



Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies

ISSN: 2717-7408 (Print) e-ISSN: 2757-9247 (Online)
Journal homepage: tjds.org.tr

Book Review

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To cite this article: Hasan Baltacıer (2026) [Özcan Mutlu, Almanya Nasıl Vatan Oldu? Türkiye-Almanya İşgücü Anlaşması'nın 60. Yılı], Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies, 6(1), 83-85, DOI: 10.52241/TJDS.1850486

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.52241/TJDS.1850486>

Submission Date: 27 December 2025 **Acceptance Date:** 24 February 2026

Article Type: Book Review



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Published online: 15 March 2026



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Kitap İncelemesi / Book Review

Özcan Mutlu, **Almanya Nasıl Vatan Oldu? Türkiye-Almanya İşgücü Anlaşması'nın 60. Yılı**, Doğan Kitap, 2. Baskı, İstanbul, Aralık 2023, 280 Sayfa, ISBN: 978-625-6570-62-7

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The migration from Türkiye to Germany, which began in 1961, was not merely a movement of labour; it was the transplantation of Anatolian people's culture, values, hopes, and stories to Germany. Written by Özcan Mutlu on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Türkiye-Germany Labour Recruitment Agreement, *Almanya Nasıl Vatan Oldu?* (How Did Germany Become a Homeland?) is a significant work that addresses the experiences of immigrants from a human-centered perspective. Although it starts with the concept of the guest worker (*Gastarbeiter*), the book documents the transformation and achievements of the Turkish community, which is now active in every field of Germany, from science to art, politics to gastronomy. By presenting first-hand accounts of how second and third-generation immigrants of Turkish origin have embraced Germany as their homeland, how they utilized the opportunities offered by Germany, and the challenges of adaptation and identity they faced, the work aims to ensure that future immigrants can benefit from these experiences. The experiences of the individuals featured in the book are conveyed directly to the reader without any interference from the author. With few exceptions, the experiences presented in the book demonstrate significant similarities.

The book brings together 27 different portraits, ranging from globally recognized figures like BioNTech founders Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci to individuals who have made a name for themselves in German politics. The fundamental question of the work mirrors its title: *How Did Germany Become a Homeland?* Examining the stories of these 27 individuals reveals that the concept of "homeland" is not a static geography but a dynamic phenomenon constructed through labour and lived experience. Indeed, almost all interviewees (with the exception of Kader Gümüş) define Germany as their home. The narratives of the generation describing themselves as "suitcase children" are particularly striking examples of being in-between. Growing up with the psychology that their suitcases were always ready to leave, feeling neither fully German nor fully Turkish, this generation constructed their identities through a synthesis of both cultures. While the main issues for the first generation were "language barriers" and "physical adaptation," the book clearly demonstrates that the primary struggle for subsequent generations has been "identity construction" and "institutional acceptance."

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Structurally, the book consists of an introduction and five main sections. The introduction features the author Özcan Mutlu, alongside the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and the Honorary Chairman of Doğan Group, Aydın Doğan. The subsequent five sections are titled: *Setting Out*, *Rising Up*, *Moving Ahead*, *Resisting*, and *Arriving*. Each section contains five or six individuals, categorized based on their experiences.

The introduction provides a general overview of Turkish-German relations rather than focusing solely on the author's personal story. It presents the consequences of the labour agreement for both sides, generalizing the difficulties faced and successes achieved by immigrants. The author posits that the Labour Recruitment Agreement signed in Bonn on October 30, 1961, marked the beginning of the Turkish migration in Germany. A key argument throughout the book is that immigrants are reshaping Germany. It highlights that the first guest workers did not intend to stay permanently and they spoke no German. Mutlu notes that between 1961 and 1973, 2.5 million people applied from Türkiye, with only one-fourth being accepted. By the end of recruitment policy in 1973, the number of guest workers had reached 850,000. Unlike other immigrants who returned home as their countries joined the EU, the majority of Turkish workers remained, driven by Türkiye's economic conditions and the political turmoil following the 1980 military coup. This section also touches upon the dark chapters of xenophobia, including racist murders and arson attacks by far-right extremists (p. 13).

In the first section, *Setting Out*, some individuals belong to guest worker families, while others are products of brain drain. A common theme here is that interviewees recall experiencing little to no discrimination during their childhoods—or being unaware of it. Furthermore, when asked about their origins, many identify as German or belonging to a specific German city. The story of Aygül Özkan stands out in this section due to the death threats and media coverage she faced as the first minister of Turkish origin (p. 23).

The second and third sections, *Rising Up* and *Moving Ahead*, share a common theme of social mobility. These stories describe the struggle of workers' children to climb the social ladder through entrepreneurship or academic success. Unlike the previous section, speakers here report exposure to various forms of racism during their childhoods. While some view both Türkiye and Germany as homelands, others identify solely as German. These sections feature a broad professional spectrum, ranging from individuals with sports backgrounds like Ali Laçın and Duygu Bolat to Member of the European Parliament İsmail Ertuğ (pp. 73, 119).

The fourth section, *Resisting*, is the most distinct part of the book. Here, contributors discuss not only their upward mobility but also the racism and difficulties they faced due to their origins. Ambivalence regarding the concept of "homeland" is visible in some

narratives. Prof. Yasemin Karakaşoğlu's account is particularly notable; although she centers her life in Germany, she maintains deep ties with Türkiye. However, the most significant outlier among the 27 speakers is Kader Gümüş. She is the only person in the book who does not live in Germany, does not feel a sense of belonging there, and is openly critical of the country (p. 175).

The final section, *Arriving*, shares similarities with the first three but differs in the socioeconomic background of the families; with two exceptions, they are not from working-class origins. Notable examples include Bülent Bilaloğlu, whose father, Bekam Bilaloğlu, was one of architects of the Germany-Türkiye Social Security Agreement. Like previous chapters, this section explores how Germany shaped these individuals and their paths to success (p. 215).

While the book's strength lies in showcasing the diversity of the Turkish community in Germany, its significant shortcoming is "selection bias." The stories are almost exclusively tales of superior success. With few exceptions, the subjects hold high-status professions such as athletes, chefs, musicians, diplomats, and ministers. While this offers different perspectives, the voice of the "ordinary person"—the factory worker, the individual unable to overcome language barriers, or those defeated by structural racism—is largely silent. Furthermore, the inclusion of individuals from non-guest worker families creates a contrast with the book's focus on the Labour Recruitment Agreement.

The absence of ordinary individuals risks creating a "model minority" perception. The book suggests that Germany becomes a homeland primarily because these individuals seized opportunities and achieved high status. In this context, it is debatable how accurately the work reflects the reality of the over two million Turks living in Germany. The *Resisting* section, particularly Kader Gümüş's story, breaks this pattern and adds realistic depth. Her narrative demonstrates how the exclusionary attitude of the host society can sever ties of belonging, regardless of an individual's qualifications.

In conclusion, Özcan Mutlu's *Almanya Nasıl Vatan Oldu?* views migration history between Turkey and Germany through personal narratives. It successfully depicts the evolution of migration from a passive phenomenon to an active and transformative force. The work serves as a valuable archive for remembering where the Turkish community in Germany came from and demonstrating where it can go.