



The White Ceiling: Why well-educated, assimilated Other Germans are still not fully recognized as equal German citizens

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Abstract The present ethnographic research analyses the live stories of young well-educated, assimilated German citizens who belong to the second generation of Turkish immigrants. Their overall successful assimilation of the interviewees is enabled by their high educational status, their upbringing and their language skills. Assuming a status of “model immigrants” they are still confined to the margins of German majority society and cannot completely overcome the status of the “Other”. A persisting racialized understanding of Germanness generates occasional feelings of foreignness. It will be argued that an underlying structure of covert forms of racism that is denied by German majority society impedes the interviewees from acknowledging and talking about their experiences of racism.

Index Terms— Racism; Immigration; Assimilation; German, Turkish

INTRODUCTION

*A*ctually I am... I am German. I am definitely German [...] Somehow I am reluctant to say so, but I am German. [...] I would like to say I am German, to say this whole-heartedly, but what I had encountered doesn't give me a real good feeling in saying so. The problem is that I very seldom got the feeling, that I so to say, am accepted as such [German]. Do you understand? I hardly got that feeling (Mithad).

This statement was made by a young university student, who was born in Germany, who had lived at the time of this statement his entire life in Germany, who has German citizenship and who only speaks German. He cannot unrestrainedly assert that he is German because the German majority society does not consider him to be an equal German citizen. In this ethnographic study I analyze stories of young university students and professionals, whose parents immigrated decades ago from Turkey. The themes that characterize their narratives range from successful assimilation enabled by education and identification as German to occasional feelings of

foreignness and the difficulties of talking about experiences of racism in a society that denies structural racism. To contextualize the present study, the historical background of Germany's status as a (non)immigration country and the current situation of integration policies will be briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

Immigration and Integration in Germany since 1955

Even though Germany has hired foreign workers since 1955 to sustain the post-war rebuilding of its economy, Germany did not, until very recently, consider itself as a country of immigration. This political statement was underpinned by a citizenship law that was based on *ius sanguinis*, i.e., citizenship could only be acquired through parental inheritance. De jure the exclusive reliance on *ius sanguinis* was only abandoned in 2000. In 2005 a new immigration law that raised the concern for integration policies for the first time to the national level followed and brought about a de facto consensus of recognizing Germany as a country of immigration (Butterwegge, 2007). This new immigration law was triggered by the increasing need of highly qualified and skilled workers, in view of an aging society. Ever since, debates about immigration are predominantly coupled with labour market policies. Part of

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the debate is a points system to regulate immigration according to age, educational and professional qualification, language skills, availability of employment and integration capability (Assner, 2015). Using such categorizations immigrants are evaluated in terms of their economic usefulness, that is, instrumentally to Germany's economic prosperity. These instrumental requirements for newly immigrating foreign workers also impact the situation of people whose parents immigrated a long time ago to Germany.

The following statement of a head chef of a renowned restaurant in Hamburg who is of Turkish descent represents the effects of such evaluations: "If you're just a foreigner, that's a bad thing. But if you're a foreigner and successful, then it's okay. I had to work hard to be respected" (Güngörmüs, 2015). This quote from a newspaper article reflects a new trend of differentiated discrimination against immigrants, which recently has been observed in Germany since the status of country of immigration has been acknowledged by authorities and is becoming mainstreamed. The general rejection and devaluation of immigrants has been replaced by an integration discourse, which separates them into two categories: "economically useful immigrants" (i.e., those who are a well-integrated part of the labour market) and "economically useless immigrants" (i.e., those who are accused of living at the expense of the German welfare state). Immigration increasingly emphasizes a "Willkommenskultur" (culture of acceptance and welcome) (Mecheril, 2014, p. 109) whereby Germany receives highly-skilled immigrants positively and facilitates their integration.

Yet in Germany, integration is predominantly conceptualized as a unilateral effort to assimilate demanded from immigrants (Mecheril, 2014). Thus, the usage of the term 'integration', which implies a bilateral effort from immigrants and receiving society to mutually adapt (Berry, 1997), is a euphemism in the German context. Instead integration is imperative only for 'immigrants', regardless of their citizenship. This means that even people who possess German citizenship, since they were born and raised in Germany are required to integrate. The terminology of 'integration' and the common classification in Germany 'people with migration background' construct them as "strange elements" (Mecheril, 2014, p. 109) independently of their German citizenship. To draw attention to the constructed nature of their 'foreignness' which is implicitly conveyed by this term, Mecheril (1997) introduced the term *Other Germans* (Andere Deutsche) to describe people who grew up in Germany and are predominantly German citizens but do not have a conventional "German history" and are thus considered strangers (p.177). In the following, I will use this term accordingly, unless in passages, where I cite works from other authors using the term immigrant.

The integration discourse is producing an integration imperative that receives its normative force out of the prevalent focus on integration deficits. It is based on predominantly negative narratives about the refusal, failure, or impossibility of integration (Mecheril, 2014). This integration imperative, better conceptualized as assimilation imperative, exercises a strong pressure on the people subjected to it. Yet it also implies the promise that if immigrants successfully integrate, they will no longer be treated as foreigners (Lentin, 2008). Özlem Gezer, a young journalist writing for the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* describes the categorization of immigrants in her article Turkified: "In Germany there are two types of immigrants: model immigrants and problem immigrants. You have to decide early, because switching later is difficult. Over the years, I increasingly became a model immigrant. Almost German" (Gezer, 2013). According to Gezer, becoming a model immigrant enables one to be accepted as almost German. This new trend of not rejecting every immigrant per se anymore, but distinguishing between good and bad immigrants exhibits a clear overlap of two forms of discrimination, namely racism and classism. Several research studies have focused on the predominant group of double-disadvantaged lower class Other Germans. However, little research has focused on those that Gezer referred to as model immigrants: well-educated, assimilated middle class Other Germans born and raised in Germany. In the following section I will review the literature on the former group and explain the relevance of this present study.

