THE TURKISH-GERMAN AFFAIR IN FILMS: A DREAMWORLD OR A NETHERWORLD?

Ayça Tunç Cox[*]

ABSTRACT

Turkish society's perception of Germany has been going through a significant transformation. This is indisputably related with the crucial role Germany played by not taking sides with Turkey in its long-lasting attempts to access to the European Union. Through critical discourse analysis, this article explores how Turkish cinematic narratives have accounted for the thorny Turkish-German relations in the last two decades. The analyzed films, which are the products of the dynamic and heterogeneous new cinema of Turkey, have contributed to the knowledge produced about Germany, Germans and Turkish-Germans in the media. Therefore, focusing on these cinematic texts should reveal alternative modes of reading the enduring Turkish-German affair. As the close textual analysis has revealed, the films in question refuse the presumed label of "subaltern" for Turkey, and instead, provides a realistic and multifaceted account of said relationship.

Keywords: Turkish-German relations, Turkish-German diaspora, Turkish films

FİLMLERDE TÜRK-ALMAN İLİŞKİLERİ: İDEAL BİR HAYAL DÜNYASI MI CEHENNEM Mİ?

ÖZET

Türk toplumunun Almanya algısı kayda değer bir dönüşümden geçmektedir. Bu dönüşümde, uzun yıllardır süregiden Avrupa Birliği üyeliği girişimlerinde Türkiye'nin yanında yer almayan Almanya'nın rolü yadsınamaz. Bu makale kapsamında, iki ülke arasındaki sözü geçen sorunlu ilişkilerin Türkiye'deki sinemasal anlatılarda nasıl ele alındığı eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmektedir. Analize konu edilen filmler, Türkiye'deki dinamik ve heterojen yeni sinema ortamının birer çıktısı olmalarının

[*] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İzmir Yüksek Teknoloji Enstitüsü Mimarlık Fakültesi, ORCID ID:0000-0003-1758-4076

yanı sıra, genel anlamda Almanya, Almanlar ve Türk-Almanlar'a dair medyadaki temsil ve bilgi üretiminin de bir parçası durumundadır. Bu nedenle, sinemasal metinlere odaklanan eleştirel söylem analizi, Türk-Alman ilişkilerinin popüler kültür perspektifinden alternatif bir okumasını sağlamak adına önem arz etmektedir. Yapılan analizler sonucunda, incelenen filmlerin, Türkiye'ye biçilen "madun" rolünü kabul etmeyerek, Türk toplumunun Almanya'ya bakışını gerçekçi ve çok boyutlu bir biçimde aktardıkları dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-Alman ilişkileri, Türk-Alman diyasporası, Türk filmleri

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on Turkish films of the last two decades that revolve around Turkish/Kurdish immigrant/diasporic characters in Germany or those who live in Turkey and yet wish to migrate to Germany.
[1] Although it is not possible to explain the strands and development of diaspora studies in detail within the scope of this article, it might be useful to describe the term "diaspora", albeit briefly, before moving on. Etymologically, diaspora consists of two words; "dia" meaning through, throughout, and "spora" meaning scattering, spread, sperm (Peters 1999: 23). Dating back to the third century BC, it originally refers to Jews living in exile from their homeland of Palestine, suggesting uprootedness and a collective trauma (Tunç 2011a: 18). "The term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shares meaning with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tölölian 1996: 428). Therefore, recent accounts of the concept offer more comprehensive, and thus more inclusive, definitions such as that of Robin Cohen's. Cohen argues that to be able to address a community as a diaspora certain characteristics should be discernible (Cohen 2003: 26):

1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;

2) Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;

3) A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history

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[1] It should be underlined here that using the term "Turkish" is not intended to assign an ethnic identity to the films, but rather for easy categorization to differentiate them from those made by diasporic subjects in Germany. Otherwise, I am fully aware of the complex transnational dynamics at play in terms of funding, production, casting, distribution, and exhibition of these films.

and achievements;

4) An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even its creation;

5) The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;

6) A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;

7) A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;

8) A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement;

9) The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

In brief, one can argue that today "diaspora" does not refer to a single entity, but to a diverse, heterogeneous and multi-layered structure that is defined by various dynamics and components such as gender, class, religion, politics and generation (Tunç 2011a: 13).

It should also be noted here that the analysis includes co-productions, however deliberately excludes the work of diasporic Turkish filmmakers such as Fatih Akın, Yüksel Yavuz, Ayşe Polat, Buket Alakuş and so on. The reason for such an exclusion is the fact that there exists now a significant amount of literature dealing with Turkish diasporic cinema in English and German. Particularly owing to the popularity gained after Fatih Akın received the Golden Bear for *Gegen die Wand* (2004), the second generation Turkish filmmakers in Germany, the so-called Turkish-Germans or German-Turks, have been studied widely. Established and respected scholars in the field such as Daniela Berghahn, Deniz Göktürk, Rob Burns, Randall Halle, Barbara Mennel and Angelica Fenner have investigated the work of these filmmakers. There have also been studies analysing the media coverage of pertinent filmmakers and their films (e.g. Tunç Cox 2012 and Machtans 2012). As discussed by Hake and Mennel, even "literary scholars such as Leslie Adelson, Azade Seyhan and B. Venkat Mani made critical interventions, … complicating the terms taken for granted in earlier debates on migration, ethnicity and identity" (Hake and Mennel 2012: 9). More recent research endeavours to explore less exhausted aspects of the topic such as studying the connections between cinema and screen-based art, focusing on more experimental examples as well as video installations (e.g. Bayraktar 2016) or concentrating on a single director's oeuvre with particular emphasis on the use of sound and aural components (e.g. Güeneli 2019). Yet there is a shortage of scholarly work in the Anglo-Saxon literature examining Turkish films which offer narrative treatments of the Turkish-German diaspora and/or Turkish-German relations. Against this backdrop, this article intends to complement the already existing body of scholarly work on the topic. It strives to bring a distinctly Turkish perspective to this discourse.

