

## **Pride and popcorn: consuming the idea of community at film screenings in the Turkish diaspora**

A range of studies has revealed the interrelatedness of identity construction, community formation and media among diasporas, mostly focusing on domestic contexts. Seeking to add further nuance to the understanding of the social lives of diasporas, we concentrate on media culture in the public environment of the film theatre. The significance of diasporic film consumption is investigated through a local audience study of Turkish film screenings in Antwerp. The phenomenon of the screenings was analysed through a multi-method approach, including 536 questionnaires among audiences, 19 in-depth interviews and 3 group interviews, along with previous findings (on distribution and exploitation) of the same project. The results show that Turkish films are almost exclusively attended by people with Turkish roots, creating a Turkish diasporic space within the boundaries of the urban and the public. The audience study shows that the screenings fulfil a major social role but also affect understandings of community.

Keywords: Turkish diaspora; media culture; cultural identity; film consumption; public space; cinema

## **Introduction**

The consumption of homeland and transnational media among diasporic communities has occupied a crucial position in the investigation of diasporic identities and the imagination of transnational communities. The multidimensional media worlds of diasporas have been related to processes of identity construction (Georgiou 2006), nostalgia, desire and cultural memory (Elias 2008; Ogan 2001), social and political activism (Shi 2005), the development of social capital (Ogan & d'Haenens 2011), issues of sexuality and gender (Durham 2004) and family relations (Madianou & Miller 2012). While there is a growing body of studies devoted to the relation between the social practice of diasporas and media consumption, it shows crucial gaps. First, most research focuses on media consumption in domestic/private spaces instead of public media consumption. Yet it is precisely in the public space that we may see interesting assertions of diasporic identity negotiation (e.g. Malek 2011). Second, most studies (including the ones cited above) consider print media, satellite television and new media. Film has been less explored, except for a vast array of studies on Bollywood's global circulation and consumption. Other exceptions include the diasporic consumption of Nollywood films (Esan 2008) and the reception of New Zealand films among expatriates (Thornley 2009). What seems to emerge from most studies on diasporic film consumption is an emphasis on how it constitutes for the people in the diaspora a 'space to create and celebrate' – for instance – 'Kiwiness' (Thornley 2009: 104) or 'to perform their Indianness' (Kaur 2005; Punathambekar 2005, p. 156). In short, the focus is mostly on individual experiences of a cultural identity. However, such questions are rarely addressed at a more collective and community level and lack a thorough analysis of how media (and particularly film) consumption is socially situated. Addressing these gaps, this article explores the audiences of public Turkish film screenings in a Western European city. The main questions are: How are audiences for

these screenings composed and what is the socio-cultural position of the screenings? And, how can the public nature of the screenings inform us about more collective senses of identity within a diasporic community? Although it concerns a local case-study, conducted with a concern for on-site details, it is very informative for studying diasporic film cultures elsewhere too, as for instance similar screenings of Turkish films take place in other Western European countries as well (e.g. in Germany, Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands). Our focus here is on the Turkish films that are screened in the multiplex theatre, i.e. the commercial and mainstream films that generate high viewing numbers in Turkey. Writing about film-viewing experiences and film-going habits, we deliberately reduce the amount of references to specific films (although we plan to investigate films addressing nationalistic and religious tendencies in Turkey in future research). Independent and art films from Turkey are not considered either since these were not screened at the multiplex theatre, not promoted among the diaspora (see Smets et al. 2011) and generally not popular among the Turkish community for reasons such as them being too 'slow', 'boring' or not starring any famous Turkish actors.

### **Diasporic media, identity and the public space**

Since the 1990s, scholars such as Dayan (1998) and Gillespie (1995) have brought to the notice how various kinds of displaced populations 'maintain their own version of global culture' (Silverstone 1999, p. 110-111) by (re)producing or circulating media that are linked to a 'homeland'. In those early studies on media and diaspora, as well as the substantial work that has ever since been done by others (notably Georgiou 2006), diaspora serves as a concept to describe multiple movements and displacements around the world (Silverstone 1999: 110; Berthomiere 2005). The concept appeals not only to the hybrid and ever-changing nature of identities in a transnational context (Georgiou

2006: 3) but also to the socio-political struggles 'to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement' (Clifford 1997, p. 252). Except for that socio-political struggle, which supposedly crystallizes in the arena of public space, the relation between media consumption and identity among diasporas has been studied especially in the realm of the domestic environment. This is not so much because of an ignorance of the public, but rather due to the expansion of transnational broadcasting since the 1990s, rendering the domestic and familial a key domain for 'constructing commonality around television' (Georgiou 2006, p. 89-94). It is now time to redirect attention to the urban, public spaces as grounds for diasporic identity constructions. Indeed, '[d]iasporic identities remain relevant as and when they are social and performed identities; as they are tested, contested and debated in the cultural and social context' of the public space (Ibid., p. 104). In her media ethnographic study of the Cypriot Community Centre and its significance for the Greek Cypriot community in London, Georgiou demonstrated that 'media challenge the conventional boundaries of the domestic and the public and create a continuation of the living space,' (2001, p. 311) and that media practices in public spaces can yield a profound reaffirmation and restructuring of ethnic identities.

