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Perceived discrimination as a major factor behind return migration? The return of Turkish qualified migrants from the USA and Germany

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ABSTRACT

This paper explains discrimination perceptions of Turkish qualified migrants who returned from Germany and the United States, and the impact of perceived discrimination on their return. It depends on in-depth interviews with 80 qualified Turkish returnees. Our findings indicate that: (i) returnees from Germany think they experienced ethnic discrimination; (ii) discrimination is a major reason behind their return; (iii) returnees from the US did not mention discrimination; (iv) discrimination is not a reason for return for them. We discuss these findings and explain the differences between German and American contexts in terms of ethnic boundaries. We use Alba's (2005) distinction between *bright* and *blurry ethnic boundaries* to explain the difference between the two countries. However, going beyond his argument, we also connect this distinction to cultural capital. We argue that in a context where there are bright ethnic boundaries, high cultural capital does not free the individual from experiences of discrimination, whereas it can make a difference in a context where there are blurry ethnic boundaries. Qualified migrants choose to return from contexts where there are bright ethnic boundaries to escape from experiences of discrimination, as they can afford return due to their high levels of cultural and economic capital.

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Introduction

Within the literature on international migration, return migration has been a relatively less-debated subject (Gmelch 1980). Although there were some early works (Cerase 1974), starting only after 1980s, and especially during the last decade, there have been some important debates on the notion of return migration (Conway and Potter 2016; Cassarino 2004; Guzzetta 2004). This lack of interest in the literature is also related to the neglect by policy-makers: Although there is usually systematic data-gathering on the numbers of migrants who enter a country, there is no such interest in the numbers of migrants who return to their home countries (Isbister 1996; Guzetta 2004). The existing literature on return migration looks mainly at the reasons for return (Jain 2013; Razum et al. 2005; King 2000; Rogers 1984; Cerase 1974), the intentions for return (Senyurekli

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and Menjivar 2012; Alberts and Hazen 2005), types of returnees (Gmelch 1980, King 1986), re-adaptation of the returnees to their home countries (Gmelch 1980), their identity and sense of belonging (De Bree, Davids, and Hass 2010; Tannenbaum 2007), as well as the impact of return on the home country (Diatta and Mbow 1999; Olesen 2002). This paper focuses on the reasons for return migration. Focusing on two groups of Turkish qualified migrants who returned from Germany and the US, it discusses whether perceived discrimination can be a major reason behind return.

According to Cambridge Dictionary, discrimination is 'treating a person or a particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality, etc.'[1] Focusing on the racial-ethnic dimension of discrimination, Feagin and Eckberg (1980, 9) defined it as consisting of 'practices and actions of dominant race-ethnic groups that have a differential and negative impact on subordinate race-ethnic groups'. Although their definition emphasises the negative impacts, they recognise that there may also be positive effects of differential treatment. Feagin and Eckberg's description of discrimination as referring to actions of only dominant groups has been challenged by research that demonstrates that majority-group norms influence how minority individuals behave towards other minority groups. Studies show that stigmatised groups can stigmatise others, and minorities can also discriminate against other minorities (Galaniz and Jones 1986; Shapiro and Neuberg 2008). Feagin and Eckberg (1980) discuss four types of discriminatory practices: (1) Isolate discrimination: Intentionally harmful actions of dominant-group individuals against members of subordinate groups, but when the action isn't embedded in institutional/organisational settings. (2) Small group discrimination: Intentionally harmful actions of a small group of dominant-group individuals acting together against members of a subordinate group, but without support from an institutional/organisational framework. (3) Direct institutionalised discrimination: Organisationally/communally approved actions, which intentionally have differential and negative impacts on members of a subordinate group. (4) Indirect institutionalised discrimination: Organisationally/communally approved practices which unintentionally have differential and negative impacts on members of a subordinate group.

In addition to the literature that looks at these different types of discrimination, there are studies on various effects of discrimination in different contexts. In relation to Turkish or Turkish-descent migrants in Western Europe, there are studies about the effects of perceived discrimination on ethnic identity and re-ethnicisation (Skrobanek 2009; Hartmann 2011), religious identification (Felischmann et al. 2011; Martinovic and Verkuyten 2012), integration (Vancluysen and Van Craen 2010), and riots (Vandezande et al. 2010). Compared to the literature on discrimination against Turkish migrants in the Western European context, there is a limited literature on discrimination against them in the US. There are some studies on perceived discrimination by Turkish students (Duru and Poyrazli 2011) and other studies on discrimination against Muslims which include Turkish migrants as well as groups of other ethnic origins (Ghaffari and Ciftci 2010; Jalalzai 2011). The current study complements the studies on the effects of perceived discrimination by discussing a neglected effect, return migration. Here, we argue that when migrants think that their specific ethnic identity is marked as inferior and they are treated accordingly, it becomes a major reason for return, as exemplified by the returnees from Germany, but not from the US.

