamburg Media School.

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