

CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING: AN ANALYSIS OF IMMIGRANTS' INTEGRATION BELIEFS AND MEMBERSHIP MEANING IN SOUTH-WEST GERMANY

STEFAN IMMERFALL
Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd
University of Education
stefan.immerfall@pb-gmuend.de

Abstract: Germany has the highest number of immigrants in Europe. Changes in immigration and citizenship laws have intended to make Germany an attractive destination for skilled immigrant workers. The accentuated focus on the economic efficiency of migration, however, leaves open the question of how Germany's national identity is living up to the immigrant situation. Based on face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (N=45), this question is probed through the eyes of first and second generation immigrants in south-west Germany. Perceptions of social and affective integration, group identifications and possibilities of de-differentiating native-immigrant distinctions are studied in detail. While a few respondents mention instances of personal discrimination and most are at ease with their life in Germany, even fewer see themselves as German without further qualification. Even though there are hints of a partial disintegration of the fault lines between immigrants' self and what they perceive as "German", their answers provide little indication of an emergence of a new inclusive narrative of Germaneness. Germany's national identity still needs to broaden its understandings of "what it means to be a German".

Keywords: Migrants; German Identity; Belonging; Social Integration; Boundaries; Hyphenated Identity.

INTRODUCTION

All societies display, construct, uphold and at times alter social distinctions between segments of the population. Migration background may be such an important distinction. Although rhetoric often refers to integration as a two-way process, most of the time it is immigrants who bear the burden of integration (Alba and Foner 2015). While keeping the imbalance of power between immigrants and the national majority in defining and guarding identity boundaries in mind, it is nonetheless necessary to study migrant's alterations of boundary perceptions as well (Nowicka

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and Krzyżowski 2016). Integration policies should also consider migrants' diverse identifications and their motives for inclusion (Greenaway et al. 2016).

Germany is a case where subjective national membership boundaries are profoundly in question. It was, and again is, one of countries with the largest intake of immigrants both in numbers and in proportion. Historically, Germany's national identity was imbued with a culturally charged, ethnic discourse. It was only recently that it officially became a self-designated *Einwanderungsland* ("immigration country"; cf. Meier-Braun 2002). The change from denying over ignoring to grudgingly accepting immigration has neither come easy nor without conflicts (Green 2013). This change in "welcoming capacities" is also reflected in mainstream attitudes (Bertelsmanns Stiftung 2015; Mader 2016).

As the German national identity seems to widen its conceptions of who belongs to "us", there is a flourishing discussion on emotionally appealing narratives attractive both to the migrant and the autochthonous population (Foroutan 2014). Even though calls for unifying categories – be they national or otherwise – remain dubious if not taking differences in power relations and exclusionary practices into account, shared collective representations seem nevertheless helpful to facilitate different social groups' getting along with each other (Andrews et al. 2014). A sense of a shared future or of a shared fate motivates to contribute to the common good (Vasta 2013), facilitates civic involvement (Huddy and Khatib 2007), and even yields economic returns (Lancee and Hartung 2012). Scholarly attention to the affective dimension of integration has been nevertheless sparse, however (Antonsich and Matejskova 2015; Simonsen 2016). More research on both mainstreams' and migrants' perceptions of belonging and identity is needed.

This paper seeks to add to the discussion on informal boundary drawing and conceptions of identity¹. Its objects are twofold. First, it elaborates perceptions of belonging, conceptualizations of the host nation and meanings of integration through the eyes of (mostly) second-generation immigrants to Germany. It does this using semi-structured interviews which are intended to give detailed context to questions routinely asked in quantitative surveys on national identity and integration. A second question concerns the nature of subjective group categorizations. How important are

different kinds of identities such as national, ethno-cultural or other categories of membership?