Film consumption among the Turkish diaspora has gradually opened up to become more public (Smets et al. 2011). Small-scale private screenings have developed into screenings that are open to a wider audience, although barriers such as subtitling and language remain. Although similar practices of diasporic film screenings exist in cities the world over, little research has been conducted on this phenomenon besides examples of Bollywood screenings and entertainment shows in the diaspora (Dudrah 2012). Historical studies on different kinds of 'ethnic screenings' have nonetheless revealed a close relationship between public 'ethnic' entertainment and processes of

maintaining senses of community and identity (Haenni 2008, Mullins 2000, Stewart 2003). The screening of Turkish or other ‘homeland’ films targeted at diasporic groups in a particular location has significant commercial underpinnings, as they enable distributors and exhibitors to explore new audience segments. It is therefore crucial to interweave our exploration of public, diasporic cultures and identities with an investigation of how those cultures and identities are shaped by market forces (see also Haenni 2008, p. 19 on ‘ethnic screenings’ in early-twentieth-century New York).

### **Studying film culture in the diaspora**

Our project examines diasporic film cultures from the perspective of industry players as well as audiences and emphasises the interaction of local players with homeland media industries and transnational media networks.<sup>1</sup> This approach is rooted in the media ethnographic tradition of socially contextualised media consumption (Morley 1992, Silverstone 1994). In a first phase, we obtained a clear view on the actual character and shape of the film cultures, mainly through expert interviews and field observations. Adopting an oral history perspective, we learnt that Turkish films have been screened by various exhibitors for decades: by Turkish businessmen at small neighbourhood theatres in the 1970s and 1980s, private screenings at the local multiplex in the early 2000s and ever since 2004, regular screenings at the multiplex theatres of Kinopolis (a Belgian exhibition group that operates 23 multiplex cinemas in Belgium, France, Spain, Poland and Switzerland) as part of its strategy to diversify its audiences as well as programming. The market of mainstream Turkish films in Europe developed thanks to the revival of the Turkish film industry and the activities of Turkish-European distributors who explored new markets among diasporic audiences (Smets et al. 2011). With the Turkish films in its regular programme, the theatre group has acquired a dominant position in this specific market segment.

The second phase, on which we mainly report here, includes audience surveys ( $N=536$ ) and in-depth interviews ( $N=19$ ), focus group interviews ( $N=3$ ) as well as participant observation during film screenings ( $N=12$ ). Surveys were carried out during the screenings of four different Turkish films at the local Kinopolis multiplex between November 2010 and January 2011.<sup>2</sup> These were processed and analysed using SPSS software, mainly by performing descriptive statistics (frequencies, crosstabs and averages). The survey analysis confirmed the added value of the multi-method approach, as issues such as cultural identification and experiences of community in the diaspora required more in-depth data. For instance questions about nationality and mother tongue, although cautiously formulated according to sound methodological procedures (cf. Lodewyckx 2004), were sometimes answered with additional scribbling, question marks and a certain aversion to ‘picking a box’. The survey results were completed with data from the interviews and field notes.<sup>3</sup>

The study concentrates on the Turkish community in Antwerp, Belgium’s second largest city. While not a global cosmopolitan city, the city is an example of mid-size multi-cultural European city, hosting people from over 160 different countries, with nearly one third of its 500,000 citizens having foreign roots. The city’s statistical office estimates that over 19,000 citizens have Turkish roots (although the ‘third generation’ is not always included in this number, see also up to date demographic statistics at [www.antwerpen.buurtmonitor.be](http://www.antwerpen.buurtmonitor.be), accessed March 2012). Following labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s, Turkish families from mostly rural backgrounds settled in a few peripheral neighbourhoods, which are still marked by the presence of Turkish shops, cafés and organisations. Recent migration is mainly the result of marriages and family reunification. We are aware that any reference to ‘the Turkish community’ reduces the complex social reality, even if it aligns with the current academic terminology. First of

all, speaking of a Turkish community does by no means imply that the city's socio-political reality is such that it is simply divided into separate ethnic groups. It rather refers to a group of citizens that shares a more or less similar social history, cultural and linguistic background as a result of human migration. Second, the label of Turkish community should not hide the wide-ranging diversity within it, as Antwerp hosts a significant number of ethnic Kurds and Circassians as well as religious minorities such as Turkish Alevi Muslims and Assyrian Christians, some of whose families migrated because of political motives. The socio-religious landscape among the Sunni majority is comparable to Turkey's situation, with a growing presence of movements such as Süleymanlı, Nurcular and Milli Görüş next to the Diyanet religious services that are controlled by the Turkish state (on this diversity, see Yükleven 2012). Taking this into account, it is no surprise that respondents articulate a multitude of identifications and social positions, overlapping and/or conflicting loyalties and hybrid cultural influences. Especially people having grown up in Belgium express a sense of bicultural identity, a state of in-betweenness that is often complicated by feeling a stranger in Belgium as well as in Turkey. There is a strong sense of being in between identities. Respondents often position themselves in relation to their family in the first place, as a trusted referential frame (as described by Clycq 2011, p. 46, among Muslims in Antwerp, including Turkish respondents).

