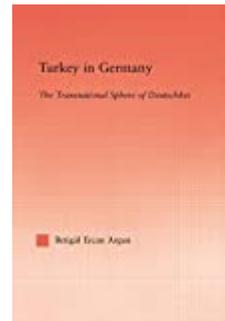




**Betigul Ercan Argun.** *Turkey in Germany: The Transnational Sphere of Deutschkei.* New York and London: Routledge, 2003. xix + 199 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-93568-5.



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## Conceptualizing a Turkish-German Transnational Public Sphere

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With *Turkey in Germany: The Transnational Sphere of Deutschkei*, Betigul Argun makes an important contribution to the growing body of scholarship on transnationalism, as well as to work on the post-World War II migration of Turks to Germany.[1] Before delving into a discussion of the book itself, it is helpful to be clear about the author's analytical framework and focus. Argun is a political scientist, and her project aims to "bring political science into transnationalism and transnational politics into political science" (p. 7). At the most basic level, her study seeks to demonstrate the political significance of transnationalism. More specifically, Argun sets out to answer the question, "How are migration movements and the transnational communities they create connected to the possibility of enhanced political voice in sending countries" (pp. 7-8)? Her central concern, then, is not so much with migrants in Germany, or what migration means for Germany. Rather, she wants to gain a deeper understanding of Turkish domestic politics by looking at "Turkish civil society outside of Turkish national bound-

aries" (p. 6). In these respects, it is not quite fair to consider Argun's book within the context of H-German, although her study offers a number of insights that should prove thought-provoking for scholars of Germany's post-war labor migration and its attendant social, cultural, political, and ideological effects.

Roughly the first third of the book is devoted to fleshing out what Argun has coined "Deutschkei," an amalgam of the German words "Deutschland" and "Tuerkei," which she uses to indicate the "transnational connections between Turkey proper and Turkey in Germany" (p. xi). One of the defining characteristics of Deutschkei, according to Argun, is the development of a critical political discourse akin to the type of independent exchange theorized in Juergen Habermas's well-known concept of the public sphere (p. 29). Because it occupies a space between Germany and Turkey, the "transnational public sphere" of Deutschkei serves as an arena uniquely situated to exert pressure on and even shape "ideas about national identity, citizenship, social integration, and democracy in the native setting" (p. 30). Argun posits a number of factors in both Germany and Turkey

that have contributed to the emergence of a transnational public sphere oriented toward Turkey. In Germany, strict citizenship laws and ongoing hostility to foreigners caused migrants to feel unwelcome and isolated, encouraging them to identify most closely with political developments in the homeland. At the same time, German discussions of multiculturalism in the late 1980s facilitated the articulation of new identities (e.g. Alevi or Kurd) within the Turkish immigrant community (pp. 68-73). In Turkey, a generally closed and repressive political culture—especially in the wake of the 1980 military coup—drove migrants to become political activists from the safe distance of Germany. Turkey’s ongoing bid to join the European Union, moreover, has meant that the Turkish state is far more sensitive to the criticisms and concerns expressed by members of the migrant community (pp. 71-73, 55-57). Argun is clearly engaged here with the scholarship on transnationalism that began to emerge around 1990, and she rehearses many of its key insights.[1] One that is worth highlighting is her assertion that transnationalism draws attention to that which it seemingly negates—the national (p. 19). This is a useful point because it reminds us that transnationalism always operates in dialectical relation to the nation. *Deutschkei*, in other words, is always defined, both socially and ideologically, vis-a-vis Germany and Turkey.

A key objective of *Turkey in Germany* is to demonstrate that this reciprocal relationship is not just a matter of academic theorizing, but has concrete political effects. The book’s middle section traces the particular impacts of *Deutschkei* on Turkish politics and political discourse. Specifically, Argun looks at the “ethnic differentiation of migrants from Turkey into sub-national groups,” a process which emerged in the German context but eventually had important ramifications for the Turkish state (p. 73). For example, the Kurdish Cultural and Information Center, established in Germany in the early 1980s, began to demand separate Kurdish language classes for Kurds in the German school system. These demands gradually made Germans more aware of the ethnic and religious differences among guest workers from Turkey (p. 67). Similar kinds of consciousness-raising activities were undertaken by the Alevi, a religious minority who comprise nearly 30 percent of the Turkish nationals in Germany. In 1990, Alevi Turks in Cologne organized the first politically active Alevi organization, which later became the Federation of Alevi Unions in Europe (AABF).