After a brief description of data and methods, feelings of belonging (social und affective integration) and membership meaning (group identifications) are explored in the next two sections. A discussion of alterations of boundaries of belonging (de-differentiating native-immigrant distinctions) is then followed by a brief conclusion.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS

This paper's findings are based on 45 in-depth interviews conducted from Mai to June 2013². The sample is a convenience sample from the Stuttgart area of Southwest Germany. Interviewees had to be adults and having lived in Germany for at least ten years. 24 respondents had migration experience, 21 were second-generation immigrants. We made sure that all larger migrant groups in the area are present (former Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia, Turkish, Italian & Polish background). No claim for representativeness can be made, however. A comparison with the southwest German migration population at large reveals that our sample is slightly younger and more educated. There is also a slight underrepresentation of migrants with a Turkish background (18 per cent in the sample versus 23 per cent in the region)³. Furthermore, the sample area is one of the more wealthy regions in Germany. These limitations should be kept in mind when assessing the results.

There were 28 closed (excluding follow-ups) and 12 open questions⁴. Many of the often used closed-ended questions were presented (also for reasons of comparisons), but in addition we always asked the respondents to give context to their quantitative answers. For instance, a question like "on a scale of 1 to 5, how much to feel attached to Germany" was included, but comments and explications were encouraged. This option was widely utilised by our respondents and more often than not they would offer explanations when refusing to give numerical answers, for instance on the ground that they found a question moot or simplistic. This procedure led to an average interview time of 70 minutes. The transcripts were then arranged within interviewees and topics



to detect patterns of arguments and across interviewees to identify relationships with individual characteristics (Miles et al. 2013).

SOCIAL AND AFFECTIVE INTEGRATION

Social networks are prerequisite for perceptions of having a place in a community (Fuhse 2012). In our sample, half of the five closest friends mentioned are native Germans on average (see Tab. 1). Only six interviewees (13 per cent) said to have no German close friend at all even though the respondents are split whether it is easy to make friends with Germans. Almost half (47 per cent) are active in some sort of ethnically mixed association.

On a scale of five, the average attachment to Germany (2.4) is only slight lower than the one to one's own background (2.5), whatever that may be. Moreover, there is no correlation between the two ($p = 0.10$), meaning that high attachment to one's (subjective) ethnicity does not preclude attachment to the German society or vice versa. Respondents without own migration experience seem to feel slightly more attached to Germany which is in line with recent results based on longitudinal data (Diehl et al. 2016).

When turning to open questions, most respondents emphasise emotional, "romantic" ties with the cultural background of their parents. Only a minority actively distances itself from their parents' ethnoculture, e.g. when they remember dissimilar responsibilities given to boys and girls. 37 year-old Natasha⁷ from Serbia explains her ambivalence: "On the one hand, I enjoy the humour so much. For instance, when we are with relatives we laugh so much, and I see that's my kind of humour. On the other hand, there are issues that just make me mad for instance how they treat children. Children get yelled at so easily, and I say, wow, why does he receive a headslap?".

For a substantial majority, Germany is "Heimat", a German word which only imperfectly translates as "home country". Many respondents mention regional characteristics such as the "Hohenlohe-dialect" (Hohenlohe is a historical region in the north-east of Baden-Württemberg) as tokens of affection. This corresponds to Germany's strong and still vibrant regional tradition. Few see themselves as German without further qualification, however (cf. the section after next).

TAB. 1. *Feelings of belonging: quantitative evidence*

Average number of German friends among five best friends	Feeling attached to (1–5)		Migrants can/cannot be “real Germans”		Careful, not become “too German”		All things being equal, prefer to live in	
	Own ethnic/culture	German society	Can not	Can	Yes	No	Germany	Country of parents
2.5	2.5	2.4	25%	62%	8%	86%	33%	33%

Note: N = 45.

When confronted with vignettes comprising contradictory arguments on the German immigration situation, only a quarter sides with the view that “immigrants never can become “real Germans”, and less than 10 per cent warn co-migrants against becoming “too German”. More seem to agree, however, that German lifestyle endangers family values. “Yes, they [Germans, SI] do seem to communicate so much within their families”, says 27 year old “Italian” Luca. There is a split as to where one would want to live in case the standard of living being the same. A full third, however, declined to answer this question, possibly because the presented alternative seemed to be too farfetched.