We should note that this article is primarily written from the perspective of viewers of Turkish films rather than non-viewers, as the specific case of theatrical film screenings is our point of departure. Some of our claims are therefore not generalizable, although we believe that few studies about diasporic communities can rightfully make such claims. Being aware of this, we took into account those people who fell off our initial radar, keeping in mind that it is troubling to assume the 'homogeneity of

immigrant communities and their monolithic consumption of ethnic media,' as Madianou (2011) points out. The interview sample included people who never went to Turkish films, usually because of stylistic preferences or a lack of a 'Turkish' social network. Older people most commonly watched films at home, finding the multiplex too modern and too far away from their own neighbourhood. Others, particularly the Alevi Muslims and people with a Kurdish background, enjoyed Turkish films in general but remained sceptical about the screenings because some films, notably action hero blockbusters such as *Kurtlar Vadisi: Irak* (Valley of the Wolves: Iraq, 2006, dir. Serdar Akar), were said to represent exaggerated nationalistic views on Turkish politics (Anaz & Purcell 2010). Such explanations rather seem to justify studying film screenings as important aspects of cultural identity in the complex Turkish community. Another note is that, unlike most literature on Turkish media in the diaspora, our focus is on film instead of television or new media. However, going to film screenings is tightly intertwined with other media practices at home or in other viewing contexts. Films are often based on popular television characters and series on satellite television play an immense role in many people's daily lives, as the literature indicates. Focusing on one medium should not ignore the wider range of media practices, their different social implications and the fact that communities 'more often participate in co-existing media culture(s) – particularistic, diverse, mainstream – than in singular framed communities', as Georgiou and Silverstone aptly note (2007, p. 47).

### **The audience for Turkish films: diversity and commonality**

With the audience survey we sought to conceive a trustworthy picture of the 'average' audience for Turkish films. The results are complementary to the qualitative study and allow us to go from the general to the particular and back again. We highlight some



relevant results here concerning demographic composition, film preferences, and social dimensions of cinema-going.

### ***Demographic composition***

One of the main questions that inspired our survey was the demographic diversity among audiences of Turkish films. In line with their online marketing, theatre managers emphasised that the films are supposed to attract a culturally diverse audience. We therefore included several questions regarding nationality, country of birth and country of birth of (grand-)parents, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Combining these variables into a new category ('Turkish origin', cf. Lodewyckx 2004) we found that 93.7% ( $N=488$ ) of the audience had Turkish roots, 61.6% of which was born in Belgium (compared to 30.3% in Turkey and 7.0% in the Netherlands<sup>4</sup>), so the vast majority of the audience is part of the second and third generation. Table 1 and 2 bring together the information on the origin of the audiences.

*Table 1 about here*

*Table 2 about here*

*Table 3 about here*

The few people that had no Turkish origins had ancestral roots in Belgium, Bulgaria and Morocco. During fieldwork conversations with the latter it became clear that some of them were not conscious of the fact that they were attending a Turkish film (sometimes the film titles are translated to Dutch in the theatre's general promotion) while others said they had joined a friend or partner with Turkish origins. Those who were born in Turkey and migrated to Belgium mostly did so after the year 2000 (49 out

of 118 respondents, i.e. 41.5%), presumably in the context of marriage migration or family reunification. Only 22% (26 out of 118 respondents) migrated before 1980 (official labour migration ended in 1973). With an average age of 26.4 and 70% younger than 30, the audience seems to consist mainly of younger people.<sup>5</sup> In accordance with that, students (34.8%) were the largest group in terms of occupation, followed by labourers (19.4%). 27,5% received higher education<sup>6</sup>. In total, 51.9% men and 48.1% women answered the survey, although they were not always equally distributed: 62.7% of the respondents at *Kurtlar Vadisi: Filistin* were men, while 55% at *New York'ta Beş Minare* was female, the former being particularly known for its popularity among male audiences (Anaz & Purcell 2010, p. 39). Although audiences from Turkish neighbourhoods in Antwerp constitute the majority, 39.8% of the respondents lives outside the city of Antwerp, in neighbouring Belgian or Dutch towns (the Dutch border is about 20 kilometre from Antwerp).

### ***Film preferences***

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they liked certain film categories. If we look at the audience of Turkish origin ( $N=488$ , see supra 'Demographic composition'), we find that Turkish and American films are highly appreciated: 95.8% like watching Turkish films, 76.5% like watching American films, as shown in Table 4. European (liked by 34.8% of the audience of Turkish origin), Flemish (20.3%) and Indian films (18.2%), the other film categories that are screened in the multiplex, are much less popular. These results highlight that we should not overemphasise the dominance of Turkish popular film among the second and third generation of the Turkish community. Going to Turkish films is not necessarily the core film consumption. For the majority of the audience, the Turkish screenings rather

complement a media menu that largely consists of mainstream American films. 61.7% of the audience of Turkish origin at Turkish movies (as defined above) said they watch American films at the theatre at least once every three months. For both Turkish and other films, the main features determining a film's appeal were famous actors, genre, advertisements (mainly on Turkish satellite television) and the opinion of friends or family. There is, however, an important difference in terms of timing and information sources between Turkish and other films: watching Turkish films is planned several days beforehand (47.5% compared to 13.9% for other films) rather than on the spot and Turkish films are promoted through Turkish satellite television and informal mouth-to-mouth advertising. This suggests that going to Turkish films is anticipated longer in advance than other films. The main reasons for this are the specific promotion medium (Turkish satellite television) and the limited amount of films that are screened (circa one per month, although this varies).