This article is part of a larger study on different dimensions of Turkish qualified migrants' return from the US and Germany. It depends on semi-structured interviews with 40 qualified returnees from Germany, and 40 returnees from the US. The current article elaborates on the findings of this research about the impact of perceived discrimination on the migration experience and return migration. It aims to explain the perceptions about discrimination of these two groups of returnees, and explain the differences between German and American contexts in terms of discrimination. We use Alba's (2005) distinction between *bright* and *blurry ethnic boundaries* to explain the difference between the two countries. However, going beyond his argument, we also connect this distinction to cultural capital. We argue that in a context where there are bright ethnic boundaries, high cultural capital doesn't free individuals from experiences of discrimination, whereas it can make a difference in a context where there are blurry ethnic boundaries. Qualified migrants return from contexts where there are bright ethnic boundaries to escape from experiences of discrimination, as they can afford return due to their high levels of cultural and economic capital, even when return brings costs.

Boundary making processes, and bright versus blurry ethnic boundaries

The focus on the formation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries in the studies on ethnicity has been present at least since 1960s. In his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Barth emphasises that ethnic distinctions don't depend on an absence of social interaction, but ethnic boundaries are formed through interactions with others. In the context of international migration, Zolberg and Woon (1999) define incorporation as composed of negotiations in which hosts and immigrants engage around these boundaries. Given existing boundaries, they discuss three patterns of negotiation between hosts and immigrants,: (i) *boundary crossing*, where individual immigrants acquire some aspects of the host identity, with no large-scale change in the structure of the receiving society; (ii) *boundary blurring*, where the existing boundaries of the host society are affected, and multiple identities and memberships are tolerated; (iii) *boundary shifting*, where the group's identity is reconstructed, and the line that distinguishes members and non-members is redrawn (8–9). Accordingly, boundary shifting can only happen after considerable boundary crossing and boundary shifting.

Wimmer (2008), on the other hand, discusses a wider range of options that actors may engage in. He distinguishes between:

> … strategies that attempt to change the location of existing boundaries ('boundary shifting') by 'expanding' or 'contracting' the domains of the included and those that don't aim at the location of a boundary but try to modify its meaning and implication by challenging the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories ('normative inversion'), de-emphasizing ethnicity and emphasizing other social divisions ('blurring') or changing one's own position vis-a-vis the boundary ('positional moves'). (Wimmer 2008, 1031)

Alba (2005), in his analysis of the social distinctions between immigrants (and second generations) and natives, also focuses on boundary making processes. He distinguishes between two types of boundaries: When there are *bright boundaries*, there is no ambiguity about membership, and individuals always know which side of the boundary they are on. On the other hand, if there are *blurry boundaries*, there are ' … zones of self-presentation

and social representation that allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary' (Alba 2005, 22). The nature of the boundary influences the likelihood and nature of assimilation, and opportunities that immigrant groups have in the host society. In his comparison of ethnic boundaries for Mexicans in the US, Maghrebins in France, and Turks in Germany, he concludes that in terms of the bright versus blurry ethnic boundaries, there is a meaningful distinction between US and European situations. He argues that religion creates a bright boundary in French and German cases, which was strengthened in the German case by the obstacles to citizenship for second generation before 2000. For the Mexicans in the US, although there is evidence on the significance of racial appearance, it ranges widely among Mexicans, and it isn't definitive enough to constitute a bright boundary (Alba 2005, 39).

Alba (2005) debates that a bright boundary usually doesn't eliminate assimilation but limits it to minority individuals who have a 'favoured appearance'. In the European context, the implication of bright boundaries is that assimilation is available to secularised Maghrebins and Turks, and the ones who have substantially higher levels of educational attainment and occupational status. In this paper, although we will benefit from Alba's distinction between bright and blurry boundaries, we demonstrate that when there is a bright ethnic boundary, assimilation or integration aren't available even for those migrants who have high levels of cultural capital. We also discuss our research findings in relation to the different strategies that Wimmer (2008) talks about.

Turkish migration to and return from Germany and the US

After the signing of a labour agreement with Germany in 1961, and Turkey's First Five-Year Development Plan (1963–1967), which targeted the export of surplus labour, large numbers of workers moved from Turkey to Germany. Labour agreements were based on the principle of rotation; workers were expected to eventually return to their home countries. However, few of them returned, and it later became clear that the 'exported labour' intended to stay. With family reunions during 1970s, the number of Turkish-descent residents in Germany continued to increase. Currently, there are 2.8 million people with Turkish migration backgrounds living in Germany (Diehl and Koenig 2013). As Celik (2015, 1647) suggests, '… the arrival of guest workers significantly changed the labour relations in the country. It increasingly ethnicised the labour force, by proletarianising Muslim Turks, associating this group with inferiority in the German ethno-racial system'.

After the Oil Crisis in 1973, programmes to encourage the return migration of guest worker migrants were put into implementation. According to Gitmez (1983), during 1974–1977, 190.000 migrants, and during 1978–1983, 200.000 migrants returned to Turkey. Although many Turkish migrants had become settled in Germany and the other European countries during 1980s and 1990s, return migration has also become a part of this international migration movement. Although there have also been studies which focus on the return (Böcker and Balkır 2012; Durugönül 2013; Böcker and Gehring 2015; Kunuroglu et al. 2018) and return intentions (Tezcan 2018) of Turkish migrants from Europe, return migration from Europe has still remained an under-explored area. According to Icduygu and Sert (2016), the number of returnees from Germany to Turkey has become stabilised during the last decade. During the first half of 1990s, 40–45.000 people

returned from Germany to Turkey every year. Although the returns during 2000s also had similarities with the returns during 1990s, return to roots of second generation Turkish-descent German citizens has emerged as a new form during 2000s (King and Kılınc 2014; Icduygu and Sert 2016; Groenewold and de Valk 2017; Kütük et al. 2018).