Perhaps surprisingly (cf. Kılıç and Menjívar 2013; Witte 2015), few mention instances of personal discrimination. While many respondents narrate instances of what they perceived as unfair treatment, few report of systematic discrimination. In line with Fischer-Neumann (2014), our Turkish background respondents seem to perceive discrimination more often. Yet there are no statements of the kind Hispanic interviewees recount in the U.S. context (Menéndez and Borges 2010) like unfair treatment by police officers on a regular basis or not being served at a store or a restaurant. This is also borne out in a recent quantitative survey in the same area which moreover found feelings of being disadvantaged to decline from the first to the third migrant generation (Fick et al. 2014). The low level of perceived discrimination cannot be explained by the sample’s comparatively high level of education since this group is shown to be highly sensitive to discrimination (Vroome et al. 2014).

IDENTIFICATIONS WITH SOCIAL GROUPS

We probed several possibilities of attachment and belonging (group, nation, region, city, culture, heritage, ethnicity, and religion) and asked our respondents to articulate their views in their own words. Most respondents regard themselves as part of the German mainstream, yet not unequivocally. This is borne out quantitatively in tab. 2, which aggregates principal self-identifications into summary categories. Responses reveal a wide range of subjective memberships including a variety of achieved and ascribed attributes. One's family heritage culture and origin certainly continue to be important reference markers, but not overwhelmingly so. Positive images like "roots" or "youth" are invoked, but also deficiencies like "corruption". Globalised self-references are also less common than the discussion about transmigration and cosmopolitan identity would suggest (Cheng 2014).

Compound identities may not only refer to countries or regions, and they may not always come easy, as painstakingly reflected in the account of 35 year-old Enes: "I lived through a lot of phases. Those identity phases were really heavy [echt krass]. I used to feel completely Turkish, but then there also times when I felt completely German and I didn't want to interact with anything Turkish, that changed a lot. Now I see myself as Muslim. I feel as integral to Islam. But in terms of culture, it is more the German culture. In that respect, I feel as a German because I took a lot from that culture".

Only five interviewees refer to a hyphenated identity ("I am polish-German"). Hyphenated identities based on country of origin or ancestry seem to be less common in Germany than in traditional immigration countries (Deaux 2008). The distribution could also be taken as an indication that the discussion as how to call the second- or third generation German immigrant forfeiting the clumsy "migrant background" has not come to end. This discussion was, among others, advanced by Alice Bota, Khuê Pham and Özlem Topçu (2012). In their autobiographical essay the three journalists proposed "Neue Deutsche" (New German) as a proper designation to self-confidently signal their otherness but at the same their belonging to a changing German nation.

The above variety of self-evoked group attachments hardly squares with the cross-cultural psychological approach developed



Tab. 2. *Main Subjective Group-Membership mentioned*

German region	7
Country/Region/Background of origin	6
Religion	5
Hyphenated	5
Family	4
Human being/cosmopolitan	3
German	3
Sports or political group	2
Life style/sub culture	2
In-between	2
Foreigner	1
None	3
Answer refused	2

Note: N = 45; summary count of answers given to following question: Many people feel attached to certain larger group, such as a nation, a region, a city, a culture, an ethnicity or a religion. How is it with you? What kind of group do you to feel most attached to?

by Berry and others (Berry 1997; Sam and Berry 2010; Berry et al. 2010) according to which immigrants' most important identification can be captured by crossing the dimension of ethnic origin with the national identification. This would lead to four (and four only) acculturation strategies, e.g. marginalization, assimilation, separation, and integration, of which integration is the authors' favored strategy. The subjective memberships given by our respondents cannot be reduced to bi-dimensional combinations of cultural attachments to the society of origin and to the society of settlement, however. Our respondent's capacity to appropriate diverse cultural positions highlights the complexity of acculturation as a "meaning-making process" (Andreouli 2013: 165f.). In line with Andreouli's findings on the negotiations between being



British and being affiliated with one's countries of origin we concur that the broad term "integration" does not account for the different relations that people develop with their family heritage culture and origin and their society of settlement.