*Table 4 about here*

### ***Social dimensions of cinema-going***

As we are interested in the social dimensions of film practices, we asked respondents whom they usually attended the film with. 71.6% said to go to the theatre in a small group, with an average of 4 people per group. Going with a group of friends (48.6%) and family (36.5%) was most common (multiple answers were possible), especially when going to Turkish films. When going to other films, respondents tend to go less with family. As is the case for most film audiences, going alone appears rather unusual, especially for Turkish films. A small percentage of men (4.7%) sometimes went alone, while women never did. These findings correspond with our observations during

Turkish film screenings and they confirm that it is meaningful to dive deeper into the social dimensions of cinema-going. Moreover, an analysis of box office results shows that up to 9,000 tickets were sold for some films. With a local Turkish community of circa 19,000 people (and 25,000 if we look at the wider region around Antwerp), the ‘penetration’ of these films is noticeably high.

### **The theatre and new socio-spatial needs**

When discussing the results of the quantitative study above, we already highlighted some elements that indicate the social character of Turkish film screenings. We now turn to the qualitative data to elaborate on this. Ever since the first video cassettes with Turkish films circulated in the Turkish community, film culture has had a deeply social character. Between the late 1970s and the 1990s, when satellite technology had not yet established a permanent media link between Turkey and the diaspora, several shops sold video cassettes of Turkish comedies, dramas and musical films. One of our respondents, Özlem (female, aged 42) recalled this period:

[...] and then the video came up and we could rent films and everybody... Back then, not everybody had a video recorder, so it was in each other’s homes, with loads of people. [...] Someone bought a film or rented a film and they said: come, sit with us. Mothers, fathers, children. Back then it was a real exuberance of home visits in order to be able to see something of that Turkish film...

Especially older respondents had similar memories of crowded film evenings when family members, friends and neighbours gathered to enjoy Turkish films and each other’s company. This practice corresponded with the desire to maintain ‘authentic’ and

everyday links with the homeland (see Ahmed 1999, Karanfil 2009), a crucial strategy among first generation immigrants. Özgür (M, 65), who was among the first generation himself, said that in the early years of settlement, the small Turkish community was in awe for anything Turkish: ‘...with everything, not only film, anything related to Turkey, was: ‘Oooh...’, that was *it!* For instance the first Turkish restaurant...’ But respondents’ accounts of the early circulation of video cassettes also reveal an essentially social practice, in a period when the small Turkish community, concentrated in a few neighbourhoods and blocks of apartments, was people’s main social network. During a focus group conversation, Ceren (F, 23) and Bilen (M, 23) prompted the example of their parents and grandparents:

C: (...) and in the past they [Turkish labour immigrants] were less numerous. In the beginning too, and they were closer to each other and they just needed each other, in order to feel safe in their new country, that’s normal. But now everybody is on his own...

B: Back then, the Turkish people were strangers for the Belgians. But the other way around too, Belgians were strangers for the Turkish people. Now that’s less the case of course. Back then, they visited each other more often.

Others also admitted, sometimes in a regretful way, that the social contact within the Turkish community has gradually decreased. Aslı (F, 38) talked about this change:

Those initial families don’t visit each other anymore, not at home. That’s only when there is an invitation to a wedding, then we gather. In the past families visited each other but now the children have grown up and they have all gone in different directions of Antwerp and because of their partners they have met new people. But we keep

contact through wedding parties, we are still invited, or you see each other at the theatre (...). At wedding parties you run into each other. [...] And the cinema yes, that's where you really run across everyone.

Maps by the city administration (Stad Antwerpen 2002, p. 11, Goossens 2004) show how families of Turkish origin are no longer only living in a few well-delineated neighbourhoods but scattered all over the city, an evolution that seems to continue to the present day. Backed by respondents' accounts, our suggestion is that, as the Turkish community scatters and 'Turkish' social networks slightly disintegrate among younger people, there is a certain socio-spatial lacuna that is filled by the Turkish film screenings at the multiplex theatre, allowing to maintain and develop social contacts, to experience public entertainment in a socio-culturally familiar atmosphere. Asli's account about film screenings further illustrates this: 'You see people that you haven't seen in years... Because many people have moved everywhere, further away. We all used to live in ghettos and now, the new generation lives further away and they see each other at the cinema. They talk, they catch up on news.' This idea was illustrated earlier with the survey, showing that audiences come from outside the city as well, even in other provinces, where there are often more rural towns that have only small Turkish communities. Uğur (M, 24) for instance tells how, as a kid, his parents moved from Antwerp to Kapellen, a neighbouring, residential municipality, where they lived more or less isolated from other Turkish families. His parents regularly attend the Turkish films while he links his not going to the films to having no friends with Turkish roots.

The results show that Turkish screenings are characterised by a particular social atmosphere. As explained above, the survey showed that audiences tend to go to Turkish films in larger groups than when going to any other films. Furthermore, our interviews and informal conversations during participant observations overflow with

stories of the particular (social) behaviour of Turkish audiences. In particular the release evenings and opening weekends of Turkish films are intensely social occasions, ‘when the Turkish community comes along massively’ (Özlem, F, 42) and when ‘*all* Turkish people head for the film’ (Hande, F, 31). Often people encounter acquaintances, neighbours, friends and family. When talking about this, Damla (F, 19) reported that this happens all the time, ‘It’s often a third... I won’t say a quarter, but really a third of the people in the theatre that you know. The first days, my whole environment goes to the film for sure [...],’ pointing at both her spatial and her social nearness of fellow audience members. Hence it is an occasion for her to ‘get to know people and to broaden [her] social network’. Moreover, respondents recognise that Turkish screenings are rather different from screenings of other films, hinting at processes of code-switching in terms of cinema behaviour. They for instance refer to audience members talking loudly during the screening, the amounts of trash left behind at Turkish films, but also the experience of a certain comfort and familiarity.