Immigration Identity Types

The range of studies dealing with educationally disadvantaged immigrant youth reflects the high prevalence of this phenomenon. In a quantitative study on the educational success of young immigrants Segeritz, Walter and Stanat (2010) determined a trend of downward assimilation in Germany among young immigrants from Turkey. Downward assimilation is conceptualized as assimilation to the lower socio-economic class of the receiving society. Atabay (2012) investigates the identity development of 3rd and 4th generation Turkish immigrant youths from a qualitative psychological perspective. He presents several identity models including the following: religious-traditional, nationalistic oriented, excluded, looser, patchwork, and hybrid identity types. However, the study did not assess the assimilated identity type, because no interviewees belonging to this category were found. Moreover, in a comprehensive study of Germany's relation towards its largest minority of Turkish immigrants, Mandel (2008) stressed the stark inequalities immigrant youth have psychologically. He presents several identity models ranging from "religious-traditional" and



“nationalistic oriented identity type” through “excluded” and “looser” identity type, to “patchwork” and “hybrid” identity type. However, the study does not assess the assimilated identity type, because no interviewees belonging to this category were found. Moreover, in a comprehensive study of Germany’s relation towards its largest minority of Turkish immigrants Ruth Mandel (2008) also stresses the stark inequalities immigrant youth have to face in the educational system. Referring to government statistics on educational achievements of immigrant youth from 2004-2005, she points out that three times as many immigrant children leave school with a Hauptschul (secondary) degree, compared to ethnic German students. She highlights a study of Kaya (2001) about Turkish immigrant youth in the neighbourhood Berlin-Kreuzberg who maintains that the hierarchical German educational system reifies their disadvantageous position. Furthermore, in a comparative study of Germany and England, Cohen (2006) draws attention to the educational disadvantages of Turkish immigrants in Germany in an international comparison, a fact that was already established by the PISA-Study in 2000. All in all, these studies highlight the deficits of the tri-partite German school system, and the fact that this system determines the assimilation successes and the opportunities of social advancement among Other German youth.

Differences in educational level influence the levels of assimilation or segregation of immigrants. According to a study conducted by Zentrum für Türkeistudien (Center for studies of Turkey) in 2001 a marginal group of 24,000 Turkish immigrants who are taking part in German higher education, exhibit integrative or assimilative development (Şen, Sauer & Halm, 2001). This supposed link between higher educational level and assimilation success is worth investigating further. Consequently, the focus of the current study will be on this less well-researched group of children from so called “Guest-workers” who are climbing the social ladder through education.

Rationale of the present study

The focus of the current research is: How does the integration discourse and its classification of good and bad immigrants affect well-educated, assimilated young Other Germans? Also, does the promise of acceptance and respect for those who are successful and assimilate hold true, or do they still experience racism?

The first section introduces theory on acculturation strategies that commonly frame the integration discourse. Based on these theoretical concepts the interviewees’ acculturation processes are analyzed. The second section analyses the interviewees’ challenges as assimilated, well-educated “model immigrants”. The final section

summarizes and comments on limitations of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

Over a three-month period in Istanbul, six second- or third-generation Other Germans were interviewed. Their real names are not presented here to preserve their anonymity. The following pseudonyms are used: Leyla, Cenk, David, Mithad, Serhat, and Sefine. Ages ranged from 18 to 26. All of the research participants were born and raised in Germany, possess German citizenship and attended German grammar schools (Gymnasien), with one exception Realschule (secondary school). The interviewees’ parents had all emigrated from Turkey, with two exceptions. One father came from Palestine and one mother from a region in Poland, which belonged to Germany before the First World War. Thus, her ancestors have been ‘ethnic Germans’. By limiting the research population to only participants belonging to the well-educated social class, I selected participants who can be considered well integrated. I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews, which were biographically structured. To avoid a stiff researcher-interviewee relation, I asked the interviewees to freely narrate their life stories starting with childhood, family, friends, and adolescence. When they touched upon experiences of various forms of exclusion, inclusion, othering and belonging I posed further, more specific questions regarding their relation to Germany, racism, and their reactions towards it.

RESULTS

Section 1: Assimilation through education: Stories of success

Acculturation Strategies

Berry (1997) developed a four-dimensional model of acculturation, which distinguishes between four strategies of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation/segregation, and marginalization. The preferred mode of acculturation of immigrants can be determined by their answers to the two following questions: How much do you value the maintenance of your own cultural identity and how much do you value the relationship with majority society? (Zick et al., 2001). Berry identifies assimilation as the option, where individuals identify more strongly with another culture than their original one. Separation or segregation, the latter implying pressure by the dominant culture, is pursued when upholding one’s original culture.



Maintaining both original culture and interacting with other cultures results in integration. However, as mentioned above, integration is defined as a reciprocal relationship, in which the dominant culture must be willing to adopt parts of the incoming culture as well. It requires “mutual accommodation” (Berry, 1997, p. 10) of the two or more cultures and is thus only possible if both societies are open towards each other and actively engage in the integration process. Assimilation instead is a much more individual process, for which no active cooperation of the dominant society is needed (Berry, 1997). As outlined above in the German context integration is better understood as unidirectional assimilation, since efforts to integrate are exclusively demanded from Other Germans (Mecheril, 2014).