BOUNDARIES OF BELONGING AND ITS ALTERATIONS

Many of our interviewees complain about being asked, "Where do you come from?". While this question may express genuine interest, more often than not it is considered as annoying, sometimes with exclusionary undertones. Another grievance concerns mainstream's society condescending indifference against the cultural background of the respondent. As in Witte's sample (Witte 2015) Turkish respondents in particular mention examples when their self-definition as German had been questioned by other Germans for reasons of a lack of command of the German language or because of phenotypical otherness. Nonetheless almost all respondents appreciate life in Germany. They are grateful to their parents for having opened up opportunities greater than their parent generation has had. Some of the positive aspects of life in Germany being mentioned are public safety and order ("Sicherheit und Ordnung"), the state of the economy and a good infrastructure. A majority explicitly conveys high educational aspirations for either themselves or their children. This is in line with other findings but contrasts to public perception (Relikowski et al. 2012; Fick et al. 2014). Some interviewees explicitly talk of a "win-win situation", meaning that they appreciate the opportunities being offered to them and, at the same time, are confident to contribute a great deal to Germany as their new country ("Germany is country where you develop."). This is reflected in 28 year-old "Turkish" Cem's account of his emotional ties to Germany: "Pride. The Germans, but also most people from other nations in Germany, are all in all pretty industrious and hard-working. Including myself. So, it's not only something German but, not difference, Greeks, Russians and what have you. They built a great economy".

When our respondents are probed about their possible otherness in conjunction with what they perceive as "Germaneness" and as typical German attributes, stereotypes come up at first.



Examples are “Bier und Bockwurst”, structure and order, lack of spontaneity, a certain aloofness and narrow-mindedness on the German side but also reliability, tidiness, “get something going” or technical ingenuity. Germans are said to be “appreciative”, “respectful” but also “reserved” and “indifferent”, depending on the respondent’s his or her ethnicity in question. A “derogative” attitude on the interviewee’s ethnic or cultural background is being mentioned less often. In contrast to “typical German” qualities, some respondents would claim attributes like “spontaneity”, “hospitality”, “temper” or “disorder” for themselves. Some interviewees furthermore claim their ethnoculture to be more family-oriented, fond of children and more religious.

Yet, further inquiries reveal the distinction of self and German to be less than clear-cut. “I am pretty German by now”, was mentioned very often in a matter-of-fact way. A 22 years old “Italian” Roberta explains: “Back then [she mentions a conversation with her parents during her time in school, SI], if it was to me, we could have gone back straight away. But now? It seems strange. Going back? It feels funny. We don’t go back. My home is here”.

The expression “I am a mixture” came up many times, too, but again, as in the above question on self-identification, more as a statement without much ado. Still, with the partial exception of Turkish respondents (Becker 2016; Witte 2015), the possibility of boundary transgression is present in most of our interviews. The partial disintegration of fault lines is further attested by the vast majority does not mind their children to marry Germans.

Our cross-sectional data could only partly do justice to the dynamic nature of identification and identity change. An almost natural experimental opportunity to study the mechanisms of identity adaptation has been provided by the short-lived German “option model” of citizenship (2000-14) and its forced-choice situation. Under this model, a child born to non-German (and non-EU) parents automatically received dual citizenship. After the age of 18 and until the end of the 21 year of age, however, it had to decide which citizenship to keep.

Against predictions suspecting deeply disturbing consequences of the choice (Brüggemann and Plüschke 2013), qualitative and quantitative research not only showed that almost all pragmatically opted for German citizenship, but moreover, and more importantly, that the vast majority experienced very little



emotional stress during the decision process (Worbs 2015). Our interviews contribute to providing an explanation for this outcome by demonstrating that national identity is only one of many group categories brought up as subjectively important. Changing citizenship may for many people therefore not touch a vital category of subjective membership.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Interpreting survey responses on questions of identification is not self-evident (Bloemraad 2013). Our research intended to add more detail to perceptions of social and affective integration, group identifications and possibilities of de-differentiating native-immigrant distinctions through in-depth, semi-structured interviews of first and second generation immigrants in south-west Germany (N = 45). Several conclusions may be drawn keeping in mind the limitations of our sample.