As stated, the average audience is rather young and respondents also often seem to think of cinema-going as an activity for younger people, ‘who have lots of spare time and want to go out’ (Alican, M, 32). Also, older people that have grown up in Turkey are often less familiar with cinema or the venue of the multiplex. Dilek (F, 24), talking about how the whole family joins for the screenings, says that it is remarkable that her mother comes too, wondering ‘how many times has she been to the cinema before? Three times maybe in her whole life. It probably didn’t even exist. But when a Turkish film comes, even she is like: ‘Oh yes, I want to come!’ Just for the sociability of it.’ Also Gülten (F, 25) noted that it is an exceptional night out ‘[...] for those people like my parents, I would say, it is a luxury because it’s something different. Something totally different from their usual life: going to the cinema, a popcorn, a Cola, they enjoy

the evening.’ The screenings appear to gather generations and families more so than other activities or screenings of non-Turkish films. During a focus group interview, the shift in social registers according to the film was explicated by Yiğit (M, 33), who said that ‘usually you don’t see that, Turkish families with father, mother, son, daughter, all together. Sons and daughters go to the American films separately, or with friends. But to Turkish films, they go with their families.’ It was repeatedly told that Turkish films interrupt the rather domestic and monotonous lives of older people and housewives, who have few outdoor activities. Consequently some of our younger respondents, clearly associating the multiplex with youth culture, were surprised by the composition of the audiences: ‘[...] sometimes it’s funny, because of, I don’t know... people you wouldn’t expect to go to the cinema and then they are sitting there. Like old people for instance’, Yeşim (F, 27) reported. In a focus group interview with three women of the third generation, Fatoş (F, 21) similarly commented that:

F: Last time there was a Turkish film and I went with my mother and the rest, it was so cute... There was this old Turkish couple that I would never have imagined going to the cinema. And there they were, sitting together. It was probably so nice for them.

Interviewer: And why didn’t you expect it from them?

F: They are people I know and I think they have a boring life, that they never do something. They are really old, they have grandchildren and everything and I sometimes see them... Never thought they would go to the cinema because that man is always in the café and she is always at home or visiting other Turkish women. But apparently they do.

From the crowded family gatherings in front of the video recorder to the packed opening nights of Turkish films in the multiplex theatre, it is clear that we are not



simply and not only dealing with entertainment or film ‘consumption’. Next to the more reception-related aspects treated in most studies about diasporas and media, there is a significant social angle to film practices in this case, as they fulfil a need for ‘Turkish’ social spaces among both young and old audiences.

### **Diasporic identity and pride**

The ‘Turkish’ time-space occurrences constituted by the film screenings generate a strong group feeling among respondents, who say they find them pleasant, more comfortable than other screenings or ‘just like at home’. Damla (F, 19) for example compares the feeling of going to Turkish films with the pride and togetherness she experienced when ‘last year or the year before our president [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan] came to Belgium’ and ‘that auditorium was also cram-full. There, you notice that feeling of togetherness and that love for Turkey...’ Processes of ‘othering’ and belonging being central to the shaping of identities, Damla’s and other comparable accounts inspire us to dig deeper to the consequences of film practices among the diaspora and bring in the issue of cultural identity. Our analysis aligns with previous studies on cultural identity among Turkish diasporas (e.g. Çağlar 2001, Robins & Aksoy 2001, Kaya 2002, Ehrkamp 2005, Schneider 2009): in their complex and altering identity constructions, individuals of Turkish origin relate to different points of reference at micro and macro levels of society. This results in the social negotiation of perceived opposites: Turkish-Flemish culture, Turkish-European culture, with an important role for local, translocal (e.g. emphasising regional background in Turkey), intergenerational and religious cultural processes. The ethnic element also plays a role, particularly for respondents with Kurdish backgrounds – although there were few respondents who problematized this as being opposite of other identity markers. As

education, linguistic fluency and cultural capital play major roles, the differences among generations are most distinct. Each in their own words, respondents nonetheless emphasised a great loyalty to their Turkish background, expressed as a respect for family, traditions, Turkish popular culture and so on. Similar results have been observed elsewhere, notably in relationship to prevailing nationalism (de Tapia 2005, Landau 2010, Çırakman 2011). Moreover, while ‘in practice multi-belonging has become an undeniable reality, in the discourse the view has persisted of exclusive belongings to Turkishness,’ Inglis, Akgönül and de Tapia (2009) argue about transnational Turkish identities, pointing at the role that discourse and power have played in this process as well.

As is evident from the literature on Turkish diasporas and media, media practices tend to hold a key position in processes of identity negotiation of cultural identities and identification with the homeland culture (Gezduci & d’Haenens 2007, Karanfil 2007, Hopkins 2009). The Turkish ‘mediascape’ indeed influences in important ways how processes of home-making and belonging develop. What role do film screenings play for our respondents? We identified two main issues. First, the consumption of Turkish films is said to have a positive influence on people’s knowledge of the language (films are screened in the original version and accurate subtitles are not always available): ‘The more you watch Turkish films or read Turkish books, the more your language improves,’ Özlem (F, 42) notes, and language remains an important determinant in people’s perceived cultural identity. Almost all respondents were (at least) bilingual and felt the necessity to practice ‘the language of their roots’. A second but less outspoken issue is the functioning of Turkish films as sources for cultural knowledge. Rather than the emphasis that is often put on nostalgic viewing of homeland media, it is crucial to acknowledge that young people watch these films in