A study by the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Studies found an increasing preference for assimilation and the identification as German on part of the immigrants. In line with this Zick, Wagner, van Dick and Petzel (2001) found a general preference among immigrants for integration or assimilation instead of segregation. Reviewing several studies, the authors also showed that German majority society expects immigrants to either assimilate or segregate: “Members of the receiving society, like politicians, seem to expect that immigrants will assimilate into German practices and culture, or, if immigrants reject doing so, they are expected to live separately and then to leave the country” (Zick et al., 2001, p. 549-550). The Integration barometer from 2014, an annual survey which assesses the German public opinion on the integration of first and second generation immigrants, shows that despite multicultural policy changes on the state level the integration debate as reflected in the media is still based on integration deficits thereby reproducing stereotypes among the public (Sachverständigen Rat deutscher Stiftungen für Integration und Migration, 2014). The preference for assimilation of Other Germans might be motivated by the attempt to prove these negative attitudes wrong. Other Germans are under high pressure created by the German integration discourse, which judges them permanently on their achieved level of integration and classifies them into better and worse integrated immigrants (Yildiz, 2005).

Identification, belonging and language: Evidence for a successful assimilation

In the case of the interviewees of this study, the majority identify themselves as more German than Turkish and/or locate their home (Heimat) in Germany. Regarding their relation to Germany, their sense of belonging and home, all of them seem to have assimilated in Germany. Leyla, Cenk and David identify themselves as exclusively German. For example, Leyla describes herself as more German than some Germans, due to her identification with

certain typical German values:

Leyla: *I couldn't live here (in Istanbul). Besides I am much too much German: this bureaucracy, this lack of punctuality, this organization, I couldn't stand it.*

Researcher: *You do see yourself more like a German?*

Leyla: *Yes indeed. I am more German than some other Germans.*

Leyla negatively evaluates the Turkish bureaucracy, the lack of punctuality and organization of its citizens in comparison to Germany to explain why she prefers to live in Germany. By identifying with certain typical German values she portrays herself much too German to live in Turkey for a longer period of time. Similarly, Cenk states that he would never feel as at home in Turkey as he feels in Germany and that he identifies himself as German: “Well I feel at home in Germany and as I have already mentioned, I do not feel Turkish, I feel German.” Likewise, David explains his feeling to be German in this way: “I feel German, given my poor Turkish language skills, that I always stayed in Germany, that my parents always spoke German, I do not really feel being Turkish”. Similarly, Mithad also feels German and does not have a strong relation to the country of origin of his parents. His mother belongs to the Arab minority in Turkey and does not really identify herself as Turkish. Mithad has never visited Palestine, the native country of his father. Thus, he concludes, he has no other place to identify with than Germany.

Mithad: *Definitely, I am German. I mean German is my only, my first language. For sure, and since I am not gifted with language skills, this won't change that quickly.*

In this quote Mithad ties his identity to his language skills, and probably includes his cultural skills. He identifies himself as German by way of an exclusion procedure. Since he has no other places, languages or cultures he is accustomed to, he must be German. Sefine says she is half Turkish half German, yet she locates her home and permanent residence in Germany: “Berlin is my hometown”. By pointing out that her heimatstadt (hometown) is Berlin she expresses her sense of belonging to this city. Berlin is the place where she was born, grew up and feels at home. In contrast she maintains that she would not like to live in Turkey permanently.

Moreover, for all of the interviewees, German is the language they know best. For two of them, it is the only language they speak. Half of them were predominantly



raised in German. Mithad's parents communicate sometimes in Arabic (his Turkish mother comes from the Arabic speaking minority), but he merely understands it. Leyla (until she was 9) and David (until he was 4) only learned Turkish from their fathers during their childhood; Leyla still knows how to speak Turkish whereas David forgot. Interestingly, David stated that he was raised German, instead of saying that he was raised IN German: "I never faced integration problems because I was raised German". Saying this, he stresses the influence of German culture in his upbringing. In his opinion, this is the reason why he was able to integrate so well and why he never had to face any problems or racism. Talking about racist experiences of a friend, who faced discrimination on the labour market due to his non-German sounding name, he explains that for his parents it was very important to give their son a German name. Thereby he implies that they probably wanted to avoid such racist discriminations. Similarly, Leyla's mother was concerned that her daughter acquired good German language skills. Leyla reports that German was the primary medium of communication at home: "My mother wanted, that I would become a good pupil and that I could speak German well, thank god that she did this, if not I don't know where I would have ended up." Also Sefine's parents were concerned with her assimilation, and the resulting avoidance of problems, when they advised her not to wear a headscarf as long as she was studying or looking for a job. These examples clearly demonstrate the emphasis the interviewee's parents laid on their successful assimilation. All of them sent their children to grammar schools (Gymnasium), with one exception secondary school (Realschule) and several interviewees point out how important their children's education is regarded by their parents.

Distance from "Turkish communities" and being an "exceptional Turk"

Throughout the interviews a tendency to distance oneself from negatively perceived and stereotyped "Turkish communities" and instead to assume the role of an "exceptional Turk" (Çelik, 2005) was observable. Similar to Serhat, Leyla also encountered segregated lifestyles of "Turkish communities", from which she distances herself:

Leyla: In Berlin you find a whole street where there are more Turkish shops than here (in Istanbul), there is the supermarket, the Turkish hairdresser and you walk along and say to yourself I thought I was in Germany... The German Turks never have adapted anywhere, they neither speak proper German nor proper Turkish. [...] They have brought along their Turkish village to Germany.

This statement expresses her astonishment about Turkish immigrants, who are living a completely Turkish lifestyle in Germany. She further criticizes them for not adapting to and still living in traditionally Turkish ways. Her statements refer to a wider perception of so called 'Parallelsellschaften' (parallel societies) that are represented in public debate as ethnic homogenous groups, which separate themselves spatially and socio-culturally from majority society. The term implies strong criticism against the lifestyles of immigrants and entails the demand for cultural assimilation. What is often neglected in public debate is that such voluntary separation or involuntary segregation is the result of the absence and failure of integration policies (Belwe, 2005). Since these Parallelsellschaften have a very bad reputation in German majority society, it seems quite likely that Leyla is trying to distance herself from these communities which she perceives as segregated and traditional.