Covering Turkish films made in the last two decades should help us shed light on the historical transformation as reflected in the cinematic narratives. These

mediated images are part of the knowledge produced about Germany, Germans and Turkish-German diasporic subjects in the Turkish media. Accordingly, by means of a close textual and contextual analysis, this article endeavours to explore how the thorny Turkish-German relations are reflected in these cinematic narratives, if at all. More specifically, it seeks to disclose what kind of meaning and significance are assigned to Germany, if any, in these films.

A critical analysis of a text requires focusing on the dialectical relationship between discourse and society and culture. In other words, "discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 276). In this respect, to provide a contextual background for the cinematic expressions of the Turkish-German relations, this article first provides a brief historical account of the connections between the two country with specific emphasis on Turkey's long-lasting attempts for the accession to the European Union (EU). This is followed by a concise depiction of the contemporary Turkish film scene as the site of the studied filmic texts. It then presents an in-depth analysis of the selected films by framing the films within the pertinent political debates and the concomitant official and public discourse.

1. A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE THORNY RELATIONS

The relationship between Turkey and the EU has a long and complicated history. In a nutshell, Turkey's official relationship with the then European Economic Community (ECC) begun in 1963 with the Association Agreement, which ultimately reassures Turkey's eventual accession to the EU.[2] Ever since, Turkey has pursued its cautious official strategy to become an EU member state.[3] In this context, Germany, who is probably the strongest member of the union in terms of economic power and political influence, and who harbours the highest population of people from Turkey, proves to be particularly important. As argued by Paul and Schmidt, "despite the fact that Germany sees Turkey as a strategic partner that needs to be kept at bay, Ankara has seen Berlin as a pivotal influencer in shaping the EU policy toward Turkey."[4] Thus, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, JDP), which has been in power since 2002, paid extra attention

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[2] For the details, see the press release regarding the Association Agreement, available at:
http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-91-46_en.htm. For detailed accounts of
Turkey-EU relations, also see Üstün 2017, Sunar 2013, Erhan et al. 2011, Rahigh-Aghsan 2011 and Bilgin 2008.

[3] From the outset, the Turkish Republic wanted to appropriate Western values in the name of modernization. In fact, this official policy favouring Westernization dates back to the early nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire undertook some administrative reforms called "Tanzimat" (1839) in order to modernize the society and to have a government in accord with secularism (Tunç 2011b: 117-129).

[4] Paul A and Schmidt, J (2017) Turkey's Relations with Germany and The EU: Breaking The Vicious Circle, European Policy Centre Policy Brief, http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_7973_turkey-germany-eu.pdf., accessed 2.10.2017.

to deepen the relationship with the EU in general, and with Germany in particular.[5] "During the JDP's first legislative term (2002-2007), its EU policy focused on using the pursuit of membership to support its legitimacy, maintain its public support, and expand Turkey's economy and its role as a regional and international actor."[6] This pursuit was so determinant for the party's continuous success that it even established the Ministry of the EU to regulate the accession process.

However, this positive outlook, which is addressed as "Islamic Europhilia" [7] by Ioannis Grigoriadis, was gradually replaced by a strong Euroscepticism (Tezcan and Aras 2015: 1-35), particularly exacerbated by Germany's unsupportive attitude towards Turkey's accession process. Beginning with the Cyprus conflict in 2005, followed by the outburst of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, and then due to the repercussions of the coup d'état attempt in 2016, the Turkey-EU relations reached an all-time low.[8] This has only been deteriorated by the increasing tension between Turkey and Germany due to various issues such as Germany's alleged support for people with links to the terrorist organization Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and to Fethullah Gülen, who is suspected to be the mastermind of the latest failed coup d'état, and Turkey's ban of the German military from the strategic İncirlik airbase etc.[9] Consequently, what has been discussed in the Turkish public sphere is whether president Erdoğan's "new Turkey" will opt for

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[5] It should be noted here that Turkish prime minister Turgut Özal initiated the revival of Turkey's interest in the EU membership when his party, Motherland Party (ANAP), came to power in 1983 (Alessandri 2010: 4).

[6] Goff-Taylor M (2017) The Shifting Drivers of the AKP's EU Policy, The Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/shifting_drivers_of_akps_eu_policy_0.pdf, accessed: 10.10.2017.

[7] Grigoriadis describes the term, which normally would be an oxymoron and yet changed meaning in the specific context of AKP's Turkey, as a unique attempt to synthesize political Islam and European political culture (Grigoriadis 2003).