rather uncomplicated ways, ‘to establish a link and not lose that connection,’ as Özgür (M, 65), a retired social worker, points out. Films seem to function as a site for people, especially youngsters, to learn about ‘how their culture works’ (Gülten, F, 25). Thus, it becomes clear that for many people in the diaspora, the film screenings play a part in maintaining a sense of identity and connectedness with Turkey, allowing them to actively take part in Turkish popular culture. Although not the country where they grew up, the ‘homeland’ diaspora youngsters get to see on screen – not only in the theatre but also on satellite TV – is experienced as a familiar place. The fact that most families speak Turkish at home and that they travel to Turkey nearly every year is mentioned most often as an explanation for this familiarity. With their ‘current topics’ and ‘increased quality’ mainstream Turkish films are believed to successfully represent a Turkish version of global, modern youth culture.

Even more crucial to experiences of collective identity is that the very possibility of watching Turkish films in a Belgian multiplex has yielded feelings of pride among the diaspora. Respondents indeed seem sensitive to virtually all things ‘Turkish’ and there is a great loyalty towards anything that is perceived as ‘Turkish culture’. We are not necessarily referring to cultural pride as a synonym of patriotism or culturally exclusive views on society, but rather to the pride generated by the acknowledgement of Turkish culture in the city’s cultural infrastructure. In a context where many have experienced discrimination of some sorts, the fact that the Turkish film industry has ‘reached this level’ (Dilek, F, 27) and that ‘they play Turkish films in Belgian theatres, not only American or Flemish films’ (Uğur, M, 24) feels like an achievement that indeed encourages the community’s collective self-esteem. This connects with what Banaji (2006) has called the empowering role of diasporic film practices.

## **Conclusion**

As a case study of the growing transnationality of media flows, this contribution concentrated on the consumption of Turkish films in a multicultural city, where screenings of Turkish films have tapped into a new audience segment. Because there is continuous need to add further layers of nuance to the understanding of the social and cultural lives of diasporas, we argue that scholarship can benefit from incorporating the ensemble of media practices among diasporas. Hitherto understudied in the field of media and diaspora, media culture in the public domain can reveal how diasporas are anchored in the urban space and infrastructure that not simply surrounds or hosts diasporic communities, but develops and progresses along with them.

We briefly retake the three main conclusions of the study and suggest how they contribute to further conceptual and theoretical discussions in the broader field of migration and media. First, the audience of Turkish film screenings was identified as being predominantly of Turkish origin, the majority being young people of the second and third generation with roots in Turkey. Their consumption of Turkish films does not contradict with watching American films; both exist next to each other. This tackles binary views on culturally homogenized media consumption. Going to diasporic film screenings should thus be regarded more 'horizontally' and in relation to other media platforms and practices. Second, despite Turkish and other screenings existing next to each other, Turkish screenings are understood to be different, especially because of their outspoken social character. They are often attended in large groups and with family, and dynamics of code-switching between Turkish and other films seem to be part of the experience. There are also significant barriers to partake in this social occasion (e.g. language). This invites us to further analyse processes of diasporic inclusion/exclusion

at the scale of the urban, public space. Third, the arrival of Turkish films in European theatres plays a role in the construction of Turkish cultural identities, generating feelings of togetherness and pride among the diaspora. They not only counter marginalisation in the urban public space but also secure cultural links with the homeland. The audience thus not only becomes a 'community of consumers' (Haenni 2008, p. 57-58) that shares cultural familiarity or that extends and sustains social ties through the act of cinema-going but also actively consumes the idea of being a close-knit and bounded community.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Hans Martens and Koen Panis for their generous support during the statistical analysis.

## Notes

‘Cinema & Diaspora’ (BOF UA 2009-2013; FWO 2008-2012), supervisors Philippe Meers (University of Antwerp), Roel Vande Winkel (University of Antwerp) and Sofie Van Bauwel (Ghent University). Researchers Kevin Smets and Iris Vandeveld (both University of Antwerp).

<sup>2</sup> The selected films were *New York'ta Beş Minare* (dir. Mahsun Kırmızıgül, 2010), *Av Mevsimi* (dir. Yavuz Turgul, 2010), *Eyyvah Eyyvah 2* (dir. Hakan Algül, 2011) and *Kurtlar Vadisi: Filistin* (dir. Zübeyr Şaşmaz, 2011), screened between November 2010 and January 2011. Before entering the theatre room, filmgoers were asked to fill in the 6-pages questionnaire, which was collected by the researchers during the intermission or after the film. The average return rate was 55.3%. Films were selected on the basis of genre diversity (one action film, one action/drama, one comedy and one thriller) and practical circumstances. The 18 questions covered respondents' demographic profile as well as film going habits and preferences. A test survey was conducted (not included in the final dataset), after which questions were often simplified to increase the response rate. For instance 5-point Likert scale multiple choice questions (about film preferences) were simplified to 3-point scale questions.

<sup>3</sup> Altogether, 10 men and 10 women were interviewed. The interviews included one double interview (mother and daughter). One of the focus groups was mixed (two women, one man), the others included 3 women and 5 men respectively. The sample consisted of people from the first, second and third generation, ages varying between 17 and 65, guaranteeing demographic diversity. Most respondents were contacted through social and cultural organizations or through a contact sheet attached to the questionnaire. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, translations are the responsibility of the authors. Participant observations were performed at 15 multiplex screenings, 3 screenings in organizations and 3 screenings in family context, between 2009 and 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Located in the northernmost part of Belgium, the city of Antwerp has a strong relation with the neighbouring Dutch province Noord-Brabant.