The attempt to differentiate oneself from negative stereotypes of Turkish immigrants and to distance oneself from the immigrant community goes along with adopting a role of "exceptional Turk" or "untypical immigrant" (Çelik, 2005, p. 91). Çelik (2005) defines this term in her ethnographic study about Turkish immigrants in Germany: Her interviewees evaluate themselves and their family situation as untypical in comparison with the Turkish community. They draw a line between themselves and the negatively perceived 'other' Turkish immigrants. Çelik (2005) describes this as a process of internal differentiation that stems from the quest for recognition of an individual personality against the generalization into homogenous group behavior. This role of exception is also offered to them in the immigration discourse, i.e., by German majority society who regards them as untypical (Çelik, 2005).

In line with this role of an "untypical immigrant" Sefine explains that due to her educational status and language skills she is seen as an exception. She refers to statements which people articulated in amazement about the coexistence of her headscarf and her education.

Sefine: The only thing I really found stupid in my whole life, hm [sic] is that people found it strange, no that people find it great and extraordinary, since it was said "Sefine with the headscarf" succeeded in getting the grammar school degree and on top Sefine with the headscarf goes to university but oddly enough she studies Islamic sciences...Again one is put in a box saying that Turks or respectively Muslims generally don't succeed in anything, but that I am a kind of miracle who succeeded.

Sefine clearly dislikes the position she is put into,



describing it as “disgusting”, since she recognizes the racism behind it. This statement shows her awareness of the fact that this exceptional status does not undermine the general stereotypes against immigrants. Çelik (2005) explains that the adoption of the role of exception does not challenge, but instead only separates exceptional Turks from the negatively perceived immigrant community. So-called exceptional Turks are positioned at the margins of Turks and Germans, but cannot completely overcome the status of the Other, since they are still identified as immigrants (Çelik, p. 91, 2005). The well-educated, assimilated interviewees assume a role of exception, since segregation and low socio-economic status are expected to be the norm for Other Germans in Germany. As we have seen, this ability to assume the role of a model immigrant is clearly facilitated by their language skills and educational status that accompany their assimilation. However, this status as model immigrant is usually not conferred to the interviewees automatically. The following section shows how hard they have to work for it.

The ability to prove or defend oneself against prejudice and stereotypes

In the cases of Leyla, Cenk, and Mithad, their language skills and education played a decisive role in enabling them to prove or defend themselves in situations where their Germanness is challenged by prejudices. Mithad and Leyla both describe the need to prove themselves at their workplaces. Describing his civil service and how he was treated by his colleagues and his superiors Mithad maintains that he generally has a feeling of being disadvantaged.

Mithad: I have the feeling that I always have to start with a negative handicap. And I first have to work, work, work before I am somehow ... [People say] “Ah okay actually he is quite okay”, although I do work much harder. Thus if I wouldn't have to start with this negative handicap, I needn't, I probably would be regarded as super positive.

Due to this social disability that is imposed upon him by stereotypes of laziness or general inability of immigrants, he always has to work much harder compared to his white German colleagues, to earn recognition. He does not start off at an equal level, but has to prove his abilities and skills before he becomes respected. Leyla also talks about the need to prove herself in the context of employment. She recalls a situation in which her potential employer did not want to give her a job. However, she was able to convince him to give her a chance to show that she is different from what he expects: “I was saying, give me the opportunity and I will show you to be different.”

Both, Mithad and Leyla referred to the importance of their education and language skills for proving themselves. Talking about the difficulties of Lebanese students, who come to Germany for education, Mithad stresses that they are really suffering from negative prejudices. In contrast he has the advantage of being able to prove himself, due to his language skills. Leyla asserts that without her German language skills and with a more traditional Turkish upbringing she would probably neither be able to prove herself, nor live the life she does.

Mithad: I am able to speak German. If need be I can prove myself, but for the others it is different.

Leyla: For people who did not learn that, who were not brought up like this, it is obviously super bad. I don't want to imagine how it would have been if we would have spoken Turkish all day long and if my parents hadn't split up, (then) everything would have come totally different. And perhaps I would sit here with a headscarf and preach the sayings of the Qur'an to you.

Similarly, Cenk believes that not everyone has the ability to defend him or herself. In his statement it is clear that his ability to defend himself is directly related to his opportunity of assimilation.

Cenk: However I was able to defend myself. That it was the thing. Certainly there are single cases when people couldn't defend themselves and said: “Yes I am Turkish and fully moved to the Turkish side.”

He believes that other Turkish immigrants, who have not the skills to defend themselves, are likely to identify more with the Turkish culture and live segregated.

Due to the interviewees' assimilation and education, which enable them to prove or defend themselves, few of the interviewees experience overt forms of racism on a regular basis. Mithad states that he didn't experience any form of xenophobia for instance at school, because he did not provide a target for attack, since he always adapted himself:

Mithad: The crucial thing is, that I rarely provided targets for attacks. For example, that I would be religious or something like this so that some points of friction would exist or something like, to which at a time it surely would come. But in this respect I was totally uncomplicated. You know what I mean? I was always able to adapt.



The ability and willingness to adapt to the dominant norms of majoritarian German society protected him from explicit racist offences or insults. In a similar way, David maintains that he was never confronted with any kind of integration problem, due to his German upbringing (for quote see above).

