



THE HYPHENATED GERMANS:

GERMAN-TURKS

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Germany-bashing, always a popular discourse in academic circles, has found particular justification with regard to immigration. Germany's political leaders have so far refused to accept that their country has become a 'country of immigration' (*Einwanderungsland*). This resistance flies in the face of the fact that Germany is home to approximately eight million foreign residents, 30 per cent of whom are of Turkish origin. Moreover, Germans have traditionally defined citizenship (*Staatsangehörigkeit*) in terms of *jus sanguinis*, that is, a *Volkszugehörigkeit* based on descent from German ancestors. Mysteriously, German authorities have continued to uphold such a definition despite its racist overtones and despite the Nazi policies with which it came to be



tragically associated. This *Volk* obsession sets limits on what policy-makers can do in order to incorporate foreigners into German society. Nearly 2.3 million Turkish origin persons live in Germany. Should they still be treated as 'migrants', 'foreigners', 'settlers', 'denizens'(1) or is it time to begin calling them 'citizens'?

Contemporary Turkish origin migrants and their descendants in Germany can no longer be simply

considered temporary migrant communities who subscribe to the 'myth of return'. Rather they have become permanent settlers, active social agents and decision-makers constructing a distinct space that combines Germany and Turkey. They have formed transnational communities by means of the contemporary circuitry of transportation and communication. Today's German-Turks have little in common with the "guest-worker stereotypes" of the past. Today they are a recognized and highly active section of the population. For instance, around 5,000 Turkish businesses in Berlin currently employ approximately 20,000 workers in 90 different fields of activity. Only 30 per cent of Berlin's Turkish businesses are in the traditional

strongholds of restaurant and catering industries, 37 per cent are involved in trade, and 18 per cent in the services sector. They form a dynamic and flexible business sector that benefits the whole country. Despite the significant transformations that they had undergone, the Turks of Germany have been continually misrepresented both in Germany and Turkey. The labels which are attached to them include derogatory terms such as 'in between', 'foreigner', 'German-like' (Almancı), 'degenerated', 'conservative', 'radical', 'nationalist' and/or 'lost generations'. All these problem-oriented representations have acquired wide popularity in both countries. It seems that the popularity of these labels springs from the traditional notion of culture which has a wide usage in both countries – a point to which I shall return shortly.

The Turkish workers have generally been addressed in the official German discourse as '*Gastarbeiter*' (guestworker), '*Ausländer*' (foreigner), and/or '*Mitbürger*' (co-citizen) – terms which underline their 'otherness' and/or their 'displacement'. On the other hand, they are officially defined in Turkey as either '*gurbetçi*', or '*Almanya'daki vatandaşlarımız*' ('our citizens in Germany'). German-Turks are stereotypically defined by their compatriots in Turkey as either '*Almanyalı*' or '*Almancı*'. Both terms carry rather negative connotations in Turkey. The German-Turks are depicted as being rich, eating pork, having a very comfortable life in Germany, losing their Turkishness, and becoming increasingly Germanized. Implicitly derogatory in its markedness, in its explicit

In the German
experience the emphasis
is on the 'German'
component of
the hyphenated identity.
Therefore,
the precondition of
becoming a
German-Turk in
Germany is integration
into the German way
of life.

differentiation from a non-emigrant Turk, the labels correspond to a combination of difference, lack of acceptance, and rejection. Their Turkish and the way they dress also contribute to the construction of an '*Almancı*' image in Turkey. "Here we are called *yabancı* (foreigner), and there in Turkey they call us *Almancı*" is a refrain one hears frequently especially amongst the German-Turkish youth. If the labels to define these groups are problematic, then how could one define them without being essentialist? Can they be called German-Turkish? If so what are the cultural and legal aspects of such a term? I will try to draw a general framework in which the cultural and legal pillars of the hyphenated identity, "German-Turkish", are outlined. In doing so, I will first start with two antithetical notions of culture which play a crucial role in our denomination of cultural phenomena and in policy formation.

Notions of Culture

There are two principal notions of culture that I will briefly summarize: the first is the holistic notion and the second is the syncretic notion of culture. The former treats culture as a highly integrated and grasped static 'whole'. This is the dominant paradigm of modernity, of which territoriality and totality were the main characteristics. The latter notion is the one, which is most obviously affected by increasing interconnectedness in space. This syncretic notion of culture has been put to use by contemporary scholars to demonstrate the fact that cultures can also emerge in hybrid forms beyond national territories.