[8] For various discussions of the AKP's recent EU policy, refer to Arsu Ş, "Erdogan Signals New Era in EU Relations," *euobserver*, https://euobserver.com/foreign/137596., accessed 18.4.2017, Kuneralp S (2017) Turkey-EU Relations: Past, Present – And Future?," Heinrich Bőll Stiftung European Union, https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/05/turkey_eu_relations_past_present_future.pdf., accessed 2.5.2017, Werz M (2017) The European Union and Turkey in 2017: Move on or Apart?," Center for American Progress, https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/07/24/436488/european-union-turkey-2017-move-apart/, accessed 24.7.2017, and Karan C (2017) AKP Avrupa'da Entegrasyon Politikasını Bozuyor, Bu Yolda Göçmen Partisi Bile Kurduruldu, *Sputnik Türkiye*, https://tr.sputniknews.com/ceyda_karan_eksen/201708241029866466-akp-avrupada-entegrasyon-politikasini-bozuyor/, accessed 24.8.2017.

[9] Paul A and Schmidt J (2017) "Turkey's Relations with Germany and The EU: Breaking The Vicious Circle", European Policy Centre Policy Brief, http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_7973_turkey-germany-eu.pdf., accessed 2.10.2017.

the continuation of the integration process or apart its way with the EU and seek for alternative collaborations instead.[10]

In this context, the existing diasporic Turkish community in Europe, especially in Germany, comes to the fore. Following the signing of the labor recruitment treaty between Turkey and Germany in 1961 (Yalçın-Heckman 2002: 308-321), people from Turkey, primarily men, migrated to Germany as "guest workers".[11] As Chin and Herbert discuss, the choice of the term "guest worker" was ideological, appropriated to reduce German public's anxiety caused by the "foreignness" of this labor force, especially by Muslim Turks.[12] Addressing these foreigners as guest workers, therefore, emphasized their temporary status in the country. However, as time proved, they have not returned, and instead, have established a significant diasporic community both in size and effectiveness in Germany. The heterogeneous Turkish community in Germany, which constitutes the largest diasporic group in the country, has incorporated into the host society socially, culturally and politically over almost six decades. They now hold permanent resident/work permits or even have acquired German citizenship. In other words, their national and international political importance can no longer be overlooked. Furthermore, as Randall Halle rightfully argues, "the conditions of the Turks in Germany takes on added significance given the relationship of Turkey to the EU" (2008: 142). Having summarized the bilateral trajectories between Turkey and Germany as well as the unequivocal significance of the Turkish diasporic community in Germany for this relationship, the current conditions of filmmaking in Turkey should also be briefly explained as a framework for the following film analysis.

2. THE CONTEMPORARY FILM SCENE IN TURKEY

Turkish films have been thriving in the last two decades. The five films analyzed here should be considered in relation to the "New Turkish Cinema", which would constitute the wider discursive context.[13] The rise of the New Turkish Cinema dates back to the mid-1990s, when a group of young filmmakers started making films with new artistic sensibilities, departing from the long-dead *Yeşilçam*'s[14] conventions; mostly on shoestring budgets combining personal capital with transnational subsidies; dealing with controversial and even taboo issues; employing aesthetics of minimalism and social/poetic realism; and gaining

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[10] For a journalistic account of the issue, see Eren E (2017) "Avrupa Birliği'ne duyulan güven azaldı", Trend News Agency, https://tr.trend.az/news/politics/2807372.html., accessed 13.10.2017.

[11] For a detailed history of Turkish-German relations that predate this labour recruitment, please refer to Akgündüz 1998: 97–120 and Horrocks and Kolinsky 1996: x–xxviii.

[12] For a detailed discussion of foreign labor recruitment policies in Germany, refer to Chin 2007, Göktürk et al. 2007 and Herbert 1990.

[13] For an account of the initial years of the new cinema in Turkey, see Tunç 2005. For diverse analyses of the later period, see Daldal 2014: 92-110, Güngőr 2014: 123–153, Çiçek 2014: 126-145, Arslan 2011, Kaim 2011: 100–106 and Suner 2010.

[14] The famous Turkish film industry, which was remarkably productive in the 1960s and 1970s.

visibility whilst garnering awards at international film festivals. Especially following Nuri Bilge Ceylan's rise to the fame at the 56th Cannes Film Festival, the number of prominent new filmmakers has increased,[15] generating the much-needed hope for the Turkish film industry, which was down to a handful of films a year and has lacked the industrial structure since the demise of Yeşilçam. This also contributed to the already-occurring rise of commercial cinema with unprecedented high box-office returns. Overall, it meant revival for the Turkish film scene, encompassing both popular and alternative films. As argued by Akser and Bayrakdar, this new cinema of Turkey operates on a new mode of cinematic production; it consists of mainstream and art cinema at the periphery; it can be regarded as a cinema of film festivals; it embraces alternative forms and genres of filmmaking as well as incorporating transnational networks via expat/émigré filmmakers; it includes minor cinemas such as Kurdish and women's cinema; and it owes much to the newly-found domestic audience (2014: xvii-xx). Simply put, it is a vibrant and diverse film milieu, increasingly attracting more scholarly attention. Accordingly, the analyzed films can be addressed as part of this new and prolific film scene in Turkey; some are popular genre films while the others might be addressed as examples of minor cinema.