The only experiences of explicitly racist insults that Serhat and Sefine encountered happened when they were resisting complete assimilation. In Sefine's case the insults are clearly directed against her religious affiliation, which is marked through her headscarf. She explains that with the rise of the anti-Islamic movement PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) people in the street treat her differently.

Sefine: It was simply my headscarf and this is really sad that people attack other people in such a way just because of a scarf or because of religion. If somebody attacks me in such a way with words then I can expect another one attacking me with a fist the day after tomorrow.

In this quote she identifies her headscarf, symbolizing her Muslim faith, as the only target on basis of which people are attacking her verbally but maybe soon also physically. The headscarf is the only marker, which signifies her differentness in relation to German majority society. It is a form of resistance against complete assimilation. Consequently, members of German majority society, who demand absolute assimilation, attack this symbol of difference. Similarly, Serhat only encountered overt racism while playing soccer on the street of his village with exclusively Other German friends. In these matches sometimes things got damaged and were causing nuisance among the neighbors, who started to insult them as "these Turks who break everything". The appearance of a large group of Turkish immigrants triggers associations with negative images of segregated communities and stereotypes. In both cases it is either a symbol signifying difference or the appearance of bigger group of 'Turks', which causes arousal and triggers openly racist insults. This points to the conclusion that indeed Other Germans are mostly subjected to overt racism, when they show forms of resistance against assimilation. Due to their high level of assimilation and adaption to majoritarian German norms the interviewees are generally able to avoid overt racism. Yet they experience a different, more subtle and covert form of racism that conveys to them a feeling of exclusion and foreignness. These experiences and their implications will be dealt with in the following section.

Section 2: The denial of racism and its covert nature

Implications of covert racism: Feelings of exclusion and rootlessness

Almost all interviewees, with the only exception of David, describe feelings of exclusion and rootlessness. Almost all of them identify themselves as German and/or locate their home in Germany. However, when talking about racist insults they all report that it conveys to them a feeling of foreignness and exclusion. Cenk recalls:

Cenk: Yes exactly for this reason one also feels foreign. For this reason one says, "Hey I am not at all how I just feel". [...] Exactly for this reason, am I, does one also feel excluded.

Several of the interviewees describe a feeling of rootlessness that is caused by the lack of acceptance as being German by majoritarian German society and also as being Turkish by majoritarian Turkish society. This is a wider phenomenon, which is known in Turkey under the motto "burada almanci, orada yabanci" (literally translated as "Germaner here, foreigner there" "Deutschländer hier, Ausländer dort"). Sefine describes the phenomenon as follows:

Sefine: You go to Turkey for six weeks or even for a year or for the rest of your life, but you always will be the German, the Turk from Germany. That means you have money that means you had had a better life, own much more than a normal Turk and this of course is disgusting. Also at the place where my grandparents live we aren't regular Turks, we also will never be, because everybody knows that we come from Germany. Hence we never belong [anywhere] to one hundred percent, regardless of how you feel yourself. And sometimes it's the same here [in Germany]. Regardless how much I feel I belong to this place, it is the way other persons, how the society, how the people see me that determines how I start to feel. Only for this reason I can never feel one hundred percent to belong anywhere.

Similar to Mithad, Sefine describes how the attitude of German majority society in Germany as well as the attitude of Turkish majoritarian society in Turkey sometimes determines her own sense of belonging. Since she generally feels rejected in Turkey as Turkish and also sometimes in Germany as German she can never completely belong anywhere. By expressing her feeling of belonging in percentages, it gets clear, that although she



feels at home in Germany and also very comfortable in Turkey there is still a little bit missing to feel completely at home. This points to the conclusion that despite of their assimilation efforts the interviewees still feel partially foreign, due to the exclusion they experience in both societies. Cenk describes the confusion that Other Germans experience when stigmatized as foreign by both the Turkish and the German societies, as a vicious cycle challenging their identity: “And just imagine here you are stigmatized as German and if you go back to Germany you are stigmatized as foreigner. Now people really need to know, this is a real vicious cycle, in which you are. What am I now, who am I actually?”

In Mithad’s case this rootlessness is apparent in his feeling that he does not really know where he belongs. He moved first from Stuttgart to Berlin and then further to Istanbul in search for the holy land. He describes the expectations he had when moving to Berlin:

Mithad: I came with a real, I was very naïve, with a dreamy wish, a pipe dream, in the sense that, I would find my holy land. Really like “now I move to Berlin and there everyone is easy going and open minded, especially tolerant and there I will completely merge and I will ... especially, there I’ll find people totally ... people who are completely free in their minds and understanding and things like that.” So to speak the very contrast to Stuttgart.

Mithad’s decision to go to Berlin was influenced by the search for a more tolerant and open-minded society where he would merge and not stick out anymore due to the city’s cultural and ethnic diversity.

These moments of feeling uprooted, not belonging or being foreign indicate the persistence of racism in the construction of immigrants. Racialization of Germanness still seems to be determinative of who passes as German and who does not (Müller, 2011). This conclusion is also supported by David’s experiences. Since he is the only one who does not experience any form of racism he is also the only one who contends that he does not experience a feeling of foreignness. He also knows about the phenomenon of being a foreigner in both countries but he maintains that it does not apply to him: “Many answer, that they feel Turkish in Germany and German in Turkey. With me this is not the case I just feel German.” In David’s case it seems that his German name, his German education and upbringing protected him completely from racism. Another reason, which he however does not emphasize, might be the fact that he is the only interviewee with an ethnically German mother. Thus he has a fairly lighter skin-color than at least the other male interviewees. This points to the prevailing importance of ethnicity in the construction of

Germanness. Only when immigrants mix ethnically with ethnic Germans they are perceived as German and can avoid racism completely.