Argun then contrasts these developments in Germany with contemporaneous political discourse in Turkey. In the process of creating a Turkish nation-state

from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, she suggests, the category of Turk (defined as any citizen of Turkey) was elevated at the expense of other ethnic or religious identities. For the Kurds, state centralization also eliminated previous administrative and cultural autonomy (pp. 82-84). Prior to the early 1990s, it was not possible to use the term “Kurd” in the public media; the Turkish state and press couched Kurdish unrest as a “separatist” movement that stemmed from “regional underdevelopment.” By contrast, early Kemalism initially benefited the Alevi because its philosophy of secularization reduced Sunni dominance. Despite this apparent alliance, according to Argun, the Alevi have been critical of religion-state relations in Turkey. In particular, they have questioned the legitimacy of the state’s Directorate for Religious Affairs (DIB) and its sponsorship of the Sunni sect. Throughout the 1980s, the government engaged in overt attempts to assimilate Alevi (who for centuries have worshipped privately in their homes) by building mosques in their communities. “Since Alevis do not pose a territorial threat and since they support secularism,” Argun concludes, “they enjoy a certain state sponsorship not felt by Kurds ... [h]owever, by asserting their identity and culture and by fighting for recognition of their group name, Alevis are challenging the illusion of ethnic homogeneity in Turkey forcefully” (p. 104). At this point, we might expect Argun to explain how the activities in Germany effected a transformation of the discourse around Kurds and Alevis in Turkey. Instead, Argun merely asserts that the Alevi renaissance and Kurdish activities abroad have pressured Turkey to come to terms with the myth of a homogeneous nation (p. 87).

I think that Argun is on to something important in the connections she attempts to draw here. Yet the historian in me wants to know much more precisely *how* developments within *Deutschkei* have altered Turkish politics and discourse. The particularly vivid example that opens Argun’s book, I would suggest, goes a long way in illustrating how this reciprocal relationship works in actual practice. In February 1999, Turkish commandos captured Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), in Kenya and brought him back to Turkey to face charges of treason, murder, and crimes against humanity (pp. 3-4). This event, Argun relates, immediately provoked numerous demonstrations by PKK members and sympathizers at consulates and embassies throughout Western Europe. The scene in Berlin turned particularly violent when Israeli consular guards killed three Kurdish protesters. The demonstrations and violence on German soil prompted the German government (among others) to

appeal to Turkey to guarantee Ocalan a fair trial, open the process to international observers, and refrain from seeking the death penalty. Turkey's domestic politics thus became a matter of international concern and intervention in direct response to the activities of Deutschkei in Germany. Most of these protesters were refugees, legal residents, or naturalized citizens of the Federal Republic, who had grown particularly savvy about the ways in which their actions outside Turkey's national borders could shape its political decisions at home.

This example, as Argun keenly observes, also points to the ways in which transnational politics often becomes a domestic issue in both Turkey and Germany. The Ocalan demonstrators not only drew the attention of Germans to the constitutional status of Kurds in Turkey; they also raised questions about immigration and the process of integration in Germany. After decades of residence in the Federal Republic, many immigrants clearly continued to engage in the political issues of their homeland. But precisely because of this ongoing engagement, Turkish immigrants simultaneously had an effect on German political policy and decision-making. This example is so useful, in other words, because it shows us ongoing reciprocal relations between Deutschkei, Turkey, and Germany.

For the most part, however, Argun does not follow up on this central insight in *Turkey in Germany*. Instead, she focuses almost exclusively on the implications of transnationalism for Turkish politics. The final third of the book examines four groups within the Turkish immigrant community in Germany: Alevis, Kurds, ultranationalists, and Islamists (pp. 101-168). In these case studies, Argun analyzes each group's political goals in relation to the Turkish state and Kemalism (which she considers official state ideology). She also reviews the activities and organizations among these different groups in Deutschkei, including their internet websites and electronic chat rooms. This section will be valuable for readers unfamiliar with the basic fault lines in Turkish politics, or the diversity of political organizations that Turkish migrants have established in Germany. But it fails to deliver on the analytical promise set out in the book's opening discussion of the Ocalan incident. Somewhat ironically, the problem here seems to be the reassertion of mutually exclusive binary categories: dialectical relationships are superseded by one-way national reverberations. Argun justifies this move by arguing that Turkish-Germans represent an exceptional case within the larger spectrum of late-twentieth-century migrant groups. In her view, because Turkish migrants have been so rigor-

ously excluded from German civil society, their political identities, affiliations, and activities have largely pointed in one direction—back to their country of origin.