<sup>5</sup> The average age of audiences at Turkish films is the same as Belgian film audiences in general, as appears from our confidential consultation of the ('national') Kinopolis

Audience Survey, conducted in 2010 across the Belgian multiplex theatres of Kinepolis (located in all major cities). Other large surveys conducted in the last years confirm this general trend.

<sup>6</sup> There is a potential margin of error due to the younger respondents and those still studying.

## References

Ahmed, S., 1999. Home and away: narratives of migration and estrangement.

*International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3 (2), 329-347.

Anaz, N. and Purcell, D., 2010. Geopolitics of film: Valley of the Wolves – Iraq and its reception in Turkey and beyond. *The Arab World Geographer*, 13 (1), 34-49.

Banaji, S., 2006. *Reading 'Bollywood': the young audience and Hindi films*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Berthomiere, W., 2005. Diaspora: an overview of a concept at the crossroads of nation-state and transnationalism. In: W. Bosswick and C. Husband, eds. *Comparative European research in migration, diversity and identities*. Bilbao: University of Deusto, 25-32.

Cağlar, A., 2001. Constraining metaphors and the transnationalisation of spaces in Berlin. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27 (4), 601-613.

Clifford, J., 1997. *Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clycq, N., 2011. *Muslims in Antwerp*. London: Open Society.

Çırakman, A., 2011. Flags and traitors: the advance of ethno-nationalism in the Turkish self-image. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34 (11), 1894-1912.

Dayan, D., 1998. Particularist media and diasporic communications. In: Liebes, T. and J. Curran, eds. *Media, ritual and identity*. London: Routledge, 103-113.

- de Tapia, S., 2005. *Migrations et diasporas turques. Circulation migratoire et continuité territoriale (1957-2004)*. Paris: IFEA; Maisonneuve & Larose.
- Dudrah, R.K., 2012. Performing Bollywood: Hindi cinema entertainment shows. In: *Bollywood travels: culture, diaspora and border crossings in popular Hindi cinema*. London: Routledge, 77-97.
- Durham, M.G., 2004. Constructing the 'new ethnicities': media, sexuality, and diaspora identity in the lives of South Asian immigrant girls. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21 (2), 140-161.
- Ehrkamp, P., 2005. Placing identities: transnational practices and local attachments of Turkish immigrants in Germany. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31 (2), 345-364.
- Elias, N., 2008. *Coming home: media and returning diaspora in Israel and Germany*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Esan, O., 2008. Appreciating Nollywood: audiences and Nigerian 'films'. *Participations*, 5 (1). Available from: [http://www.participations.org/Volume%205/Issue%201%20-%20special/5\\_01\\_esan.htm](http://www.participations.org/Volume%205/Issue%201%20-%20special/5_01_esan.htm) [accessed 24 September 2012].
- Georgiou, M., 2001. Crossing the boundaries of the ethnic home. Media consumption and ethnic identity construction in the public space: the case of the Cypriot Centre in North London. *International Communication Gazette*, 63 (4), 311-329.
- Georgiou, M., 2006. *Diaspora, identity and the media: diasporic transnationalism and mediated spatialities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Georgiou, M. and Silverstone, R., 2007. Diasporas and contra-flows beyond nation-centrism. In: Thussu, D.K., ed. *Media on the move. Global flow and contra flow*. New York, NY: Routledge, 33-48.



- Gezduci, H. and d'Haenens, L., 2007. Culture-specific features as determinants of news media use. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 32 (2), 193-222.
- Gillespie, M., 1995. *Television, ethnicity, and cultural change*. London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Goossens, A., 2004. *Een Turkse droom die geschiedenis werd. De historische ervaring van Turkse arbeidsmigranten in Antwerpen*. Master thesis. Ghent: Ghent University.
- Haenni, S., 2008. *The immigrant scene. Ethnic amusements in New York 1880-1920*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hopkins, L., 2009. Turkish transnational media in Melbourne: a migrant mediascape. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 11 (2), 230-247.
- Inglis, C., Akgönül, S. and de Tapia, S., 2009. Turks abroad: settlers, citizens, transnationals. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 11 (2), 104-118.
- Karanfil, G., 2007. Satellite television and its discontents. Reflections on the experiences of Turkish-Australian lives. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 21 (1), 59-69.
- Karanfil, G., 2009. Pseudo-exiles and reluctant transnationals: disrupted nostalgia on Turkish satellite broadcasts. *Media, Culture & Society*, 31 (6), 887-899.
- Kaur, R., 2005. Cruising on the Vilayeti bandwagon: diasporic representations and reception of popular Indian movies. In: Kaur, R. and A.J. Sinha, eds. *Bollyworld: popular Indian cinema through a transnational lens*. New Delhi: Sage, 309-329.
- Kaya, A., 2002. Aesthetics of diaspora: contemporary minstrels in Turkish Berlin. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28 (1), 43-62.

