

Forever Migrants: The Power of Television to Retard Identification with the Dominant Culture.

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In 1966, Fatma Akbil arrived in Rotterdam. She was 18 years old, had only a fifth grade education and was newly married. At that time there were few Turkish migrants in the Netherlands. A shortage of labor in boom economic times in Europe caused manufacturers to seek labor from Mediterranean countries. Fatma's husband was one of those laborers. Since his shift started at 2 in the afternoon, he had time in the mornings to orient Fatma to the city. They walked around, then returned for lunch, and he would leave for work. Suddenly Fatma was left alone. But she was adventurous. "If I went a meter from my home the first day, I'd go two the second and three the third, venturing a little more each day." She said she found it easier to adjust because she grew up in Ankara, Turkey, the capitol, a city of about 1 million at the time. She was not like most of the people who came directly from a village__that likely had no running water, indoor plumbing or perhaps even electricity. But I was young, and more beautiful than I am now and had a much better figure," she said. But nobody looked at me. She felt invisible in her strange environment.

Because there were so few Turks in the country and few organizations to help her with adjustment, she was often lonely. She talks about seeing strangers on the street who looked Turkish. "I thought of the person as my mother or my father and wanted to walk up to the person and hug him or her, " she said. She was so homesick that after a year, she thought she might return to Turkey__and even went for a visit. But her mother told her she shouldn't leave her husband like that. She told her that she would get used to it__that she should work, make a little money and earn enough to buy a house when they returned to Turkey for good." So she stayed in Holland.

And when the first screening of a Turkish film was scheduled in a local theatre, she was so excited, she could hardly wait for the day to come. She remembers the evening fondly__a whole theatre full of her countrymen. A large group of people all in one place who spoke her language. What a happy occasion. She turned to other media to make a connection with home too. Her grown daughter, Serra, remembers the first radio program her family listened to in Turkish when she was a child. It was called "Letter from Turkey," and it was broadcast from Germany and lasted only 15 minutes. She said it later expanded to 30 minutes and then 60 minutes. Later, in 1990, the Turkish Radio and Television service__Turkey's public radio and television__began broadcasting to Europe. In Holland it was carried on cable.

Now Fatma is 52, her husband has retired from work, and they have returned to Turkey to live. She comes to the Netherlands for visits to her children. Serra, 28, and one of her sisters still live in Amsterdam. Another one lives in Rotterdam. A third sister is attending university in Ankara, and a brother has settled there. Serra and all her siblings were born and raised in the Netherlands, but Serra went to her last year of high school in Ankara and attended university for a couple of years and then dropped out and returned to Holland. Serra will not go back to Turkey to live. But she is not totally immersed in Dutch culture, either. Though she rejects some of the habits of the Turks who live in the Dutch diaspora, she watches and enjoys Dutch media more than Turkish__says that Turkish television is too loud, the lights are too bright and the tone is at one constant fever pitch. She says the Turkish papers scream their headlines and contain too much color for her taste. She finds more peace in the Dutch television and the more staid Dutch press to her liking. But Serra still thinks of herself as a Turk. She's married to a Turk who was born in Turkey and heads an organization that produces radio and television programs and a cultural magazine. The programs and the publication are produced by Turkish teen_agers, many of whom have family problems or adjustment issues. She says most of her friends here are Turkish, like her mother's__and her sister's "You can have work friends who are Dutch. But you look for people from your own culture when you want to be close to someone or tell your problems to someone. You can't tell your most inner thoughts to a Dutch person. They'll think, Oh, you're Turkish. Your customs are like that__when problems may really have nothing to do with culture. They don't understand. They're looking at it from a different point of view."