The directors of the analyzed films are: Aydın Sayman, Reis Çelik, Talip Karamahmutoğlu, Seyfettin Tokmak and Hakan Algül. Aydın Sayman (1953) appears to be the oldest with a miscellaneous career in journalism, advertising and TV before his debut with *Güneşteki Leke* in 1986. Reis Çelik (1961) stands out with a consistent career beginning in the early 1990s predicated on political cinema, including critically acclaimed films such as *Işıklar Sönmesin* (1995), *İnat Hikâyeleri* (*Tales of Intransigence*) (2003), and *F Tipi Film* (2012). Talip Karamahmutoğlu (1972) and Seyfettin Tokmak (1978), on the other hand, are relatively younger representatives of the new Turkish film scene, starting their filmmaking careers in the 2000s and 2010s with previous experiences in TV. Hakan Algül (1966) presents a special case as he is famous for his despise for independent/alternative art cinema, with a career heavily based on blockbuster comedies from 2005 onwards, having previously worked in TV. Among his films are the very popular *Eyvah Eyvah* series (2010, 2011, 2014), *Deliha* (2014) and *Olanlar Oldu* (2017).

Despite their stylistic and thematic differences, aligning with the common features of the new cinema of Turkey, all the films included in this article are either multinational co-productions and/or integrated in transnational distribution/exhibition channels. They have also travelled across the world following international film festival circuits. For instance, *Janjan* (Aydın Sayman, 2007), which received the Best Film and Best Film Music awards at the 12th International Berdyansk Film Festival, is a Turkish-German co-production,

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[15] Many young filmmakers begun garnering international awards in this period. Among them are Emin Alper, Kaan Müjdeci, Ali Aydın, Mahmut Fazıl Coşkun, Deniz Gamze Ergüven, Tolga Karaçelik, Senem Tüzün and so on.

supported by the Turkish Ministry of Culture. So is *Mülteci* (*Refugee*) (Reis Çelik, 2007), which claimed the Best Film award at the 2nd Bucharest International Film Festival, CineBlackSea Competition. *Kırık Midyeler* (*Broken Mussels*) (Seyfettin Tokmak, 2011) is a Turkish-Swedish co-production, again with the support of the Turkish Ministry of Culture. The business aspect of the films demonstrates a well-operating transnational network, highlighting the already in-effect Turkey-EU/Turkish-German connection –a "European economic configuration", to adopt Randall Halle's definition– that allows cooperation beyond the official EU borders (2014: 45). Besides, the sponsorship of the Turkish Ministry of Culture in the films underlines the Turkish state's official support both in terms of reinforcing the Turkish-European co-production strategies and vis-à-vis the themes/content of the films, indicating an embedded political agenda. Especially when considered that some of the films are dealing with rather delicate and controversial subject matters in the Turkish context such as the Kurdish-Turkish relations, this official state support by the ideologically-driven ministry sheds light on the incumbent JDP government's EU policies at the time.

3. IMAGINED GERMANY: A DREAMWORLD OR A NETHERWORLD?

In order to address how Turkish cinematic narratives have accounted for the abovementioned Turkish-German relations from 2007 onwards, following the JDP government's first legislative term, five films in various genres have been analyzed through critical discourse analysis: *Janjan* by Aydın Sayman; *Mülteci* by Reis Çelik; *Kırık Midyeler* by Seyfettin Tokmak; *Berlin Kaplanı* (2012) by Hakan Algül and *Mezarcı* (*Private Cemetery*) (2016) by Talip Karamahmutoğlu.

It should be underlined that critical discourse analysis serves as an aggregate term and a general framework here containing various approaches with distinct methodologies rather than a strict linguistic methodology in the sense that "critical discourse analysis has moved beyond language, taking on board that discourses are often multimodally realized, not only through text and talk, but also through other modes of communication such as images" (van Leeuwen 2006: 292). In this respect, films themselves are considered discourse. That is to say, cinematic discourse "is not the use of language in film (film dialogue, scripted conversation, fictional interaction) but the audio-visual discourse of film narration itself: the discourse of mise-en-scène, cinematography, montage, and sound editing used in narrating cinematic stories to viewers" (Janney 2012: 85). Following this line of thought, this article strives to present an analysis of formalistic and textual elements of the selected films in order to exemplify how these cinematic narratives influence and are influenced by "[other] discursive as well as non-discursive social and political processes" to adopt Wodak's approach (2001: 66).