Sensitive or paranoid?: The denial of racism and its effects on Other Germans

Strikingly when talking about incidents that make them feel different or foreign, the interviewees do not use the term racism. It seems that they associate racism only with explicitly racist insults or offenses. For instance, Mithad describes how he feels frequently observed in the metro and looked at strangely. In this context he maintains: “Nothing ever happened to me, but this is simply my world.” By pointing out that nothing (serious) ever happened to him, Mithad makes a distinction between extreme offenses and the daily experiences, which characterize his life. He does not identify strange looks or subtle comments as racism. Essed (2002), who coined the term everyday racism to describe such incidents explains that these “injustices [are] recurring so often that they are almost taken for granted, nagging, annoying, debilitating, seemingly small, injustices one becomes to expect” (p. 202). A distinguishing feature of everyday racism is that it is often expressed in covert ways and thus often not acknowledged as racism. Racist attitudes are often exclusively attributed to people with low socio-economic and educational status and racism among members of the middle or upper class is usually not acknowledged (Scherchel, 2011). However, everyday forms of discrimination and negative attitudes toward immigrants in Germany are generally expressed by citizens from the center of society (Zick et. al, 2001). Among well-educated people who try to comply with norms of political correctness, racist discrimination is more indirect and covert and therefore less acknowledged. A young Muslim woman reported this observation in a newspaper interview:

The perfidious thing is: As soon as people are well educated, the discrimination only becomes more indirect, hidden. One does not get an employment or only a Job without client’s contact, one is not allowed to be on the company pictures and all sort of things. But no one says it into your face that it is because of your headscarf. Against this it is much harder to defend yourself, than against open hostilities (Boukraf in Halser, 2015).

In this context Scherchel (2011) states that racism is expressed in “socially differentiated” and “milieu specific” forms (p.123). Among people possessing a higher educational and socio-economic status racism becomes more covert, which is much more difficult to detect and consequently to challenge.



Covert racism and the failure to recognize are enhanced by the prevalence of a denial of racism. After the era of National Socialism, the use of the terminology of race and racism became a taboo in the German mainstream but also in the academic discourse. Based on an agreement found by a post-war UNESCO conference “the concept of race as a description of human relations and social processes was abandoned” (Mecheril & Scherchel, 2011, p.49). Until recently racial differentiation and by implication racism was almost exclusively related to Nazism and is therefore considered to belong to the past. Goldberg (2006) contends, “There is no racism because race was buried in the rubble of Auschwitz” [...] Hence the silence about race today, its censoriousness, its denial (p. 337-338). Consequently, the terminology of race has been erased from the German language. If racism is acknowledged to still exist, it is confined to the margins of society as a problem of right-wing extremism. Using the term racism in order to describe phenomena not directly linked to Nazism is considered to risk trivializing and relativizing the Holocaust and to overrate contemporary discrimination practices (Mecheril and Scherchel, 2011).

Thus, covert forms of racism coupled with denial of racism might explain why none of the interviewees use the term racism to describe their experiences and why they are so careful to not overrate their experiences. Throughout the interviews there is a general tendency to relativize and/or trivialize racism. Mithad relativizes his experiences of racism, by adding that he might be paranoid, fantasizing or sensitive. When describing situations in the metro or a nightclub where he feels observed and looked at strangely, he questions his own perception by wondering if he is paranoid:

Mithad: Now this might sound a bit drastically depicted, maybe I am, I always have to add, maybe I am also a bit sensitive, you know?...When I, I actually had the impression that when I enter the metro, I was somehow watched. Am I paranoid? I don't know. I just had the feeling, I enter this [metro], I am somehow exotic, but I think in a rather negative sense.

With such comments he questions his own ability to recognize racism. Instead he looks for explanations of his perception of racism in himself. He might be the one being sensitive or paranoid. Thus he makes himself responsible for the racism he experiences. It seems that he knows that his annoyance about these racist experiences is not accepted by German majority society. Talking to me as a white representative of German society, he probably expects me to judge him for exaggerating and overrating his racist experiences. Such kind of judgments he even knows from

his friends whom he “loves extremely” (über alles) but who tell him not to make such fuss about it. They got into fights about ‘over-exaggerated’ perceptions of discrimination, when Mithad felt uncomfortable going out partying. Mithad points out that even though his friends are also from different ethno-cultural backgrounds he experiences more racism, due to his physical appearance (black, curly hair and darker skin color), which marks his ethnic Arab origins.

Just like Mithad, Serhat talks about the over-interpretation of racist experiences. He maintains that racist experiences remind him that he is different, which in turn makes him attentive for it and might cause over-interpretation on his part. Upon my question he explains that over-interpretation refers to seeing racist discrimination where it actually is not present. He gives the example of being deprived of entering a nightclub, which might be an act of racist discrimination but could also be motivated by different reasons. Mithad describes this as “seeing something, where nothing is” and as perceiving an appropriate punishment as racist discrimination: “If you simply f*ck up something and then say ‘yeah because I am a foreigner’ then, to be fair, you also need to regard it like it is.” This perception that immigrants are sometimes likely to over-interpret acts as racism conforms to a common accusation from majority society that people of color relate everything to their skin color and playing the race card (Lewis, 2001) calls it. Lewis explains that by accusing a person of color of playing the race card racist incidents are deracialized and thereby trivialized to be like any other insult: “such a mode of addressing racist events makes it seem as if the victim is the one with the problem rather than the perpetrator, as if they are making a big deal out of nothing” (p. 791). It seems as if Mithad and Serhat have adopted the assumption that racialized subjects unjustifiably portray themselves as victims of racism. They have adapted to a discourse in which racism is denied and trivialized. Thus, when I asked Serhat for racist experiences he first maintains that he cannot recall any specific situation:

Serhat: Mh, (is thinking) now and then one has such a feeling. But honestly, I am not really sure when being asked straight forward. Spontaneously I can't think of anything, actually everything was partially okay. Yeah and some things one can really over interpret. Maybe it was a bad moment, in which somebody simply said no. At least there was one teacher, who never favored foreigners. That I noticed.