The history of Turkish migration to the US, on the other side, goes back to 1820s. According to Kaya (2004), there are three major waves of Turkish immigration to the US. The first wave of immigration was between 1820 and 1920, where 50,000 of the immigrants were Muslim Turks, while the rest were of other groups under the Ottoman rule (Karpat 1985; Ahmed 1993; Acehan 2005; Grabowski 2005). During the second wave, which started during 1950s, mostly professionals came to the US (Angın 2003). The final wave after 1980s included a more diverse group of immigrants, including professionals, skilled workers, and students, as well as unskilled workers and undocumented Turkish immigrants. There are few studies on the return migration of Turkish migrants from the US (for a section on return, see Akcapar 2009, and for return intentions, see Senyürekli and Menjivar 2012). Although there are debates on current 'Germanification' of Turkish Americans (Akcapar 2009), the Turkish-American community, has a more skilled and educated profile compared to the Turkish community in Europe. By comparing Turkish migration to and return from these two countries, we are comparing two contexts which have predominantly received Turkish migrants with different profiles. However, by focusing on the experiences of the qualified migrants in both contexts, we compare what both countries offer to this group of migrants.

Research

For this research, we had a total of 80 semi-structured interviews with migrants who lived in Germany or the US, and returned to Turkey. Our research is on qualified migrants, and as qualified migrants, we looked at those people who migrated either as an exchange student or after completing the undergraduate programme at a major university in Turkey. Additionally, we only interviewed those people who lived in Germany or the US for at least five years, had further education and/or professional work experience in one of these two countries, and returned to Turkey.[2] Although our research looks at many dimensions of their migration and return migration experiences, this current paper focuses on their perceptions of discrimination. Depending on the definition by Feagin and Eckberg (1980), but also considering positive differential treatment, we asked 'Do you think you were treated differently in a positive or negative way because you were a foreigner? In what areas were you treated differently?[3]' to understand their perceptions of discrimination. In response, some of the respondents themselves used the word 'discrimination' while they were answering this question. Not only in response to the question about different treatment, but also in response to several other questions, our respondents reflected on discrimination.

Returnees from Germany

Most of the existing research doesn't distinguish between Turkish migrants of different socio-economic origins; there is even research that talks about 'Muslim immigrants' as a general category. This goes together with what Ramm (2010) calls the increasing

Islamisation of Turkish immigrants in Germany. Our research is different as it targets a sub-group of Turkish migrants with high levels of cultural (and in most cases also economic) capital, and looks at those qualified Turkish migrants who returned to Turkey. We aim to explain the perception of discrimination of a group which has high levels of cultural capital, and whether perceived discrimination had a role in their return. Some of our respondents, even before going and living there, were thinking of Germany as a country with high levels of racism and discrimination especially against Turkish people.

> I didn't like it when I heard that I would be transferred to Germany. In the past, there was another project in England. I wanted to be a part of it, and go to England. But unfortunately, it didn't happen at the time. I wish I could go to England! We could have both improved our English, and could have been more comfortable. Why did we go to Germany? Because of necessity … (Senior Design Manager)

> I had prejudices about Germany when I went there … I was thinking of them as … how should I say … racist and discriminating … (Finance Manager)

There were many of them who thought that the prejudices they had before going to Germany were supported by their experiences after living there. According to the research by Brüß (2008), only 30% of the Turkish-Muslim participants of the research living in Berlin agreed that they were treated respectfully and in friendly ways in the receiver society, while 68% didn't agree with this statement. Many also believed that they belong to a minority that is discriminated against. According to another research by Fischer-Neumann (2014), Turkish immigrants in Germany reported discrimination significantly more often than South-Europeans or Ex-Yugoslavs. The findings of our research are also in accordance with those findings. When we asked them the most negative aspect of their life in Germany, discrimination was the factor that was most often mentioned. Although its forms may have differed from the type of discrimination that worker migrants experienced in some cases, other times, educational level, cultural capital, occupation, and social class were all erased, and according to their perception, they were all discriminated in similar ways, being labelled as Turks in general. According to their accounts, discrimination had many forms, like negative treatment, glass ceiling, or even direct violence.

For some of our respondents, the loss of the class distinction, and being treated in the same way with uneducated, lower class Turks was a significant problem. There were even those who believed that German people's dislike of Turks was because of their encounters with Turkish guest workers, who were to blame for this perception about Turks. According to their arguments, Turkish guest workers had traditional lifestyles, lacked knowledge about proper conduct, and were uneducated.