In *Kırık Midyeler*, İstanbul is depicted as a cruel world, whereby its inhabitants struggle to survive. Departing from the widely-circulated postcard images of this ancient metropolis, the film frames İstanbul as a city of immigrants, refugees and various "others". The film focuses on two children Hakim (Uğur Barış

Mehmetoğlu) and Faysal (Seydo Çelik), who migrated from Mardin to İstanbul, and now dream about escaping to Germany, and their friendship with Bosnian refugees in İstanbul, Medina (Selma Alispahic) and her daughter Elma (İpek Kızılörs). In fact, the film plausibly proposes the idea that these people are the indispensable part and the main fabric of society. Reminiscent of Stephen Frear's stylistic and yet rather social realistic thriller *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), which focuses on the lives of two immigrants in another metropolis, London, *Kırık Midyeler* has various immigrant characters from African countries, Balkan countries and from the eastern rural parts of Turkey, all staying in a run-down pension and navigating an underground crime scene. It is a scene in which human trafficking, organ trafficking, and drug dealing constitute an everyday normality. In stark contrast with this dark, gritty world, Germany in the film, even though it is never actually seen, is presented as the place of "hope". Those who are marginalized in the Turkish society dream of fleeing Turkey for a better future in this European country. Germany here features as an idea, an idealized location, a dreamland. All this imagination is based on a letter Hakim receives from a cousin who migrated to Germany and has since been working there happily.

Yet, the filmic depictions of this dream image appears to be rather fragile. A quick look at *Mülteci* or at Kurdish-German filmmaker Yüksel Yavuz's 2003 film *Kleine Freiheit* (*A Little Bit of Freedom*) reveals an alternative reality. *Kleine Freiheit* tells the story of a Kurdish asylum seeker from Diyarbakır, Turkey, Baran (Çağdaş Bozkurt), who befriends an illegal African immigrant, and together they face a rather bleak future in Germany at the end of the film. In effect, a similar narrative thread is discernible in *Kırık Midyeler* too. Despite their unbeaten faith even after all the cruelty they confront, the two Kurdish boys, Faysal and Hakim, cannot get the opportunity to flee. Instead, they are stuck in this ruthless place, which is implied via a visual assertion: Tokmak ends the film with the image that started the film; suggesting a loop, an inescapable whirl, contradicting the naïve, hopeful dialogues heard. Hence, the visuals of the film create a conflict with its audio, upsetting the narrative model of disruption followed by reconciliation as seen in many mainstream examples. It almost feels like being in a never-ending nightmare, from which you cannot wake up, reminding its viewers of Terry Gilliam's cult film *Brazil* (1985). It does not offer hope, quick solutions or absolute moral judgements. This ending lends itself to the viewers' interpretation and imagination.

Janjan and *Mülteci*, both made in 2007, have different stylistic and narrative approaches, and deal with the issue of being the "other" of society in two different contexts. The former, employing conventional storytelling techniques, revolves around a harmless village idiot (*deli/mecnun*), Janjan-Sadık (Berk Hakman), who is forced to vanish as a result of the community pressure caused by his unapproved relationship with the young woman Güzel (Selen Seyven) his caretaker Murtaza (Çetin Öner) marries via a religious ceremony. The latter, attaining art-house aesthetics, tells the story of a young, wealthy Kurdish man who is pushed to the

edge of life as an illegal immigrant trying to obtain refugee status in Germany. The two films present two opposite migratory routes: In *Janjan*, Janjan-Sadık's brother, Ahmet (Aykut Kayacık), who is an established and well-integrated businessman in Germany, returns to Turkey, albeit on a temporary basis; and in *Mülteci*, Şivan (Luk Piyes) is forced to leave his hometown and flee to Germany in order to escape the increasing oppression of the Turkish military in the Kurdish regions of the country.

In both films, Germany stands for hope, at least to begin with. In *Janjan*, Ahmet symbolizes all the potentials Germany, the dreamworld, has to offer since he is an ideal, successful diasporic subject, who "made it through". Furthermore, he is the only hope for his brother Janjan's rescue from the hate-driven villagers who intensify their attacks by the day. And yet, Ahmet fails to deliver, conjuring up an earlier film by Kartal Tibet, *Davaro: Son Eşkiya* (*Davaro: The Last Bandit*) (1981), whereby the protagonist Memo (Kemal Sunal) returns from Germany with lots of technological gifts like small kitchen appliances, only to disappoint. Unlike Memo, Ahmet even fails to bestow the expectant villagers with presents. All he does is to appear for a short while without presenting any solutions to the pushing problem. And when he leaves, what is left behind are heartbroken people and crushed dreams about the idealized, almighty diasporic subject and European wealth and power, paralleling the inflated media narratives that shape the public imagination in Turkey. Similarly, *Mülteci* begins by picturing Germany as the ultimate destination for safety and peace, even if not for happiness. Nonetheless, the reality does not match the expectations once again. All Şivan experiences in Germany is rejection, insult, fear, poverty, loneliness, alienation, and the ultimate devastation. In other words, the dreamworld gradually transforms into a netherworld over the course of the film.