- Landau, J.M., 2010. Diaspora nationalism: the Turkish case. *In: Gal, A., Leoussi, A.S. and A.D. Smith, eds. The call of the homeland: diaspora nationalism, past and present.* Leiden: Brill, 219-240.
- Lodewyckx, I., 2004. Allochtonen: zichtbaar in de actualiteit, maar in welke mate in de statistieken? *In: Steunpunt Gelijkekansenbeleid, Wachten op... gelijke kansen: jaarboek 2 Steunpunt Gelijke Kansenbeleid.* Antwerpen: Garant, 163-182.
- Madianou, M., 2011. Beyond the presumption of identity? Ethnicities, cultures and transnational audiences. *In: Nightingale, V., ed. Handbook of media audiences.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 444-458.
- Madianou, M. & D. Miller (2012). *Migration and new media: transnational families and polymedia.* London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Malek, A., 2011. Public performances of identity negotiation in the Iranian diaspora: the New York Persian Day Parade. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31 (2), 388-410.
- Morley, D., 1992. *Television, audiences and cultural studies.* London; New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mullins, P., 2000. Ethnic cinema in the nickelodeon era in New York City: commerce, assimilation and cultural identity. *Film History*, 12 (1): 115-124.
- Ogan, C., 2001. *Communication and identity in the diaspora: Turkish migrants in Amsterdam and their use of media.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Ogan, C. and d'Haenens, L., 2011. Do Turkish women in the diaspora build social capital? Evidence from the Low Countries. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34 (12), 1-17.

- Punathambekar, A., 2005. Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora: mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (2), 151-173.
- Robins, K. and Aksoy, A., 2001. From spaces of identity to mental spaces: lessons from Turkish-Cypriot cultural experience in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27 (4), 685-711.
- Schneider, J., 2009. From 'Kanak Attack' to the 'GerKish Generation': second-generation Turkish narratives in German culture and politics. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 11 (2), 212-229.
- Shi, Y., 2005. Identity construction of the Chinese diaspora, ethnic media use, community formation, and the possibility of social activism. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 19 (1), 55-72.
- Silverstone, R., 1994. *Television and everyday life*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Silverstone, R., 1999. *Why study the media?* London: Routledge.
- Smets, K., Meers, P., Vande Winkel, R. and Van Bauwel, S., 2011. A semi-public diasporic space: Turkish film screenings in Belgium. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 36 (4), 395-414.
- Stad Antwerpen, 2002. *Antwerpen voor iedereen kleurrijk. Beleidsnota 2003-2006*. Antwerpen: Dienst Integratie Antwerpen.
- Stewart, J., 2003. Negroes laughing at themselves? Black spectatorship and the performance of urban modernity. *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (4), 650-677.
- Thornley, D., 2009 Talking film, talking identity: New Zealand expatriates reflect on national film. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12 (1), 99-117.
- Yükleyen, A., 2012. *Localizing Islam in Europe. Turkish Islamic communities in Germany and the Netherlands*. New York, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Table 1. Nationality and country of birth of audiences at Turkish films

	Amount (frequency)	Share of respondents (valid %)
<b>Nationality</b>		
Belgian	207	39.9
Turkish*	163	31.4
Belgian-Turkish (double nationality)	100	19.3
Dutch	23	4.4
Dutch-Turkish (double nationality)	23	4.4
Moroccan	3	0.6
Total	519	100
<b>Country of birth</b>		
Belgium	317	61.6
Turkey*	158	30.7
The Netherlands	36	7.0
Bulgaria	2	0.4
Germany	1	0.2
Morocco	1	0.2
Total	515	100

\* Two Respondents answered 'Kurdish' to this question in the margins. Considering the language of the films, we assumed that the Kurdish region of Turkey was implied here. Hence they were recoded into Turkey/Turkish.

*Source:* Author's survey, 2011.

Table 2. National origin of audiences at Turkish films

	Amount (frequency)
Country of birth parents*	
Both parents born in Turkey	411
One parent born in Turkey	477
Both parents not born in Turkey	20
Country of birth grandparents*	
All grandparents born in Turkey	445
None born in Turkey	16
Total participants	536

\* In the questionnaire this was split up between mother and father's side of the family. For the sake of readability of the table, we have merged these variables. Due to overlapping categories, only amounts are given, no totals and percentages.

*Source:* Author's survey, 2011.

Table 3. 'Turkish' audiences at Turkish film screenings

---

	Amount (frequency)	Share of respondents (valid %)
Turkish origin*		
Yes	488	93.7
No	33	6.3
Total	521	100

---

\* This category comprises the variables nationality, country birth and country of birth (grand-) parents, as represented in Tables 1 and 2. Respondents fulfilling at least one criterion are considered as being of Turkish origin.

---

Source: Author's survey, 2011.

Table 4. Appreciation of Turkish and American films among audience of Turkish origin

	Amount	Share of audience (valid %)
<hr/>		
Do you like watching Turkish films?		
Yes	454	95.8
Neutral	20	4.2
No	0	0
Total	474	100
Do you like watching American films?		
Yes	316	76.5
Neutral	66	16.0
No	31	7.5
Total	413	100

*Source:* Author's survey, 2011.

KEVIN SMETS is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp.

ADDRESS: Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium. Email: kevin.smets@ua.ac.be

PHILIPPE MEERS is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp.

ADDRESS: Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium. Email: philippe.meers@ua.ac.be

ROEL VANDE WINKEL is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp.

ADDRESS: Department of Communication Studies, University of Antwerp, Sint-Jacobstraat 2, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium. Email: roel.vandewinkel@ua.ac.be

SOFIE VAN BAUWEL is Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Studies, Ghent University.

ADDRESS: Department of Communication studies, Ghent University, Korte Meer 11, 9000 Ghent, Belgium. Email: sofie.vanbauwel@ugent.be