The main claim of the holistic approach is that 'shared meanings and values' are the principal constituents of each 'distinct' culture. The focus on 'shared meanings and values' may sometimes make culture sound too unitary, homogeneous, holistic and too cognitive. The fracturing of this unity and totality is considered to result in crisis, breakdown, or degeneration. The themes of 'identity crisis', 'in-betweenness', 'split identities' and 'degeneration' raised by some scholars in the study of ethnic minorities are the products of such an assumption. This assumption claims that culture emerges in distinct ethnic lines, and holds no place for syncreticism and mixture. Syncreticism could merely be considered, in this approach, as an impurity that pollutes the 'authentic culture'.

Although some researchers who work on Turkish migrants' culture in Germany note emergent syncreticisms, they dislike these 'cultural impurities'. The common



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trend amongst these scholars in the context of Turkish migrants in Germany is either to label the cultures of mixture as ‘degenerate’ or to diagnose the situation as a ‘fragmented cultural world leading to a crisis of identity’. These scholars regard the Turkish migrants as the victims of a transnational capitalist process. This is why those ‘victims’ have been considered to be incapable of coping with their new circumstances and the obstacles they face in the diaspora. This approach negates a subject-centered analysis. Ironically, this notion of culture also provides the ground for the formation of multiculturalist polities. Multiculturalism assumes that cultures are internally consistent, unified and structured wholes that belong to distinct ethnic groups.

Most of the studies on Turks and

the Turkish culture in Germany are based on a notion that links ethnicity and culture. This approach mainly rests on the assumption that Turkish migrants carry their own distinct cultural baggages all the way from home to their country of settlement. Underestimating the situational and instrumental nature of ethnicity, these scholars went back to the place of origin of migrants to discover or figure out the main parameters of the Turks’ social, cultural and ethnic identifications. These analysts took the ‘traditional culture’ of Turkey as their basis to ascertain the migrants’ social and cultural identities in their new social milieu. The emphasis is usually placed on the norms, values and codes that predominate in rural areas of Turkey. Islam comes to the fore in these studies as the core element of this ‘traditional culture’.

Islam has been primarily used by the culturalist German academic circles to label the German-Turks in a way that reduces their culture to religion. Moreover, this group of scholars approached the issue through the lens of an ‘identity’ framework in which identity is considered to be stable, fixed, centered and coherent.

The syncretic notion of culture, on the other hand, claims that mixing and bricolage are the main characteristics of cultures. According to this approach, culture does not develop along ethnically absolute lines but in complex, dynamic patterns of syncretism. Cultural identity is viewed as the outcome of a constant process of ‘becoming’. From this perspective migrant cultures mix their newly available set of tools, which they acquire in their migration experience, with their previous lives

and cultural repertoires. Syncretic notion of culture embodies a ground whereby a third space could be



constructed by the descendants of the transnational migrants -a point to which I shall return shortly. The major challenge to the scholars who are bound to the holistic notion of culture comes from those who reject the idea that ethnic groups are pre-given, unchangeable social units. Bearing in mind these two opposing notions of culture, how should we name the Turkish migrants and their descendants in Germany?

A Third Culture: Cultural Bricolage

In its 14 April 1997 issue, *Der Spiegel*, a prominent liberal weekly magazine, denounced the ‘foreigners’ in the country as ‘dangerously alien’ and as the cause of the failure of ‘multicultural society’ in Germany. In the magazine, Turkish youths in Germany were represented as ‘criminals’, ‘fundamentalists’, ‘nationalists’ and ‘traumatized’. An approach similar to this type of media coverage of the Turks in Germany has also been observed in the academia. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, a scholar cited in the *Der Spiegel* article, is a controversial academic figure. In his book on the German-

Turkish youth, *Verlockender Fundamentalismus* (Enticing Fundamentalism), Heitmeyer concluded that it is the Turks who resist integration and incorporation into the political system. His main criterion to unearth the self-isolationist tendency of the Turkish-origin youths was their contentment to live with Islam and Turkishness. What was missing in both the journalistic piece and the book was the consideration of the structural constraints of Germany, which shaped the survival strategies of migrants and their descendants to a considerable extent. Such an approach does not consider the impact of the institutional structure of the receiving country on immigrant political mobilization, and is therefore quite essentialist and exclusionist. Moreover, this kind of representation of Turkish origin migrants may mislead the majority society towards reducing culture to religion.

It is true that German-Turkish youngsters, at first glance, look as if they are practicing a conventional and essentialist form of cultural identity that they have taken out of the ready-made package of cultural attributes carried over from the homeland by their parents. This is an erroneous conclusion. The formation and articulation of cultural identity are part of a process, which is intimately related to the constant intercourse between various social groups, classes and cultures. As Czarina Wilpert accurately stated:

“The significance of the concept of cultural identity within this framework derives from the assumption that, in the construction of a collective ethnic identity, culture becomes a resource. It is not that culture, which may be in continual

transformation, is viewed as something static and fixed, nor that an immigrant ‘community’ is considered to live as a homogenous closed cultural entity within a foreign society. Rather, elements of culture, its signs and symbols, may be transformed or filled with new meaning and take on a new significance in this process...”