The ongoing and deep connection which many (if not most) Turkish migrants feel to their homeland, I think, is too little acknowledged in the growing literature on the labor migration to the Federal Republic. In this sense, Argun's book provides an important corrective to a body of work that has almost exclusively emphasized the ways immigration has impacted German society.[2] Yet her repeated insistence that German policies towards Turks make them more invested in homeland politics exists for the most part as an unsubstantiated assertion. There is recent work, moreover, which comes to the opposite conclusion: namely, that despite restrictive German naturalization laws, Turkish immigrants have sought to incorporate themselves both socially and politically at the local level in their country of residence.[3] My own sense is that this apparent discrepancy cannot be understood in terms of a zero-sum game. The complexity of migrant experience in the Federal Republic undoubtedly supports both views.

I suspect that each reader's assessment of *Turkey in Germany* will depend, in large part, on his/her theoretical starting point. For those working on Turkish-German history, this book represents a pioneering work that fills out our understanding of the political affiliations and organizations of Turks in the Federal Republic. Its examination of Deutschkei's effects on Turkish politics, moreover, will force Germanists to pay closer attention to the labor migration's broader, transnational consequences. Scholars of transnationalism, by contrast, may view Argun's book as somewhat one-dimensional because it only concerns itself with the impacts of migrant politics and culture on Turkey. Indeed, it seems to me that an emphasis on national reverberations need not require us to abandon one of the crucial projects of transnational studies—namely, to draw attention to and explicate the reciprocal traffic of culture, bodies, and ideas that exists *between* nations. Thus, it is quite possible to agree with Argun that studies of the Turkish-German community have consistently neglected the migration's impacts on Turkish political discourse, but also to note the book's limitations in advancing our understanding of how this transnational public sphere impacted ideology and discourse in multiple directions.

Notes:

[1]. Important studies on the contours of transnationalism include Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rum-

baut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992); Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Basel: Gordon and Breach, 1994); and Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a useful assessment of theories of transnationalism, see Peter Kivisto, "Theorizing Transnational Immigration: A Critical Review of Current Efforts," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24:4 (2001): pp. 549-577. On the postwar migration of Turks to Germany, see Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1980: Seasonal Workers/Forced Laborers/Guest Workers*, trans. William Templer (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1990); David Horrocks and Eva Kolinsky, eds., *Turkish Culture in German Society Today* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996); Peter O'Brien, *Beyond the Swastika* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996); Karen Schoenwaelder, "Migration, Refugees and Ethnic Plurality as Issues of Public and Political Debates in (West) Germany" in David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook, eds., *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 159-178; Klaus J. Bade and Myron Weiner, eds., *Migration Past, Migration Future: Germany and the United States* (Providence and Oxford:

Berghahn Books, 1997); Christian Joppke, *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rita Chin, "Imagining a German Multiculturalism: Aras Oren and the Contested Meanings of the 'Guest Worker,' 1955-1980," *Radical History Review* 83:2 (2002): pp. 44-72; and "Toward a 'Minor Literature'? The Case of Auslaenderliteratur in Postwar Germany," *New Perspectives on Turkey* (Fall 2003).

[2]. Exceptions to this rule include Faruk Sen, *Tuerkische Migranten in Deutschland* (Essen: Center for Turkish Studies, 1997); Sami Ozkara, ed., *Tuerkische Migranten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Cologne: Onel Verlag, 1990); and Ertekin Ozcan, *Tuerkische Immigrantorganisationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: Hitit Verlag, 1989).

[3]. Brett Klopp, for example, has recently traced immigrants's efforts to achieve social integration in the schools, unions, and political organizations in Frankfurt. *German Multiculturalism: Immigrant Integration and the Transformation of Citizenship* (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 2002).

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