Serra and her mother are probably more open to the Dutch culture and people than most of the Turks who live in Amsterdam. But the issues they define as important for their lives are not so unusual__how to fit into a different culture when you feel like you don't belong__how to respond to the dominant culture view of you as "the other." Fatma and Serra are part of a larger research project that started out to be narrowly focused on the impact of television programs on satellite that come to the Turks in Amsterdam. Since 1992 private television stations

originating in Turkey have been received on small dishes across Europe. The cost is minimal to Turkish migrants who have been eager to consume media from home. Two small dishes attached to one's balcony gives access to more than 10 channels of news, sports and entertainment—the next best thing to being there. Since many of these migrants—at least the ones in the first generation—never learned to speak very good Dutch, they have struggled to understand Dutch television and radio—and many can't read the newspapers. So the arrival of satellite television meant that they could at last give up the linguistic fight and retreat to their living rooms to live in a Turkish world. Outside their apartment doors, it isn't much different. The community tends to live in neighborhoods where Turkish stores serve their needs and the schools have majority populations of Turkish and Moroccan migrant students. In Fatma and Serra's neighborhood, there is a Turkish grocer and green grocer—that import products from Turkey. There is also a Turkish butcher and baker, a Turkish coffeehouse, three Turkish banks, and many other Turkish-owned businesses. There's even a mosque a few blocks away.

So as I spent more time in Amsterdam, I began to understand that this study wasn't just about the impact of media on the lives of these migrants—but about many factors that contribute to identity formation, maintenance and change. It is about the reality in Europe today that seems to keep whole groups of ethnic minorities "forever migrants." Now forever is a long time—and of course I can't speculate about future generations, but in the nearly 40 years since Turks began migrating to Europe in great numbers, I observe that the majority have stronger ties to their native homeland than to the land where they have settled. Today, I'd like to explore the reasons for this.

This conference is about diasporas, and the Turkish migrants in Europe are not technically a diaspora—if we define that as "the collective forced dispersion of a religious and/or ethnic group" that is usually precipitated by a political or other disaster. The Turks who live in Amsterdam went there by choice. And since the migrants' home country still exists, and is a place to which they frequently return for visits, they are not a dispersed population. But these days diasporic communities are thought of more broadly. They continue to retain their identity through a collective memory in the new home. More important than why a diasporic community comes together, say Chaliand and Rageau in *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*, is the people's "will to survive as a minority by transmitting a heritage." The Turkish migrants in Amsterdam certainly have this will for the moment. Their memories are refreshed continuously from exposure to television from Turkey, from their regular trips back to their homeland, and from their interaction in neighborhood communities that contain Turkish shops and cultural centers.

Most of the authors who have written about diasporas and identity have been migrants themselves—Stuart Hall, Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhaba. Perhaps that is why they write with such passion about the identity process. Some scholars write of identity crisis that occurs in being forced from one's home and into an alien environment. Though the Turks were never forced from their homes, they didn't go entirely willingly. The reality of that time was that many of these people were struggling to feed and clothe their families on the earnings from their village or small town employment. Others had no jobs at all. Still others were spurred on by the attraction of the possibility of forming a nest egg that would be used to establish some kind of small business in Turkey upon their return. Many of them, like Fatma, were not reunited with their families in Turkey for several years. Others, like Fatma's husband, went without any family and married or brought family members several years after their arrival. I am told that there was little to help them adjust to the new environment in the early years. The plan was for a temporary stay—that would last only as long as their labor was needed in Europe. Then they would return home. So in the early 1960s, they went without language instruction. (Some have told me that at the time, no Turkish-Dutch dictionary existed), without a permanent place to settle, without advice on cultural differences.

Some of the migrants did get to return home, but not many. It rapidly became clear to the migrants that there was less hope for a bright future in Turkey. When they did return for summer holidays, they would be looked on as foreigners. They were called "Alamanci," (a derogatory term for Turks who had moved to Germany, though it has been used to describe all European Turks) and presumed to be rich, since they usually arrived in a car and wore clothing and had possessions from a more developed society. Certainly there were few social benefits to be given by the Turkish government if they returned. In Holland they had free schools, unemployment insurance (that became necessary when the economic bust came to Europe in the early 1970s), retirement benefits, health insurance, and subsidies for many other necessities.