> Turkey has a very bad image in Germany and it is easy to understand why. When I saw the Turks there … If they were here in Turkey, we would maybe react to them even more … Those Turks have been there for generations. They could neither protect their Turkish identity, nor become German. They have lived there for such a long time, but can still not say a word in German and make life difficult both for themselves and others … During the period when we were there, we could never get close with those Turkish people. (Finance manager)

> Many people ask questions like, what kind of a Turk are you, how can a Turk be like this? You are a PhD, you speak German fluently, how can it be … Turks that they knew there were completely different. Even we couldn't get along with them. (Marketing Director)

> About Germany … There, Turks are called *kara kafa* (dark-headed). We are treated as second, third-class people. Even if you migrate there with the best qualifications, still you have the same status with Turkish people who don't work and do nothing. You are treated in the same way. (Senior Design Manager)

Their arguments implied that there were those Turks who deserved hostile treatment because of their own failures and lacks. They, themselves, didn't deserve discrimination because they were 'good migrants': They could speak multiple languages, were highly educated, had secular orientations, and good manners. These respondents were, in fact, the ones who were trying to make what Wimmer (2008) calls *positional moves*. They were trying to change their own position vis-a-vis the boundary, without challenging the existing boundaries. However, all of our respondents didn't necessarily underline the class and/or educational difference between the other migrants and themselves, and didn't necessarily like statements such as 'You aren't like the other Turks that we know'. Many of our respondents made a reference to hearing similar statements, but with varying interpretations. Some of them were happy about the fact that German people distinguished between them and the other Turks, while others found such statements negative and derogatory. Those in the second group found the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories as problematic, and believed in the necessity of a *normative inversion* as discussed by Wimmer (2008):

> We have been subject to all kinds of discrimination. Everywhere … I believe that I have been treated badly just because I am a foreigner. And I was a good foreigner. I can speak German very fluently, almost like my native language. That seemingly positive statement 'I didn't expect you to be Turkish' is in fact terrible. Because I speak German, I don't wear a head scarf, things like that … By saying this to me, you position what I am at such a low level! What this means is, being a Turk is a terrible thing, and you are that, but better than the other Turks … (Associate Professor)

A few of our respondents spoke about discrimination and racism as things that other Turkish migrants experience, and distanced it from themselves personally. This type of distancing made it easier for them to talk about discrimination, considering it as the problem of Turkish migrants in general, but not as their personal problem. This personal/group discrimination discrepancy, or the tendency to perceive more discrimination at the group level compared to the individual level, is well-documented (Guimond and Dubé-Simard 1983; Taylor et al. 1994; Dion and Kawakami 1996). As Taylor et al. (1994, 235) argue, this discrepancy is consistent across various minority groups, and it has deep psychological implications.

> The problems related to ethnic identity are the problems that we all know about Germany. As I was in a different kind of environment, I didn't directly face them. I was in an art school, I was with artists, and university students. I had no problems there. But what was happening to our workers, and to Italian and Greek workers was disturbing. (Professor)

> In the context of Germany, there is extreme xenophobia. I haven't personally been exposed to that. However, I observed many cases in different environments, happening to my friends … (Instructor)

Few returnees from Germany thought that they experienced positive differential treatment as foreigners who were trying to get adapted to a new country. To the contrary, most of the returnees talked about several different examples and types of negative

discrimination. According to their perceptions, the most direct and frequent experiences of discrimination took place in interactions with state officials and during visa procedures. Everyday interactions with strangers in public places were also problematic. The third challenging sphere was employment. Compared to the first three, our respondents spoke about facing relatively less discrimination as students at universities. Depending on their accounts, we categorised the spheres of negative discrimination under four headings:

Discrimination in employment or at the work place

The first major problem that many of our respondents talked about regarding employment was about how they were generally treated at their work place. They talked about not only hidden remarks or being blamed for things that go wrong, but also visibly hostile behaviours like shouting.

> It was my sixth day at work. A man came and started shouting at me … He was shouting something like 'You cannot do this'. I was just looking at him, asking myself who this guy is. Then he started shouting 'You cannot look at me like that'. I was shocked. I couldn't say anything. And then he left. I said to myself, how will I work with these people … The first six months, I had such a hard time! I went home crying every evening … Let's say, the lab leaders were having meetings. The lab leader was talking about missing lab equipment and looking at me. He was saying, there were 38 yesterday, and today there are 37, so one is missing. And he was looking at me! I was trying to pretend that I didn't understand what he was saying … And it was something that you could buy for 10 cents. They blamed us for everything! (Researcher)

In addition to these hostile encounters, some of our respondents also had problems with being given opportunities to work only in those jobs which were related to migrants or refugees. Even if they had other qualifications which could help them to work in other areas, many times the only positions that were open to them were related to the integration of migrants. They were expected to act as intermediaries between the German society and other Turkish migrants. All of them didn't necessarily like or accept that kind of an intermediary position.