Contrary to notions according to which Germany is hostile to immigrants, our data implies that (former) migrants are predominantly at ease with their life in Germany. Also, contrary to Germany's previous preoccupation with the two-stools-notion within the intercultural educational debate (Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz 2010), very few feel caught between two stools or say they belong nowhere. When asked to articulate their views on attachment, belonging and identification in their own words, nation and ethnicity are only two of many subjective memberships brought up. This result clearly speaks against the notion of a compartmentalised self-identity and points to its construction and reconstruction over time (cf. Enes' elaboration cited above). Acculturation strategies may therefore best not be couched in conceptual dichotomies. Within programs to promote diversity this finding would imply to avoid construing sameness and difference along unidimensional lines and, instead, try to cater for multiple identities (Aman 2015).

Our respondents have little difficulty identifying worthwhile subjective memberships among which national identity is only one group category among many others. On a positive note this may mean that high attachment to one's subjective membership does not preclude attachment to the German society or vice versa. On

a more sombre note, that fact remains that, when it comes to boundary alteration, we have found only limited indication of the emergence of a new inclusive narrative of Germaneness. Even though most respondents clearly perceive themselves as part and parcel of the German society, they hardly mention a superordinate German identity. Candidates for such an inclusive narrative (“Deutsche Traum”) could easily include several “economic miracles” produced by old and new Germans alike and to which Cem alluded to in the paragraph cited above, a highly developed welfare system or a middle-class society where bottom and top are not too far apart.

Since nation-states continue to be crucial reference markers for many citizens (Immerfall et al. 2010) and, at the same time, migration processes are transforming the make-up of nation-state societies quite dramatically, it is important to study the possibility of inclusive national narratives. As national narratives are always contested, they can be more or less exclusionary. A national identity couched in attractively open criteria weakens negative attitudes towards immigration and immigrants even for individuals holding such negative attitudes (Pehrson et al. 2009).

To accommodate the processual nature of identities, future research should study the “categorical game” (Dahinden 2013) within changing contexts of situational demands and in the life course. Interviews and observational data from different periods of time would reveal more about the dynamic nature of identities and would hopefully allow to entangle those elements of identities which stay important regardless of context from those which are more process-prone. The research on bicultural identities thus needs to shift “from one of whether to one of how” (Deaux 2008: 937): how can multiple identities be managed and when is which identity being invoked?

More research is also needed to determine whether the incoherence between high satisfaction with the personal situation and limited emotional attachment to the German national community is due to the restricted symbolic boundary of German nationhood or a reflection of Germany’s overall low national pride (Reeskens and Wright 2014). For Germany, broadening the understanding of “what it means to be a German” beyond its ethno-cultural elements remains a daunting task.



NOTES

¹ A first version was presented at the 14th Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities, and Nations, Vienna University of Economics and Business, 9-11 July 2014 and a second version to the 18th Nordic Migration Conference, Migration and social inequality, Oslo 11-12 August 2016. I would like to thank the participants in those venues as well as three anonymous reviewers. The paper is part of a larger German-American research collaboration including Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón from Butler University and Hermann Kurthen from Grand Valley State University (e.g. Menéndez Alarcón, Antonio V and Borges, 2010). One of our questions concerns the American model of “hyphenization” which is considered to be a mechanism of Americanization and integration: as people become a hyphenated Hispanic, Korean, or German they become American. Is that model applicable to the German context? Another question relates to a possible German equivalent of the “American dream”.

² The interviews were conducted by graduate students within the Master-Program “Interculturality and Integration” at the University of Education at Schwäbisch Gmünd. I wish to thank in particular Rebekka Schroth, Yasemin Serttuerk, Yasmin Martina, Jane Mbeba, Satanat Heinzelmann, Svitlana Samarova, Karin Kirchner, Ute Baumeister, Clarissa Schubert and Katharina Jaeger. Note that the data collection took place before the massive swelling of asylum seekers in Germany.

³ Details can be provided upon request.

⁴ A copy of the questionnaire is available upon request.

⁵ All translations by me. Names have been changed.

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