The Dutch too began to realize that most were here for the long haul. After several years, the migrants had reunited with their spouses, started families, and settled down to a permanent stay. Still, all the while they thought they would return to Turkey—that was the hope and the dream. And that kept many of them from trying to assimilate into Dutch culture. Besides, they could get along without learning much Dutch. And if they needed a translator when they dealt with legal matters or doctors, their children were able to help out. To this day there exists a sizeable number of migrants who speak no Dutch at all. And to become citizens of the Netherlands, a person must speak a

minimum amount of Dutch, so these folks will remain resident aliens for as long as they live.

The story of this community is a long one, and my task is to focus more on the role of the media in the lives of these people. Because I focus on the Turkish migrants themselves in this paper, I do not describe the role of the Dutch in any detail. Though I will not describe how the Dutch may have discouraged the settlement of this group of migrants, it should be known that the Turkish community in the country was not really embraced or welcomed as new citizens. I first became interested in this research project when I heard about the wide ranging adoption of satellite broadcasts from Turkey. And it surprised me that so many people who had lived so long in a country apart from their homeland, would be attracted to the content of these television channels. So I had to go and see for myself why that was happening and what the impact of that content might be. I visited families in their homes__at all times of the day, during the week and on weekends__and I can tell you that in the nearly 100 homes I visited, almost every one had the television on and tuned to a Turkish, not a Dutch channel. There were very few exceptions. Those who had struggled to learn enough Dutch to get along in this society admitted that they were losing the language facility as they interacted less and less with it. Very few said they had close friends who were Dutch, so they spoke Turkish at home and outside of their homes__in the markets and on the streets, in the homes of their friends, at the coffeehouses and in the mosques. And now, aside from the weekly free Dutch newspaper that comes to their doors, they have little exposure to written Dutch.

Even their children who were educated in Dutch got little exposure to the Dutch media since they saw no daily Dutch newspaper, and unless they had a separate television in a bedroom, they watched the television of their parents' choice.

But I'm a little ahead of myself. Before the Turkish public channel began broadcasting on the cable, I said there were no media available from home. I mentioned that Fatma and Serra and their family listened to a German station to get news in Turkish. But the Dutch also created spaces for the migrants from several countries on broadcasts __both radio and television__from the public stations. Most of these programs air on metropolitan stations and carry information specific to the particular community. These stations attempt to serve the needs of minorities in the civic arena, and in legal, religious and political matters. There are programs on Islam, programs on Dutch public affairs (explaining important issues to be voted on, for example), programs explaining the Dutch educational system to parents, programs for youth made by youth in the various urban centers. And the radio carries a daily news program in Turkish as well. Ahmet Azdural has worked at the public radio station that broadcasts to the Turkish community for many years. He says the half_hour early evening program is the only daily source of news for Turks in the Netherlands. Yet the ratings don't attest to its importance. He told me that in the early 1980s, the station's listener surveys indicated that 60_70 percent of the potential audience listened regularly. In the last 3_4 years, since satellite television arrived__the ratings have dropped to a mere 4 percent. But the Dutch programmers don't shut down the newscast for want of listeners. A weekly talk show has more popularity. The listeners call in with questions and Azdural says that as many as 4,000 might call in if it is a significant legal issue that personally affects the community.

Migranten TV offers a similar service on television. Broadcast in Turkish with Dutch subtitles or Dutch with Turkish subtitles when necessary, the program focuses on news that wouldn't otherwise get to the Turkish community. While it too had about 80 percent penetration in the days before satellite television, today he says the audience surveys indicate that 25 percent are active/regular viewers, and another 25_30 percent listen occasionally. Like the radio program, it continues to air despite the decline in numbers of viewers. Seref Acer, program director and a migrant himself, says he doesn't need surveys to know that the program should continue. "Our important purpose is to supply information, and even if they don't like it, it's good for them," Acer said. Acer is determined to continue the program, because he is worried about the Turks' lack of feeling of belonging. "It is a problem that Turks don't see this as their country, that they look to Turkey for their identity. It's not enough to just work here to be part of this society" Acer believes that having more Turkish professionals in the country would help change things. Of course part of the reason that these radio and television programs that are focused on minority needs and interests do not attract many listeners or viewers is that the households have the television tuned to the satellite programs non stop and never switch over to Dutch channels.