> If you are a foreigner, they think that you should work with other foreigners. That was something that I didn't like, and it was the main reason why I left my first job. (Family Therapist)

A third major problem was being unable to find a full-time job that is consistent with their qualifications. They believed that it was impossible for them to compete with German citizens when they were looking for professional jobs. With their level of qualifications, they thought that they deserved better jobs and opportunities. This was also a major factor behind the return decision for some of them. Another person who had jobs as waiter and bartender as a student argued that while he was working in those jobs, he didn't face discrimination. But when he graduated from university and looked for a professional job as an architect, there was discrimination in job applications. In the end, he started working with another Turkish architect. He thinks that German people don't have a problem with seeing Turks in service sector, low-paying jobs, but don't want to see them getting professional jobs in Germany.

Discrimination in educational institutions

In a similar way with the area of work, the biggest problems that they had while they were having degrees in higher educational institutions was the kind of treatment that they had to face because of their ethnic identity.

> It was the first day of my program in biological engineering. There was an event in the evening. When I introduced myself, and said that I am from Turkey, I got questions like whether men still beat their wives in Turkey. It was annoying. I was especially disturbed because that was the first thing they said to me after I introduced myself. (Coordinator in an NGO)

In addition to these problems related to general treatment, our respondents also talked about their achievements and educational qualifications having been underestimated because of their ethnic identity. Although they had the feeling that they got less appreciation and rewards than what they deserved, it was impossible to prove it. Therefore, they could never be sure; they mentioned having that kind of 'feeling'. That feeling could only be verified when there was another witness to the incident:

> When I was a university student there, it was mostly like a feeling that I had. I graduated from the university with a very good degree. But I always expected to get better comments and grades for my projects. Because I had done remarkable projects. I attended one contest, which I believed I was good enough to win. There was an Italian professor there, he came and said, 'What they are doing to you is unfair!' This is exactly what he said to me! (Architect)

Discrimination during visa processes or in interactions with state officials

As discussed before, our respondents talked about having experienced the most direct forms of discrimination in their interactions with state officials and especially during visa processes. Some of them believed that the difficulties and problems they experienced during the visa processes weren't accidental events; they were intentionally made part of the system and supported by related laws to discourage foreigners/Turks from staying longer in Germany. They believed that discrimination was systematic and structural.

> Before talking about the attitudes, we need to first start from the laws. The state constantly reminds you that you are different. For instance, every six months, you need to renew your visa. Visa renewal isn't an easy process. You go early in the morning, wait in the line for hours. If you are lucky, you don't hear all those offensive things from the officials … And this is every six months … (Research and Development Manager)

A major complaint about the visa procedures was again, in some cases, related to the fact that they were treated in the same way with the other Turks, who are less educated or lower-class. As we discussed before, they seemed to find discriminatory treatment problematic mostly when it was directed to them, not necessarily when other, less privileged migrants faced it.

> What I hated the most was how we were treated by those officials each time we went to renew our visas. They were treating all the foreigners in the same way. I understand that there were also those who couldn't speak the language and didn't understand anything. But we were there as this elite group. We speak the language fluently, we are totally proper and well-prepared. They were still treating us badly. (Finance Manager)

Discrimination in other public places and in daily life

Research shows that everyday social interactions contribute significantly to the perception of being exposed to discrimination (Brüß 2008, 890). Our respondents also thought that they had the most negative incidents in those places where their professional and social identities were unknown. In those situations where only their Turkish ethnic identity was known, they felt that they were labelled and treated in hostile ways. They weren't labelled only as 'foreigners', but with their specific ethnic identity, about which there were many negative stereotypes.

> You go into a shop. Maybe there was a German person who entered the same place before you. The cashier responds and explains patiently when that person doesn't understand something. But when you ask a question to the same cashier, she understands that you are a foreigner from the way you look, from your accent. And she treats you differently … (Senior Engineer)

> Germans have an extremely negative perception. Not only of foreigners, but especially of Turks … We were all PhD students at the time. We did our amateurish research. We introduced ourselves as from Cyprus, Algeria, Iran, or Palestine. We never got the kind of reaction that we received when we introduced ourselves as Turkish. When we said Turkish, there were people who suddenly stopped talking to us and left … (Marketing Director)

Considering Feagin and Eckberg's (1980) four types of discrimination, returnees from Germany talked about not only isolate and small-group discrimination, but also direct and indirect institutionalised discrimination. According to their perceptions, discrimination wasn't only the result of individual and small-group actions, but it was institutionally approved and supported. Our respondents talked about having rearranged their lives in ways which would decrease exposure to such experiences. Some of our respondents also told that they had therapy, especially to deal with experiences of discrimination and exclusion. They also talked about a 'psychology of the guest': internalising the fact that they don't necessarily have the same rights with German people in terms of how they can behave in social life.