What is striking in this quote is how he describes his teacher as “not favoring foreigners”. After my insisting questions he explains that this teacher obviously racially discriminated a fellow student of color. It becomes clear



that Serhat also had conflicts with this teacher, but he seems reluctant to contend that he was also racially discriminated against.

In contrast Sefine clearly recognizes racist experiences, but also has difficulties to find a language to put them in words. She compares Aachen to Berlin in regard to levels of racism.

Sefine: There are headscarves as well, but obviously far less. It's a smaller city, less multicultural than here [Berlin]. Therefore it is stranger to the people and therefore people look completely differently [at you]. And that's why people are so differently tolerant. [...] Hence in this regard I also feel really uncomfortable in Aachen, I must say. It is totally different compared to here [Berlin], however it might be that I only met weird people.

In this quote Sefine's has difficulties to pinpoint her impressions. Instead of talking about racism, she circumscribes the phenomenon with terms like "differently tolerant". With this circumscription she trivializes the behaviour of members of German majority society. She seems anxious to justify the racist looks and treatment, by referring to a smaller immigrant population and consequently less contact with women wearing headscarves. She also immediately relativizes her experiences by adding that she just might have met the wrong people.

Essed (2002) explains this phenomenon of trivializing and relativizing racist discriminations by pointing to the discretization of voices of discontent, which is inherent to the denial of racism. Accusations or complaints by victims of racism are often dismissed as sensitive or paranoid. According to Essed (2002), a fear of not being heard or taken seriously is preventing people to speak out against racism: "Everyday racism, though felt persistently, is often difficult to pinpoint. As a result these microinjustices become normal, fused into familiar practices, practices taken for granted, attitudes and behaviors sustaining racial injustices". In line with this Mecheril (1997) observes that racialized subjects lack the language to conceptualize their experiences as racism. Not speaking out against these forms of everyday racism might also be an effect of their assimilation efforts. Endeavoring to be accepted by German society as equal members, the interviewees are thus not likely to raise accusations of structural racism against German majority society. By portraying themselves as victims of racism they would again draw a dividing line between themselves and German majority society. Instead, the interviewees depict German majority society quite positively, justifying their behavior or putting the blame upon themselves. This conclusion is

supported by the findings of Zick et al. (2001) that positive attitudes of minority members towards majority society enhance their acculturation success.

Racism as an ordering principle

Essed (2002) points out that everyday racism needs to be recognized as a structural phenomenon. It is crucial to detect all these seemingly discrete microinjustices to identify them as effects of an underlying structure of racism. "When racism is transmitted in routine practices that seem 'normal', this can only mean that racism is often not recognized, not acknowledged, let alone problematized" (Essed, p. 214). Mecheril (1997) shows that even the victims of racism are so entangled in the racist discourse that they are prone to partially reproduce it. Exactly this phenomenon can be observed in the interviewees' attitudes towards segregated immigrant communities through which they partially reproduce the negative stereotypes. In their struggle to differentiate themselves from the negative stereotypes they are partially agreeing with and perpetuating the stereotypes. Sefine describes the stereotype of Turks or Muslims in general as lazy and not able to achieve anything (for quote see above). She is upset that German society generalizes all Turkish and/or Muslim immigrants into this stereotype, yet maintains that it is true that the stereotype applies to some people.

Sefine: That's what I always find a bit stupid, but I also can understand it a bit, because there are really those. But this constant lumping together and equating each and everybody, that's simply stupid.

In line with her statement, Mithad also talks about the reality of "aggressive Turks" and that he understands people who are afraid of them, since he is as well. However, it is also observable that he knows that he is reproducing a racist stereotype, which he actually rejects. Thus he tries to put the stereotype of "aggressive Turks" into perspective by stating that there are also aggressive Germans or aggressive Russians. Mithad and Sefine talk very reflectively about these stereotypes and are careful not to generalize. In their endeavor to prove to German society their intention and ability to assimilate, they have to distance themselves from negative stereotypes and the reality of segregation. Mecheril (1997) explains that Other Germans grow up in a German context where a racial discursive order is all-pervasive. To be able to socially and functionally act in this context they have to follow the rules of the discourse, which attributes negative stereotypes to immigrants. By trying to differentiate themselves from these negative stereotypes of segregated communities, they adopt a role of exception, which is offered to them by the integration discourse. However this role of exception does



not challenge the racial distinctions between ethnic Germans and Other Germans. Instead it reproduces it. Mecheril (1997) refers to this mechanism as the “racism trap” (p. 197).

Accordingly, racism must not be understood as a personal attitude of some individuals but as a central ordering principle that structures the societal relation between groups and their individual group members (Lentin, 2008). Mecheril and Scherchel conceptualize racism as a discourse, which produces the binary categories of foreign and non-foreign, white and non-white. The core principle of racism consists of the “denigrating and disadvantaging binary, differentiating between a national-ethnic-cultural we and a non-we” (Scharatow, Melter, Leiprecht & Mecheril, 2011, p.11). The construction of who belongs to a nation and does not, i.e., national identity, is based on this racist principle. In Germany whiteness constitutes implicitly the national identity. Whiteness is taken for granted and thus disappears from sight in a society, which denies its own raciality (Müller, 2011). Consequently, it is key when examining effects of racism to not only look at racist offences against people considered to be foreign, but also to focus on the ways in which these people are constructed as foreign in the first place. This latter effect of racism, namely the construction of non-Germanness, is the one from which the interviewees are suffering.