This trajectory unmistakably corresponds to the political disappointment Turkey has experienced over time in its pursuit of the EU membership. The prevailing news media discourse, creating the shared knowledge in the public sphere, has portrayed Turkey as the "betrayed" partner, particularly by Germany, in the everlasting negotiation process.[16] When abovementioned political and emotional investment in the accession process is considered, the degree of resentment can be better comprehended. Every time Turkey is promised access and then subsequently denied, the resentment in the Turkish public has increased. So have the official accusations against the EU in general, and Germany in particular, as "unreliable", "treacherous", and "hypocritical". This certainly has contributed to the spreading of Euroscepticism across the country, and the concomitant shift from

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[16] For examples of official discourse represented in the news media over the two decades, see "Provokatif, iki yüzlü," *Milli Gazete*, October 1, 2005; "Başer: Avrupa," *Hürriyet,* December 7, 2006; "Merkel'e: Türkiye," *Hürriyet*, January 8, 2007; "Evet polis," *Yeni Şafak*, March 19, 2015; "Bahçeli'den sert," *Haber 7*, September 9, 2017; "İki yüzlü," *Türkiye Haber Merkezi*, March 5, 2017; "Erdoğan'ın Almanya," *Birgün*, March 5, 2017.

the perception of Germany as a trustworthy partner, as a dreamworld to the perception of Germany as a foe and a netherworld.

The protagonists both in *Janjan* and *Mülteci* reach, or rather are pushed to, a state of insanity/madness; they end up as *meczup*.[17] In the micro discursive context of *Janjan*, Sadık's transformation from a village idiot to a *meczup* can certainly be read as a critique of close-knitted small town traditional values, of feudal system practically in effect in rural Turkey, and of the discernible hypocrisy defining human relations there. In *Mülteci*, Şivan is stripped off his sins, if he had any, as the naïve illegal immigrant who is beaten by the cruel reality of a cosmopolitan city, a netherworld, which is ready to devour those who are not ruthless enough to fight it. In either case, Janjan and Şivan symbolize purity and innocence, inherently positive concepts, which inescapably deem those who caused their loss as "inhumane". Both Janjan and Şivan are essentially defeated by the indifferent Turkish diasporic subjects, who are "too integrated", "too individualized", and callously rational and selfish now to care. Thus, to a certain extent, both *Janjan* and *Mülteci* contribute to the popular imaginary about Turkish-German diasporic subjects predominant in Turkey. They are commonly addressed as *gurbetçi/Almancı*,[18] implying exclusion, and thus, their questionable sense of belonging and loyalty to Turkey. Portraying Turkish-Germans as "too Europeanized", therefore, underpins this perception.

This representational strategy should also be considered in the context of abovementioned Turkey-EU and Turkish-German relations. "Turkish identity is perpetually imagined and constructed in relation to Europe, leading to an ambivalent sense of self because Turkey has long been denied any proximity by its everlasting object of desire" (Tunç Cox 2012: 167). Consequently, binary contradictions such as modern-traditional, civilized-barbaric, advanced-underdeveloped, rational-emotional and so on have been the overarching theme in the official discourse and mediated narratives from films to news reports,

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[17] Both insane and *meczup* are viewed as the "other" of society. Yet, differing from what Foucault and Derrida argue regarding the issue of madness in the capitalist Western context, a *meczup* in the Eastern context, who is overwhelmed by the love of God and consequently begins a never-ending solitary journey, enjoys more mystical associations (Foucault 2013, Foucault 2006 and Derrida 2005). A *meczup* is not necessarily always marginalized or ignored by the society, instead, he is highly likely to be respected. As Ertaylan discusses, the West's quintessential concept of "rational mind" is equally important in the eastern societies and Muslim cultures. Nevertheless, *meczup* is described as a person who God specifically summons, and thus, his lack of rational faculties and reason does not call for condemnation. It is regarded as the act of God (Ertaylan 2017: 1025-1050). For detailed discussions of the concept in the Ottoman/Turkish context, see Pehlivan 2017: 19–39, Narter (2018) Deliliğin Sosyal Temsilleri, http://tjs.istanbul.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/13283-29862-1-SM.pdf, accessed 15.5.2018 and Ay 2013). Also, for critical accounts of *deli/meczup* portrayals in Turkish cinema, refer to Doğan 2013: 68–86.

[18] "The term '*Almancı*', formed by adding the suffix –cı to the Turkish word for German, linguistically means they fancy Germany and German culture. Thus, Turkish immigrants have been humiliated by being addressed as *Almancı* in Turkey" (Tunç Cox 2018: 15).

assigning superiority to the idealized European side. *Janjan* and *Mülteci*, on the other hand, seem to reinforce prevailing dichotomies, but with a semantic shift. Imagined superiority of Europeans, in this case that of Turkish-German diasporic subjects who are evidently alienated to their roots, is questioned and undermined. Barış Kılıçbay suggests celebrating the "pleasures of stereotyping", claiming in terms of politics of representation, "playing with stereotypical tropes in an innovative way" might be instrumentalized as a disruptive power (2014: 510). Correspondingly, as Turkish interventions in the cinematic canon about the Turkish-German diasporic community,[19] *Janjan* and *Mülteci* seem to appropriate a subversive stereotyping strategy that allows them to form a critical discourse. This strategy draws on seemingly contradictory and yet closely interlinked methods: 1) Age-old dichotomies are employed; 2) Turkish diasporic subjects are portrayed as idealized European others in these dichotomous categories; 3) Consequently, European superiority is destabilized. What gives these audio-visual texts a subversive quality is the fact that whilst appropriating familiar binaries, they simultaneously undermine them.