> While the other people living in the same building could listen to music at high volumes, I never did such things. I later realised that I was in one sense thinking that they, as Germans, had the right to do it. But as a migrant, I didn't. Not to give reason to them to talk at me … (Researcher)

A final, major consequence of perceived discrimination for these qualified migrants was their return to Turkey. In response to our questions about their reasons for return, in addition to reasons such as longing for their own culture, native language, family, and friends, discrimination was also mentioned as a major factor behind their decision to return from Germany. They explained that always feeling as a guest, not feeling welcome, not being able to develop a sense of belonging, and constantly getting stereotypical comments about their ethnic identity and country of origin, they didn't feel at ease living in Germany. They returned to feel 'at home', many times accepting especially the material costs of return. Therefore, our findings about the returnees from Germany support Alba's argument that European contexts like Germany have bright ethnic boundaries for migrants who come from Muslim-majority countries, like Turkey. Even when those migrants carry no religious symbols and have secular orientations, which was the

case for the majority of our respondents, they face a bright ethnic boundary which makes a clear distinction between those on both sides of the boundary. We additionally demonstrate that even when the migrant group has high levels of cultural capital, they perceive widespread discrimination when there is a bright ethnic boundary. Finally, qualified migrants' perception that there is discrimination against them becomes a major reason behind their return to their home country.

Returnees from the US

There was a striking difference between the returnees from Germany and the US in terms of their perceptions about discrimination in the host country. Unlike those who lived in Germany, most migrants who lived in the US mentioned not having experienced negative discrimination. Many mentioned cases of positive discrimination. Among the group of 40 returnees from the US, 13 argued that they got positive differential treatment as foreigners especially when they were graduate students; 16 were thinking that they weren't treated differently in a negative or positive way. There were seven people who talked about being treated differently in both positive and negative ways. Finally, four respondents stated that they were treated negatively because of being a foreigner. None of them talked about different treatment based on their specific ethnic group. Those who thought that they faced negative discrimination mentioned being Middle Eastern/Muslim, not necessarily being Turkish, and the level of language skills as the major bases for discrimination. Although most of them went to the US after several years of schooling in English, not being able to speak English as skilfully as native speakers in daily life and speaking it with an accent became markers of being a foreigner. However, there were also those who argued that having an accent and being 'different' helped them to socialise with people. Many of our respondents mentioned having received additional support as students:

> I was the first international student of my advisor … She has treated me in a very supportive way from the beginning, although I hadn't shown any achievements yet … She invited me to Thanksgiving dinners, and many other events … I think it was more like positive discrimination. After two-three years, with my achievements, I showed that I deserved it … (Assistant Professor)

> I think I was approached in a positive way. Students loved having a foreign instructor. At the beginning of the semester, I was telling them to ask me when there are words they cannot understand. Because of the accent, there may be things that they cannot understand. And students appreciated it. I was never discriminated against. I don't look Muslim; that may be another factor. (Professor)

As we discussed earlier, many returnees from Germany believed that the official practices in Germany were structured in ways to make Turkish-descent people feel that they don't belong to Germany. To the contrary, returnees from the US believed that there are active legal protections against discrimination in the US, which make it hard for people to discriminate even if they have such tendencies. If we speak in terms of the four types of discrimination that Feagin and Eckberg (1980) discussed, while some of our respondents talked about isolate and small group discrimination, they were of the idea that there were low levels of institutional discrimination.

> I believe that all over the world, America may be the country where you will face the least discrimination. It is also legally guaranteed. Laws actively protect you against discrimination. Even if they tend to discriminate, people know that there are all kinds of laws against it. (International Logistics Specialist)

Despite their generally positive evaluation of the US in terms of discrimination, some returnees were upset about the difficulty of getting a professional job and moving to managerial positions. They claimed that while universities are much more egalitarian and protected places for foreigners, professional life is different. In many cases, it was hard to find a company which would sponsor work visas. Especially after the 2008 economic crisis, they argued, it became even more difficult to find jobs for immigrants.

> I had a hard time while I was looking for a job. As a foreigner, because of my visa status … You cannot even apply to some positions if you don't have permanent residence … Other than that, I had no experience of discrimination. (Assistant Professor)

Our respondents emphasised that there might be differences in terms of discrimination depending on which part of the US a foreigner lives. Cities like New York and Seattle were described as places which are more comfortable to live as a foreigner, whereas smaller cities in Texas, Ohio, or Indiana were described as not foreigner-friendly. Those of them who lived in multiple locations or travelled to different parts of the US made comparisons depending on their experiences in these different places. Campus towns were also described as more comfortable to live as a foreigner.

In the following case, she talked about concrete cases of positive discrimination where she benefited from quotas for women and foreigners. She told that she didn't face negative discrimination while she was living in the US. However, she also emphasised that she knew those realms where she could have been discriminated, and avoided them. She developed some strategies to succeed in the workplace as a foreigner woman, like establishing her own networks composed of people who are like her. However, she also believes, if she was a white, Christian man, she could have been a lot more successful:

> I had several experiences of positive discrimination. The fact that I was admitted to Harvard … You know they have quotas. As both a foreigner and a woman … I also think that to have work opportunities, being a foreigner worked to my advantage. But it was necessary to find a company which would sponsor the H1 visa, which means we have less chance at smaller companies. They may not have their legal departments, may not know about this process. But we have more chances at bigger companies, as they have know-how. Microsoft had a huge department for this, and it was never a problem. I always played to my stronger suits at work. It may be hard to connect with white, Christian males. There was this black woman who was living in Atlanta, who was like my sister … She had graduated from Harvard Business School. She always provided guidance to me. The only common thing between us was that we were both women and minorities. Being a foreigner always worked to my advantage but, what I did was, I didn't push for those places where I wouldn't succeed. I didn't push to become a member of the polo club. I was together with people like me, and I became successful doing that. But if I was a Christian, white male, I would be managing billion-dollar funds today. (Director)

