

Transnational Solidarities and Journalism from Abroad. The Experience of *taz.gazete*

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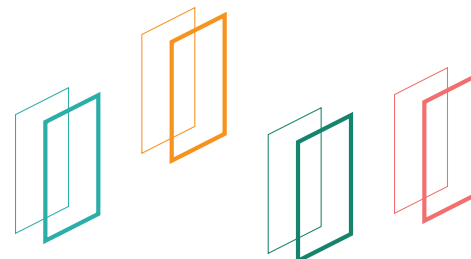
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Reporting on a country from abroad seems to contradict or at least complicate the practice of journalistic research. To report on events in a classical sense, one needs to be close, get a first-hand impression, and talk to people. Yet, when it becomes difficult to report from the field and publish critical articles in a country because the government of the country massively restricts press freedom, journalists have to find creative solutions. In the case of Turkey, one of these solutions has been transnational solidarity projects.

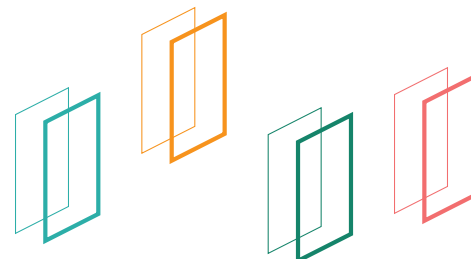
After the coup attempt in July 2016, Turkey faced an ongoing purge of critical journalism and oppositional voices; independent media organisations were shut down, and hundreds of journalists were arrested or lost their jobs. Press freedom in Turkey became a topic that made headlines in Germany nearly every day. Some journalists and media organisations in Germany not only wanted to watch the rapid crackdown but support the critical voices who were risking so much to continue their work. From early 2017 on, several transnational media platforms were established in Germany to support press freedom and critical reporting in Turkey. Most of these projects were initiated by journalists from Turkey who had been forced to leave the country and were supported by donations or public and foundation funds. With an editorial team based in Berlin or Cologne and reporters working in the field in Turkey, these projects became experiments in transnational journalism.

¹This paper has been published on Reset DOC Dialogues on Civilizations:
<https://www.resetdoc.org/story/journalism-from-abroad-the-experience-of-taz-gazete/>



The example of the bilingual platform *taz.gazete* shows what reporting across borders and languages means for journalism. *Taz.gazete* started as a rather spontaneous solidarity project of the daily newspaper *taz* at the end of 2016 in response to the police raid of the oldest daily newspaper in Turkey, *Cumhuriyet* and the related arrest of thirteen journalists on 31 October 2016. *Taz* wanted to show practical – instead of symbolic – solidarity with the journalists who risked so much working in Turkey and decided to start a bilingual project, which would be based in Berlin and publish articles of oppositional journalists from Turkey in Turkish and German. The idea of the project was to open a transnational space for journalism from Turkey abroad as the spaces for independent journalism in the country were increasingly restricted. In doing so, *taz* wanted to support critical reporting in Turkey and contribute to more diverse reporting on Turkey in Germany.

In its three and a half years of existence, around fifty reporters from all around Turkey worked for *taz.gazete*. Some of them had been imprisoned, others had lost their jobs or had to leave the country because of the crackdown on journalistic freedoms. Those who worked for the independent news platforms in the country struggled financially, as those platforms that resisted repressions and reported critically were put under economic pressure by the government. *Taz.gazete* became a place to go for journalists who found themselves in exile in Germany and were looking for a way to continue their work.



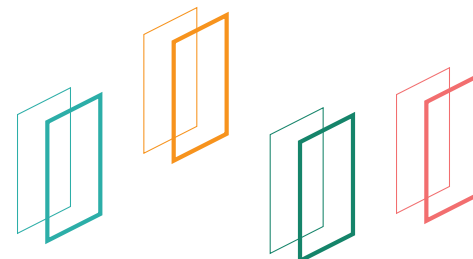
Working in two countries and two languages opened a transnational space full of new experiences and challenges at the same time. As a bilingual project, the editing process was important and time-consuming. For the German readers, it was necessary to not only provide a linguistic but also a cultural translation, as they had less contextual knowledge than readers from Turkey did. It was necessary to reflect on the different working contexts, understandings of journalism, and background knowledge of the audience. Even the pace of events and news was different in the two countries: Once an article had been translated and edited, it was often already yesterday's news in Turkey, where journalism had adapted to the overwhelming speed of events. Another challenge was bridging the gap between the two countries, with editors trying to determine from an office in Berlin what was relevant in Turkey and reporters trying to anticipate what German readers might or might not know about Turkish history and politics.

At the same time, these challenges led to reflections on unquestioned certainties and understandings about journalism, reporting, and working together transnationally. What did the editors in Berlin know about what was happening in Turkey? What role did they play as curators of the articles published on *taz.gazete*? Struggling to find the right words and formats showed that there is not just one valid form of journalism and that reporting is fundamentally shaped by working conditions, which were different in Turkey than in a comfortable office in Berlin.

Probably the biggest challenge was the habituation effect. While the repressions in Turkey got worse and worse, public attention eventually shifted to other topics. The donation-based model of *taz.gazete* worked very well in its first two years when there was a strong interest in the developments in Turkey in German society and media. However, especially after the presidential elections in June 2018 when president Erdoğan increased his power, *taz.gazete* experienced a fatigue and loss of interest in Turkey from its German audience. This had effects on the donations and *taz.gazete* ended in July 2020. Because the project started spontaneously with the initial intention of lasting for one year, this was longer than expected. Still, the situation of press freedom has not improved in Turkey.

The example of *taz.gazete* indicates a general problem solidarity projects are facing: Many of them are not sustainable because they rely on public attention. When public attention shifts, funds and donations go to other projects. Thus, solidarity projects remain short-lived, only offering precarious solutions. Finding strategies to leave this short-term-perspective behind and make solidarity projects sustainable remains an ongoing challenge.

While transnational journalism projects face several limitations and difficulties, it is still worthwhile to try new experimental methods in journalism. The *taz.gazete* experience showed that a transnational mode of working led to more diverse, multi-perspective reporting on Turkey in Germany. It gave room to voices in Turkish society that are usually not heard in German media. Considering that newsrooms in Germany still



lack diversity and thus relevant perspectives, reporting transnationally seems like a necessary and overdue step; as it is not only important what is reported, but also who is reporting.

Short Biography:

Elisabeth Kimmerle studied Philosophy, German Language and Literature, and Journalism in Freiburg, Leipzig and Istanbul. After her traineeship at the daily newspaper taz, she worked as a co-project manager and editor for the bilingual Turkish-German online project of taz, taz.gazete. Currently, she is working on her PhD project on democracy in Turkey from a transnational gender perspective at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam.

