

**Replaying Home**  
**Can Sungu**  
**2013**

Before the invention of “cheap flights”, cars were the most important means of long distance travel for Turkish “guest workers” (Gastarbeiter) living in Germany. The train was too slow and time-consuming and flights were too expensive. Another reason not to prefer air travel was the luggage restrictions that made it nearly impossible to carry the whole bunch of *bayram*<sup>1</sup> presents to home. Bragging about the brand new German car and the relief that the amount of luggage is merely restricted by father’s skills of packaging, made the car trips more attractive. Many “first” items were carried from Germany to Turkey in the trunk: Deodorants, soaps, radios, binoculars, colour TV’s... Every new good which was brought along from Germany provided a great attraction and strengthened the “positive clichés” about the German technology and the occidentalist analyses of German and/or Western cultures. The almost hysterical desire for Western consumer products resulted in such a craze that even the people without any relatives abroad wished to own one of these products. Due to high tariffs and inadequate mass purchasing power in the 1980’s Turkey, especially electronics made in Germany were regarded as luxuries. Therefore, everything that did not fit anymore into the “father’s car” was carried with pickup trucks. In addition to this, a group of guest workers who permanently travelled to Turkey in the early 1980s, unintentionally established a smuggling route which eventually evolved into a “silk road” for professional smugglers.

Video tape recorders, the most significant of these smuggled products, gave way to a new cultural field in Turkey: Video. But in order to understand the whole process, we have to go back to the starting point, namely to Germany: In the early 1980s, first Betamax and then VHS video recorders became widespread in Germany and in a very short time they were well accepted by the Turks there. The lack of sufficient language skills, as well as the fact that the content of German television was not targeting the Turkish audience, lead the Turkish immigrants to rent videotapes more and more. The video somehow replaced German television. The video nights were a sort of social events including the neighbours and the family and were seen as a pleasant, family-friendly alternative to going out and being part of the German-dominated cultural life.

The enthusiasm for video inspired Turkish film producers to export Turkish movies to Germany and transfer them on videotapes. In order to take part in that growing market, a lot of Turkish video companies opened up in Germany. These companies had their own studios and were responsible for transferring the imported movies on videotapes, enriching the content with commercials, trailers and presentation films, packaging and distributing them to the Turkish video rentals in German cities. Some of these studios also produced low-budget video movies targeting the Turkish audience in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Religious feasts of Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Due to digital revolution, these companies were not able compete against digital TV and online videos and closed one after another. Some of the movies which were only released on videotapes, are now in danger of disappearing forever.

Those who would spend their summer vacations in Turkey started to bring video recorders and tapes along to Turkey. The idea that you can watch every movie every time you want was magical. The video recorders were mostly combined with colour TV's which were also brought by the relatives in Germany and placed into the favourite corner of the living room.

However, the copyright laws in Turkey could not keep up with the technological innovations and the Turkish state did not enact laws against the illegal duplication of videotapes. Thus, the new video market rapidly grew in Turkey but in its early stages, it was a bit improvised and "semi-legal" and mainly dominated by duplicated or smuggled video tapes. The video clubs where videotapes were rented and/or duplicated for favourable prices were very commonplace. Some Turkish film distributors in Germany were very keen on these developments in Turkey and already got involved with smuggling of video recorders. These smuggled goods were sold for example in a big warehouse in Istanbul, *Dogubank*, a place admired by the Turkish consumers due to its low (tax-free) prices. *Dogubank* still exists and is a favourite spot for buying home appliances and electronics.

For *Replaying Home*, I started my research in 2010, a couple of years after I moved in to Berlin. I already had heard about some of these movies, I had even watched a few of them before. But the real turning point of my research was when I discovered one of the last Turkish video rentals in Berlin. The shop was about to close and the owner had decided to make a selling-off. I had the opportunity to buy some videotapes there and talk with the owner about his memories of the golden age of home video, as well. This was a trigger of a long research phase, all the while I watched movies, tried to reach some local experts and find more information about the production companies, directors and actors. I noticed that the most of these movies base on a similar plot which focus on the Turkish migrant life in Germany by following their protagonist(s). The plots mainly deal with concepts of culture shock, homesickness, discrimination and assimilation by discussing the issues from different perspectives of religion, national identity or social rights. I began to edit sequences as sort of thematic clusters entitled as "arrival to Germany", "first impressions", "neo-nazis" or "drugs". I created a new narrative imitating the narratives of these movies and melting the cuts taken from more than 25 movies into the same pot. I tried to avoid any documental approaches or making any certain anthropological statements. In contrary, I explicitly wanted to emphasize the fiction and storytelling.

The installation recreates a "video corner" of an anonymous Turkish family and presents this found footage video includes selected cuts from some of these smuggled videotapes such as the Turkish movies from the 70's/ 80's shot in Germany, presentation films of Germany-based Turkish video studios, movie trailers and title animations. The installation offers a one-on-one experience where the visitor's role shifts between spectator and guest of the family. *Replaying Home* invites to a journey through a fictive universe based on stereotypes, occidentalism and the traumas of migrant life.