One important discussion that emerges from such accounts was about whether in all areas, citizens and non-citizens should be treated the same. Some of them were thinking that it is

a country's right to give priority to its citizens in, for instance, employment practices. Therefore, when American citizens were preferred over them by companies, all of them didn't necessarily consider it as discrimination:

> If you are a doctor who was educated in another country, you need to be a lot better than American doctors to get a job. An American doctor who has the same qualifications with you can, more easily, find a job. So, you always need to be at least one step ahead of them if you want to secure a place for yourself. But there is nothing abnormal about it. If we think about our country, if a doctor from another country comes and tries to work in the position that you want, you will show the same kind of reaction. (Doctor)

Finally, when we focus on their reasons for return, in a different way from the returnees from Germany, they didn't mention discrimination as a factor behind their return. Their wish to live in the culture that they are accustomed to, to be close to their families and friends, not to be lonely, to be able to speak their native language, and to raise their kids in their culture were the most frequently-mentioned reasons for return. Although many of them talked about the difficulty of living as a foreigner in a different country, this difficulty was not necessarily tied to discrimination.

> In fact, I loved America. But I thought that I cannot feel similar to Americans. I was like a stranger. Although people weren't treating me badly, I was still feeling that I was a foreigner … I wanted to feel belonging. That had an impact on my return. (Assistant Professor)

To sum up, for qualified Turkish migrants, the US seems to be a context where there are blurry ethnic boundaries. Depending on physical appearance, level of economic and/or cultural capital, or manners, those migrants are located at different positions in relation to the boundary. Our interviewees didn't report having experienced widespread or structural discrimination, and they didn't mention discrimination as a reason behind their return to Turkey. Although not feeling belonging was one of the reasons for return, for the returnees from the US, not feeling belonging wasn't linked to discrimination experiences.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we compared the perceptions of Turkish qualified returnees from Germany and the US about discrimination in the host country. Returnees from Germany reported having experienced widespread and different types of discrimination because of their Turkish ethnic identity. Their high levels of cultural capital, and educational and professional qualifications didn't make them immune from discrimination experiences. They felt that their ethnic group was marked as inferior, and they were mostly evaluated as a homogeneous group of Turks. Even when they were considered different from what the stereotypes about Turkish people suggest, the difference was tied to their extraordinary personal characteristics, not changing the stereotypes about their ethnic group. While some of our respondents were glad when they were identified as 'different from other Turks', as part of their *positional move* to change their own individual position in relation to the boundary, many others expressed discomfort hearing such statements, which approved the inferior portrayal of the ethnic group. The ones in the second group were critical of the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories. Although many of them thought that return would bring material disadvantages, they still decided to return to

feel 'at home'. However, although return to Turkey would bring material disadvantages to some of them, they were still confident that they would transfer their professional and educational qualifications back to Turkey, and would have high living standards. Therefore, they could afford return due to discrimination, which may not necessarily be the case for migrants of different socio-economic backgrounds.

On the other side, returnees from the US had a different perception about discrimination in the host country. The majority stated that they didn't experience any negative discrimination; they rather received positive differential treatment especially as students. While a few mentioned discrimination based on being Middle Eastern or Muslim, none of them thought that there was discrimination against them because of their Turkish identity. Those who looked for professional jobs in the US talked about the difficulty of finding a job and climbing up to managerial positions as a foreigner. However, not all of them found it problematic that the companies were giving priority to American citizens. Although they sometimes talked about the difficulties of being a foreigner, most of them didn't discuss discrimination as a part of the difficulties they faced as foreigners. They didn't think that their ethnic group, or they, as individuals faced discrimination. They didn't name discrimination as a negative aspect of their life in the US, or as a major reason to return to Turkey.

How can we evaluate the difference between the perceptions of these two groups? On the one hand, we cannot assume that there is a direct correspondence between perceived discrimination and actual experiences of discrimination; there is obviously a gap between the two. However, it will be accurate to think that their perception has, at least, some connection to their lived experience. This suggests that German and American contexts offer very different experiences to Turkish migrants. To interpret the difference between these two contexts, we followed Alba (2005), who made a distinction between a *bright ethnic boundary*, where the ethnic distinction is unambiguous, and individuals know which side of the boundary they are located, and a *blurry ethnic boundary*, where there may be ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary. Our research supports his finding that European/German context is characterised by bright ethnic boundaries for Muslim groups or people who come from Muslim majority countries. We additionally demonstrate that even high cultural capital doesn't make a difference in terms of how the ethnic group is treated if there is a bright ethnic boundary. The US, on the other hand, seems to have blurry ethnic boundaries for Turkish migrants. Especially for qualified Turkish migrants with educational and professional credentials, there seem to be indefinite locations with respect to the ethnic boundary. Our research shows that in a society where there are bright ethnic boundaries, perceived discrimination is higher for the members of the ethnic group which is marked as inferior, and it becomes a major reason for their return migration. To the contrary, in a context where there are blurry ethnic boundaries, there is less perceived discrimination and less return due to perceived discrimination.