This racial construction of their non-Germanness pervades throughout the integration discourse and treats German citizens who have been born and raised in Germany as foreign elements. Lentin (2008) argues that the unilateral conception of integration (i.e., assimilation) is premised on a racist principle of the superiority of European values:

There is no need for Europe to integrate its outsiders. This is unnecessary because Europe upholds values that set Europe apart or above: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. [...] It is perhaps unnecessary to recall that this very assumption is racist in itself because, mirroring whiteness, it holds Europeanness up as the norm and condemns all else to its moral hegemony. What is less evident perhaps is that requiring all to integrate into a Europe, which denies its raciality – past and present- is an impossibility.

The racialization of Europeanness asserts the superiority of white western peoples and simultaneously denies this racialization. This added denial makes complete assimilation a hopeless endeavor because, in the end, no one can assimilate skin color. According to Lentin (2008), the endeavor of Other Germans to integrate necessarily goes along with denying the significance of their experience of race. They need to comply with the European discourse of non-raciality to be accepted by German majority society. However, even then they will not be recognized as

completely German in a country where a racialized understanding of Germanness sustains whiteness as the norm (Müller, 2011).

DISCUSSION

Reflections and implications

Given that racism is an ordering principle constantly discursively reproduced by every member of society, (including Other Germans), it follows naturally that researchers also take part in this reproduction. The fact that I am a privileged, white, educated woman probably influenced how interviewees reported on their experiences with racism. Taking into consideration that talking about racism is taboo in Germany, it is likely that the interviewees were very careful not to make any harsh accusation of German society as racist. They probably would have talked differently about their experiences of racism to a person of color or a person with immigration in his or her background.

The organization of the study was problematic. By means of these interviews I asked the interviewees again (like the German majority discourse does regularly) to talk about their role as immigrants in German society. Thereby I was pointing to their immigrant status that I actually wish to deconstruct. Even though I did not ask explicitly about their experiences with racism, they could figure out that this was one of my interests. Most of the interviewees were already aware of what this interview would be about, because I told them that I chose them due to their immigration background. They all expected me to ask or they started to talk about without my prompting (1) their successful assimilation, and (2) their racist experiences without me asking for it. Thus, throughout the interview they made efforts to prove to me that they are not stereotypical ‘bad’ immigrants and also are not victims, despite their experiences of racism. This shows that they are struggling with racism in two ways. First, due to society’s general denial of racism, these people have difficulties expressing their experiences of racism. Second, the few people (including me) who are listening and who are attentive to racism tend to target racialized topics and thereby accentuate their immigrant status. This dilemma was addressed in a newspaper interview in the TAZ with four Muslim women, all wearing headscarves. After a while one of them points out that she actually does not want to talk about the headscarf topic anymore, because she does not want to assume the victim’s role any longer. She believes that even though there are many prejudices and problems, she does not see any point in talking about it. Through such talks the topic only gets artificially blown up and they are reduced to their headscarves. Instead she wanted to be invited to an expert talk as a representative of her



profession (Boukraf, 2015).

Contrary to this perception of fuelling the stereotypes and reducing Other Germans to their immigrant status, there is the assumption that it is necessary to create space for self-narration and affirmation of individual perspectives. In this context Mandel (2008) points to the importance of recording individual stories: “Whereas the dominant German narrative of ethnicizing Turkishness would often homogenize Turks into a monolithic unit, when examined from the perspective of these ethnicized subjects, a fundamentally different picture appears, one of contestation, complexity, and diversity” (p. 2). In this sense, I have tried to capture all the ambivalences, successes and difficulties that characterized the interviews.

Furthermore, contrasting the statement by Boukraf that she does not want to talk about discrimination, most of the interviewees seemed to enjoy sharing their experiences. The first two interviews and in generally the idea for this study emerged out of informal conversations, in which the interviewees started to talk about their experiences, when I mentioned my field of study. In particular, in the case of Mithad, who was most affected by racism, the interview appeared to enable him to talk about his resentment to a person who takes him seriously. Consequently, the setup of the study needs to be judged ambivalently: On the one hand it clearly reproduces the problematic categorization of ethnic Germans and immigrants. On the other hand, it creates a space, where interviewees can express their own narrative, which counteracts the homogenizing narrative of Turkish immigrants.

CONCLUSIONS

This research paper set out to scrutinize the unilateral integration demands on Other Germans and its implicit promise of the acceptance as equal citizens by German majority society. The overall successful assimilation of the interviewees was largely enabled by their high educational status. However, a closer look at the many challenges they are facing points to the fact that, despite their assimilation efforts, they are not unconditionally accepted as equal citizens. While being able to generally evade overt racism in forms of offenses or explicit insults, they are still experiencing feelings of exclusion and rootlessness, which reflect a subtler, covert form of racism typical for higher educated classes. A racialized understanding of Germanness (upholding whiteness as the norm) creates a ceiling which is the last barrier depriving the interviewees of the recognition as equal German citizens. Yet the German majority society’s denial of their own raciality impedes the interviewees from conceptualizing and talking about their feelings of racism. Well-educated, assimilated Other Germans, who want to be recognized as equal citizens by the German majority society, understandably do not want to accuse the German

majoritarian society of structural racism. Nevertheless, through the analysis of the interviewees’ qualitative data, this study affirmed their experiences as being part of an existing, structural problem of racism. Collecting these experiences of microinjustices and assembling them as parts of a bigger picture helps to understand these experiences from a structural perspective. That is, these instances are not discrete practices by racist individuals; these instances reflect a racist order that categorizes people living on German territory as Germans and immigrants.

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