Challenging the "burden of representation" that has haunted diasporic cinema for a long while as explained by Kobena Mercer,[20] these Turkish narrative accounts address Turkish-German characters not merely as an ethnic constituency, but as the representatives of European people. In doing so, they question the forced representational status of "raced/ethnic" people. Richard Dyer, in his seminal study on whiteness and its power, argues that "the claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people cannot do that – they can only speak for their race" (1997: 2). Portraying Turkish-Germans as the European "other", therefore, serves to disrupt the fixed understandings of identity and hegemonic categorizations. These films endow their diasporic characters with agency, with the long-denied status of "subject".

Moreover, *Mülteci* in particular deals with the issues of self-alienation, social anomy, insensitivity, and loss of meaning in modern society with reference to multicultural, multinational and multilingual existence of diasporic subjects in contemporary Germany. Thus, with all their failures, the previously idealized European others as portrayed in the film demonstrate the weakened status of the signified in the first half of said dichotomous pairs.

Depicting the complexities and multiplicities ingrained in the relationship between Turkey and Germany, *Berlin Kaplanı* and *Mezarcı*, made in 2012 and 2016 respectively, exemplify the late cinematic and public discourse and imagination

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[19] For detailed accounts of German and Turkish-German cinema that portray the Turkish-German diasporic community, see Tunç Cox 2013a: 37-55 and Tunç 2011b: 117-129.

[20] Elucidating the concept of "burden of representation", Mercer calls attention to the limitations it imposes upon diasporic filmmakers' creativity. Mercer asserts that the necessity to be authentic, the responsibility to be the representative of a whole diasporic community should be transcended (Mercer 1994).

about Germany and Turkish-Germans. Indicating a link which is beyond a basic economic configuration –an unrestrainable "interzone" that allows imaginative possibilities–,[21] the two popular films complicate the issue of transnational connections.

Berlin Kaplanı, directed by Hakan Algül, is a comedy about a semi-professional Turkish-German boxer Ayhan Kaplan (Ata Demirer), who is left with no other option than fleeing to Turkey to save his life. The narrative begins as two parallel stories, which inform viewers about Ayhan Kaplan's long-lost relatives in Antalya, Turkey, forecasting the route of the forthcoming journey. Like *Berlin Kaplanı*, Talip Karamahmutoğlu's film *Mezarcı* too begins in Germany, only to form a narrative which mostly takes place in Turkey. Nevertheless, these are not return journeys or voluntary homecomings. These are stories of transit, suggesting fluidity, flow, simultaneous dis/connection and dis/continuity. These films problematize the issue of migratory routes and interactions between Turkey and Germany, emphasizing their multilateral character.

Opening scenes in *Berlin Kaplanı* is accompanied by a fusion genre soundtrack – Turkish-rap–, highlighting the ever more discernible hybrid soundscape in Berlin.[22] Use of such an idiosyncratic music style alone reveals the extent of cultural and artistic exchange between the two countries and beyond. Similar to the representational strategies utilized in *Janjan* and *Mülteci*, *Berlin Kaplanı* too describes Germany primarily as Turkish and multi-ethnic since we barely see any German characters throughout the film. The protagonist, Ayhan, with his broken Turkish, rational outlook on life, and buried emotional attachment to Turkey as well as his circumnavigating business arrangements, appears to be a product of an interzone, or of "third space" to adopt Homi Bhabha's definition (1994),[23] or of "the contact zone" if we are to adopt Marry Pratt's definition (1992).[24] Regardless of the term appropriated, Ayhan as the central character here challenges the common perception of identities as static. Unlike the Turkish-German diasporic characters in *Janjan* and *Mülteci*, he is not portrayed within a framework of binary oppositions.

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[21] Randall Halle describes interzone as "an experience not limited to geographic cartographic proximity but rather an ideational space, a sense of being somewhere that unites two places, if even only transitionally or temporarily" (2014: 4-5).

[22] For an insightful discussion of the hybrid music scene in Germany, please refer to Güney et al. 2014: 132-151. Also, for an account of the use of music in Turkish-German diasporic cinema, Tunç Cox 2013b: 142-159.

[23] As Bhabha explains, "the hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no primordial unity or fixity. It conceives of the encounter between the native and the other as one potentially resulting in a new language and new forms of social existence and conviviality" (Meredith 1998).

[24] Contact zone, according to Pratt, is "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict" (1992: 6).

Neither is Ejder (Emre Altuğ) in *Mezarcı*. Combining the alleged Turkish and German entrepreneurship skills, he starts a private cemetery business in his hometown in Turkey. This rather unusual choice can be considered as a refusal to reproduce occupational stereotypes such as greengrocer, custodian or taxi driver that have stood for the entire Turkish diasporic community for decades in many mediated narratives. To attract rich customers, promising them an eternal luxury, Ejder incorporates promotional campaigns and new technologies into his unaccustomed business such as crying folk service, custom-made graves, and live broadcast from the cemetery via the Internet. The latter, in particular, is aimed at diasporic families who cannot visit the cemetery regularly, so they can send their prayers through the integrated cameras. This might be interpreted merely as an element of comic relief for the story. Nonetheless, it draws attention to the complexities of community and identity construction. "Advanced technologies, causing a deeper semantic shift in the traditional understanding of "homeland" as a pristine, nostalgic lost land, and instead re-positioning it as readily available and approachable, have disrupted prevailing fixed formulations" (Tunç Cox 2018: 1). An ever-increasing number of people leads a transnational life today, dividing their careers and/or lives between two or more countries. New media particularly makes exchange easier; that is, Turkish-Germans are connected to their country of origin in a lot of ways while residing in Germany.