All the people I talked to who were involved in programming aimed at minorities on Dutch channels believe their mission is to provide the information, whether the audience is large or not. Dick Oosterbaan, producer of a recent series of profiles of prominent Turks in Amsterdam for Dutch Public television, said one of the goals of a public broadcaster is to produce programs that help people in Holland understand what is going on with their neighbors. And even if only the opinion leaders in the community watch the programs, you have to start with the elite and move down with this sort of program. Oosterbaan's view is that it takes at least three generations to assimilate a

culture. The "first generation is lost," he said, but by the third, they begin to get it." He notes that satellite television from Turkey is not helping with the process. "We have less than one hour of radio broadcasts, while they (the Turkish private television channels) have a full 24 hours to reach the audience."

This, then, is the environment into which Turkish private television came—a less-than-rich media environment in the migrants' native language with a potentially large audience for Turkish-language programming. So the audience adopted the dishes in droves. As Azdural pointed out, "One radio and television station are not enough to change the ideas of the Turkish people here. We need a wide range of multicultural programs that include a European perspective." And since that wasn't available, the entertainment, sports and news offered on the Turkish private channels were very attractive.

I guess we could expect that those people in their 50s and 60s, who came with little education or were illiterate would have been most attracted to the imported channels. After all, many of them were retired, their children had left home, and they had little social activity to fill their days. The Veldkamp (a market research company in Amsterdam) survey of migrants in 1995 found that only 22 percent of the Turks rated their Dutch language skills as "very good." And only 28 percent of the Turks said they speak Dutch in the family at home.

And I can even understand that those in their 40s with young children at home and little money to go out to a movie or the theatre would also enjoy spending their evenings watching entertainment from Turkey. But the group that surprised me most was the young adults and the teen-agers who watched a mix of television in both languages or preferred Turkish television to Dutch TV. Many of them watch the Turkish channels in deference to their parents, who won't watch Dutch channels. And even if they made a careful selection of programs from both kinds of television, when it came to pop music, all of them preferred music from Turkey over that of Europe.

It is this mix of cultural choice on television that characterizes the second generation—and even the third. One woman, a teacher, who lives at the very end of the tram line in a new neighborhood with her two teen-aged daughters, told me that "if her feet were in the Netherlands, her head and heart were in Turkey." Another young professional man said it like this: "If you shine a light on me, I would cast two shadows." Neither one or the other, they say they never completely fit in either location. Stuart Hall (1992) would say they represent one of the new diasporas, as they "must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, and to translate and negotiate between them." And mass media, particularly broadcast media, both helps and hinders that process. Or as Michael Schudson (1994, p. 40) has put it:

"@the mass media have often been seen as a powerful force for integration, both positively—assimilating different peoples to a common, civil culture—and negatively—stripping different peoples of their folk cultures and embracing them in an overbearing 'hegemonic' culture produced by elites at the society's center."

I firmly believe that television plays a role in preventing the Turkish diaspora in Amsterdam from negotiating Dutch culture—if that is characterized as a hegemonic culture—to any major degree. And it is important for this community to be able to be literate in Dutch to be empowered in the Dutch political system. To be able to vote, they need to become citizens. And to be able to elect representation from among the Turkish ethnic community, they need to be able to vote.

Although I have no statistical evidence to that fact that television retards literacy and a more complete understanding of Dutch culture, I am convinced that it does. And it is not any particular program, but rather the pervasiveness of the reception in almost every household and the fact that it provides a backdrop for all household activity. George Gerbner, a communication scholar, has long researched a theory about media exposure in this country—called the cultivation hypothesis. This approach claims that it is the cumulative exposure to certain types of television programming that has an effect on people—not any one program or set of programs—so that, over time, a child who watches violence on television on a daily basis, eventually has a certain reaction to that violence. This is what appears to be occurring with this group of migrants.

