At the invitation of European governments in the 1960s, large numbers of immigrants, mainly young men from rural areas in Turkey (as well as other countries), began to arrive as temporary "guest-workers" in northern European countries like Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands to work as unskilled labor in factories. They had never intended to stay, yet two or more generations later, they are still there, now with large families and Dutch-born children. How do they identify themselves? What factors govern how they maintain their cultural orientation?

Christine Ogan, professor in Indiana University's School of Journalism and associate dean for graduate studies and research in the School of Informatics, has just published a case study of the Turkish community in Amsterdam that explores such questions, paying particular attention to the influence of the media, both Dutch and Turkish, on this community as it struggles with cultural identity in an adopted land. 

Communication and Identity in the Diaspora: Turkish Migrants in Amsterdam and Their Use of Media (Lexington Books, 2001) is a detailed study of how the Dutch Turkish community has had to cope with living in a host country that is as different in every possible way—by language, religion, cultural values, socioeconomic status, government social services, education, cuisine, geography, weather—from their home country.

Turkish migration occurred in several waves, first just the workers themselves, followed by their families ("reunion migrations"), and later second-generation Turks returning to Turkey to bring back spouses ("marriage migrations"). From 1997 to 1999, Ogan conducted in-depth interviews with individuals in the various Turkish neighborhoods in Amsterdam, including retired factory workers, public office holders, shopkeepers, members of Islamic and secular organizations, young educated professionals, housewives with little or no literacy in either language, and journalists working in both the Dutch and Turkish media. Although about 30 percent of Turkish residents in the Netherlands have now acquired Dutch citizenship, "being Dutch is not a state to which the majority of Turks living in Holland aspire," despite better living and working conditions and Dutch progressive social policies. And while the "homeland myth is generally perpetuated in a community where the majority regularly takes vacations in Turkey rather than anywhere else, most accept that they will probably never return home.

Over the years, the Dutch Turkish community, which Ogan shows is by no means homogeneous, has become more oriented to their ethnic culture than to the dominant European host culture. She examines a range of intersecting topics—Dutch language proficiency, schooling preferences, the social and political functions of mosques, women's lives, stereotypes, the abundance of Dutch media aimed at Turks and Turkish media available from home (print, radio, and television)—that have shaped both individual and collective identity among the Turks. The advent in the 1990s of satellite television beamed directly from Turkey has been a major force shaping cultural identity among Turks who are now the biggest consumers of media from the homeland than any other ethnic group in Europe. But this causes identity confusion and conflict among younger generations who grew up speaking Dutch and are comfortable in the host culture, even though the host culture continues to see them as "the other." Her study, says Ogan, should encourage more in-depth analyses of similarly dynamic diasporic communities, particularly as mass communication media become "increasingly portable through the Internet and satellite connections."

—RMN