Mezarcı opens with a moving camera zooming in a Jesus figure accompanied by a vocalized Turkish folk song by one of the most famous minstrels (*ozan*) in Turkish history, Aşık Veysel. It seems to be a striking oxymoron. However, when it is cut to a cemetery, heard famous lyrics make sense (*my only loyal lover is the dark soil…*). The importance of this particular scene predicates on the fact that we are not given any specific visual reference to the exact geographical location. It can be any Christian country, or it can even be a Christian church in Turkey. Only when we hear Ejder talking to the gravediggers in German, we assume this should be Germany. A sense of simultaneous dis/connection and dis/continuity is further reinforced when similar grave-digging scenes and differing rituals of preparing the deceased are repeated in Turkey.

What is intriguing in *Berlin Kaplanı* and *Mezarcı* for the purposes of this article is the fact that neither Germany nor Turkish-Germans are glorified. Nor are they demonized. Instead, both films engage in a fruitful dialogue, allowing room for dialogic imagination.[25] As discussed by Bakthin, dialogic interaction is only possible if a platform for the co-existence of multiplicities is provided. These films form polyphonic narratives in which alternative voices are heard and different perspectives are negotiated.

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[25] Bakhtin's observations about the relational nature of language have paved the way for a discussion of the notion of "dialogic imagination" in the context of diasporic cinema (Tunç 2011a: 192). To see how Bakhtin conceptualizes the "dialogic principle" and the other related term "double-voiced discourse", please refer to Morris 1997.

By stripping Germany off its glorified status in the Turkish collective imagination, these films normalize it. The seemingly insurmountable geographical distance, which also stands for the cultural and social incompatibility of Turks and Germans, is transcended via subtle sub-stories. For instance, lots of people in Ejder's small hometown appear to have had something to do with Germany; they either have a relative or themselves have lived in Germany or they mention continuous business relations. Similarly, in *Berlin Kaplanı*, Ayhan's brother-in-law, Nurettin (Necati Bilgiç), easily travels between Turkey and Germany as if it is an interstate journey. Or his nephew Fatih (Mert Aran) is very disappointed when he sees the jar of Nutella his uncle brought from Germany as a present, stating they already have it in Turkey. This simple comment denotes that "the interconnectedness of the global capitalism as well as underlying various aspects of a more dynamic Turkish-German relations, going beyond the point where Turkey is merely seen as an immigrant/guest worker-sending country" (Tunç Cox 2018: 7). All in all, Germany in these cinematic narratives is not a dreamworld. However, it is not a netherworld, either. These films instead invite constant negotiation, which means, and also requires, contextualizing what is understood by Germany/Germans/Turkish-Germans.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has attempted to demonstrate what Germany means in the radically shifting Turkish political climate by exclusively focusing on pertinent cinematic narratives since 2007. Without neglecting popular cinema, it has included various genres of films and filmmakers with diverse styles in Turkey. Thus, it hopes to provide an encompassing snapshot of the existing perspectives and opinions in the contemporary Turkish film scene with regard to Germany and Turkish-Germans. Evaluating films with reference to the official and public discourse on Turkish-German relations is ultimately aimed at engaging with political debates through the peculiar lenses of popular culture.

The selected films here offer alternative modes of reading the European dreamworld, which has historically been imagined as "an exclusive civilizational entity; a problem-solving instrument and; as representing world society, […] ultimately aiming for supranational integration" (Buhari-Gülmez and Rumford 2016: 41). Problematizing the long-celebrated ideal of European integration, Buhari-Gülmez and Rumford argue that "Europe is less integrated socially and culturally than it is economically and politically" (2016: 41). This argument becomes even more complicated when peripheral countries of Europe like Turkey, which are in the negotiation phase, are taken into account.

Correspondingly, the world of illusion and imaginary, the dreamworld as epitomized by Germany, seems to be rendered as a corrupt and undesirable netherworld in said Turkish cinematic narratives. This approach certainly aligns with that of some earlier Turkish films such as *Dönüş* (Şoray, 1972), *El Kapısı* (Elmas, 1974) *Almanya Acı Vatan* (Gören, 1979) and so on. These films emphasize the sufferings of Turkish guest workers in the hostile and alienating host land,

Germany, implying a sense of victimhood. The denigrating treatment of Germany in the current examples on the other hand serves to mitigate the widespread sense of inferiority with regards to Germans/Europeans in the Turkish collective psyche. Departing from earlier Turkish films that problematize the plight of Turks in Germany, some of the analyzed films purposefully normalize Germany; it is neither superior nor inferior, just neutral. This is more suggestive of a productive dialogue. Either way, these audio-visual texts can be read as an act of "talking back". Turkish cinematic narratives are talking back, refusing the status of "the subaltern". They can also be regarded as positive interventions in the self-otherizing Turkish political and news media discourses since they present different ways of imagining the long-lasting affair between Turkey and Germany.

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243

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