But as I said in the beginning, other factors are equally influential in maintaining the identity with Turkey. People who only speak their native language and only choose to interact with others who come from Turkey never give themselves a chance to become comfortable in the dominant culture. All those Turkish shops in the neighborhoods, schools that are relatively segregated, and the Turkish cultural centers attached to the neighborhood mosques, work to isolate the minority population—even the children who were born in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has an educational policy that allows parents to choose where they wish to send their children to school—and many Dutch people have chosen to move themselves or move their children out of the schools predominantly populated by migrants. Though some Turkish families choose to send their children to schools away from their neighborhoods when they see that a majority of the students are migrants, other families like the idea of schools attended by many

Turkish children. Still others have opted to send their children to Islamic schools where the entire population of the schools are Turkish or Moroccan immigrants. When the time comes for those many of those children__raised in the segregated environment__to marry, they select a mate from within the Turkish community__or their fathers return to Turkey to select a person from the family's village or town, perhaps even a 1st or 2nd cousin for their son or daughter to marry.

One person I interviewed said that this is one of the reasons that integration takes so long. The community is constantly receiving first generation newcomers. And when the newcomers arrive, they have to learn the language, adjust to the new environment, find employment__and they bring with them the cultural orientation to Turkey __which is subsequently passed on to their children.

Religious affiliation is another major factor. Nearly all Turks are Moslems. But they are not all uniformly devout and they don't all subscribe to the same version of Islam. In the last decade or so, Turkey has witnessed an increase in the number of people who subscribe to what could be termed fundamentalist Islamic views. Turkey even had a prime minister from the Islamist party__then called the Welfare Party, now re_formed as the Virtue Party. In Europe, a portion of this group call themselves the "Milli Gorus" or "National View" party. They are organized in the mosque and its cultural center. The largest group in Amsterdam is located at the Aya Sofia mosque. The center provides cradle_to_grave services for this community. The youth are encouraged to gather for sports and Koran classes. In the summer and on weekends, a Milli Gorus_sponsored boarding school offers religious instruction in weekend and summer "camps." Women__young and old__have special groups to meet their needs. Babysitting is provided while they attend meetings and plan for community activities. Men gather in the coffee house on the first floor and discuss politics and religion throughout the day. And families gather for meals and celebrations at religious holidays. Money is collected for the mosque's activities and for supporting campaigns for helping the poor in Turkey and for building party strength in the homeland. Many of their members hope and plan for a shariah__the establishment of a religious state__to replace the secular state in Turkey. In the summer of 1998, 40,000 Milli Gorus gathered in the Amsterdam Ajax soccer stadium for a weekend rally and celebration of their religious and political views. At this rally the group reaffirmed their loyalty to Turkey and to Islam and to the Virtue Party. So whatever else happened during that weekend, the rally attendees went away with a stronger identification to something outside the Dutch culture and community. I am not suggesting that people should abandon their beliefs and their cultural traditions, but this religious group seems to help intensify the differences between themselves and the Dutch culture, the culture within which they work and live.

But some groups are trying to help focus the identification with Holland too. And just as there are satellite television stations reminding Turks of their Turkish and Islamic identity, other efforts are being made by the Dutch and the Turks in the Netherlands (particularly those in the second generation) to help establish a European identity. A recent event has been the organization of young ethnic Turkish professionals whose goal is to change the image of the Turkish migrant in the Netherlands. Like most all European societies, Holland is multicultural, and has come to accept that reality. Efforts have been made to include the diverse population in all phases of that society, though some Dutch may oppose those efforts. The Turks have a great cultural tradition to enrich Dutch society too__in their music, their cuisine, their art, their language, and their religion. However, the concern is that many of these migrants will always be oriented toward Turkey and not fully benefit from their European citizenship. The hope is that eventually they may stop being considered migrants and take their place in society as European Turks. A large group of them already have assumed this identity.