Notes

1. http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discrimination.
2. Further information on methodology is provided in the appendix.
3. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, and relevant parts of them were then translated into English.

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Appendix

This article depends on a qualitative research, which aims to understand the migration and return migration experiences of Turkish qualified migrants to and from Germany and the US. Although qualitative research has meant different things at different moments, qualitative researchers all aim to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 3). In this research, we also intend to study migration and return migration considering the perceptions of migrants/returnees themselves about these processes. For this purpose, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 40 returnees from Germany and 40 returnees from the US. As Boyce and Neale (2006) argue, in-depth interviews are suitable for getting detailed information about people's thoughts and behaviours, or when we want to explore issues in depth. In-depth interviews also provide a more comfortable environment for the respondents; people usually prefer to have a conversation rather than filling out a survey (Boyce and Neale 2006, 3). By having semi-structured, in-depth interviews, we had a checklist of topic areas and questions, but we also asked additional questions depending on how the conversations proceeded. We aimed to get our respondents to talk in their own terms. Although our interview style was closer to structured rather than unstructured interview, it was less rigid and we had more opportunities to explore the aspects of the topic that we hadn't recognised before we started doing research. Our interviews consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, which aimed to understand the three periods in returnees' lives: Period before migration, period in the host country, and period after their return to Turkey. The interviews were conducted by three members of the research team: Responsible Project Investigator (RPI, the author of this article), the researcher, and the research assistant who were involved in and knowledgeable about the previous stages of the research.

At the beginning of the project, we had a literature review on different aspects of especially return migration. After that, we had long and detailed discussions on which dimensions of the migration and return experiences we were aiming to focus on. In the light of those discussions, we developed our interview guide and questions. Our research is on qualified migrants, and as qualified migrants, we looked at those people who migrated either after completing an undergraduate programme at a major university in Turkey or migrated as an exchange student but stayed further. Therefore, we defined qualified migrant as a person who was a university graduate or student at the time of migration. There were some other criteria that we used while selecting our respondents. We interviewed people who: (i) lived in Germany or the US for at least five years; (ii) had further education and/or professional work experience in one of these two countries; (iii) returned to Turkey. We excluded those who stayed for periods shorter than five years, as we wanted to exclude those who were in the host country for short temporary stays. We wanted to talk to those people who stayed long enough to make a decision between settling or returning. Forty returnees from Germany and 40 returnees from the US were

recruited through targeted snowball sampling with multiple initiation points, as well as by sharing ads on social media and in places like Turkish-German Bookstore, and Goethe Institute in Istanbul.

We conducted interviews between June 2015 and February 2016. We interviewed the majority of our respondents in those places where they chose: mostly in cafes and restaurants, but also at their offices in some cases. Having the interviews at places of their own choosing helped our respondents to feel more comfortable, while sometimes causing distractions during conversations when they chose crowded places. This was one limitation of our study. We also had interviews on Skype with those people who live in cities other than İstanbul. Sixty-four out of 80 respondents were living in İstanbul, while the rest were living in other cities (Ankara, İzmir, Aydın, Kocaeli, Bolu, Antalya, Kayseri, Muğla) at the time of our interviews. Although over-representation of İstanbul can be considered as a limitation of the study, it also represents the overall situation, as the majority of qualified returnees return to İstanbul. We introduced our study as a research that aims to understand the migration and return experiences of qualified migrants. Before each interview, consent forms, which also had information about the purposes of the study, were signed by both the respondents and the interviewer. One copy of the form was given to the respondents. After that, the respondents filled out personal information forms where they were asked demographic questions. The interviews started after that. Except a few cases in which we took notes as the interviewees didn't want the conversations to be recorded, we recorded and transcribed the interviews. The interviews lasted an hour and a half on average.

We used grounded theory as our general research methodology, as an approach that combines diverse traditions in sociology and that is methodologically dynamic (Ralph et al. 2014). In using grounded theory, our main goal has been to understand our respondents' main concerns and how they try to resolve them. In our qualitative analysis of the interviews, we used the method that McCracken (1988) and Piercy (2004) suggest for the analysis of long, semi-structured interviews. This method has a lot of similarity with the more open coding stages of grounded theory. However, in the method that McCracken and Piercy follow, researchers benefit from some theoretical frameworks during the formulation of research questions. This research follows the same perspective in the sense that we also benefited from some theoretical frameworks (especially the structural approach on return migration and transnationalism) for the formulation of our research questions.

After the interviews were completed, first the RPI read all the transcript texts to gain familiarity with all the respondents' stories in their entirety. This thorough reading provided the RPI the opportunity to go through the migration and return experience of every respondent. Then there was a second reading for coding the interview texts; detailed notes were written, useful concepts were identified and named, and key phrases were marked. The data is broken into its conceptual components during this process. At the next step of the analysis, concepts of similar content were grouped together and turned into categories. After these categories emerged, they were linked together around central categories that hold everything together. We tried to come up with a theoretical explanation as a group of categories that detail the subject of our research.