Wilpert reminds us of two significant points. The first point to be considered is that the reification of culture in the diaspora is a vital instrument to be employed in the process of identity formation. The second point to bear in mind is that the community culture that is being shaped in the new environment is not immune to the allure of the culture of the wider society. It is far from being unchanging, or always clear and unambiguous.

In this sense, there are at least three main dimensions that shaped the cultural identification of the German-Turkish youth in Germany:

- a) ‘authenticity’, that is, the expression of an ‘imagined’ Anatolian culture;
- b) German culture, which refers to the life styles of German peer groups to which the German-Turkish youngsters desire to adapt themselves to; and
- c) global culture, which is mainly the imitation of urban American symbols.

To take an example, the language used by the German-Turkish youth in Berlin reflects a mixture of their Turkishness, Germanness and cosmopolitan identity. This refers us to the ‘multiple cultural competence’ of the descendants of migrants. Modern diasporic communities should learn to inhabit at least two identities, "to speak two cultural



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languages, to translate and negotiate between them". People belonging to such cultures of bricolage tend to gravitate either towards ‘Tradition’ or ‘Translation’. Gravitating towards tradition is an attempt to restore the former purity and authenticity of the culture that is feared to have been lost. Choosing translation, on the other hand, acknowledges that identity is subject to the play of history, politics, representation and difference rather than being perpetuated in its purity.

This approach and the remarks of Wilhelm Heitmeyer do not go unchallenged. There are some other voices vocalizing the multicultural competence of the German-Turkish youths. The Berliner woman rapper Azize-A tries to shatter the traditional image of the Turkish origin youngsters in Germany, and

wants to show that the second and third generation youngsters have become very ‘*multi-kulti*’ and cosmopolitan. She also rightfully highlights her own multicultural capital in order to be accepted by the majority society:

“I attempt to erase the question ‘are we Turkish or German’, and announce that we are *multi-kulti* and cosmopolitan. I want to show that we are no more sitting between the two chairs, we have got a ‘third chair’ between those two...”

Negating the so-called state of ‘in-betweenness’, Azize-A presents a new picture of the transnational youth. Her insistence on multiculturalism seems to be the main pillar of her politics of identity. She does not invest in cultural boundaries in a way that would help define culture as a distinct, self-contained and

essentialist form. By stating her wish to erase the question: "are we Turkish or German", she challenges the holistic understanding of culture, and reconfirms that cultures are learned, not genetically encoded.

What Azize-A calls the ‘third chair’ illustrates how the transnational subject crosses over the cultural borders and constructs a syncretic cultural identity. In his poem ‘Doppelmann’, Zafer Şenocak writes of his Germany as follows:

I carry two worlds within me
but neither one whole
they’re constantly bleeding
the border runs
right across my tongue.

The transnational subject who is defined in this poem is someone who experiences a constant tension between roots and routes. "The split", as Şenocak states, "can give

rise to a double identity. This identity lives on the tension. One's feet learn to walk on both banks of the river at



the same time". Having to learn to walk on both banks of the river, the German-Turkish youngsters develop a multiple cultural competence. Thus, when they gravitate towards tradition by increasingly getting closer to homeland, religion, ethnicity and culture German-Turkish youths do not necessarily become nationalist, fundamentalist, racist, or xenophobic. Contrary to what Wilhelm Heitmeyer argued, this is rather a rightfully chosen survival strategy developed by the youngsters in response to a structural outsiderism led by the legal, political and economic limitations of the German state. Thus, encountering a more inclusionary and integrative political system, German-Turkish youth may opt out of gravitating towards tradition, and prefer gravitating towards translation.

Thus, these youngsters display a unique subjectivity, a third position, where one could abstain from the Cartesian duality. The third culture is a bricolage in which elements from different cultural traditions, sources and discourses are constantly intermingled with and juxtaposed to each other. The third space is what

Homi Bhabha called a 'differential communality', and what Felix Guattari referred to as the 'processes of heterogenesis'. By the 'processes of heterogenesis' Guattari suggests that "our objective should rather be to nurture individual cultures, while at the same time inventing new contracts of citizenship: to create an order of the state in which singularity, exceptions, and rarity coexist under the least oppressive conditions". He describes this formation "as a logic of the 'included middle', in which black and white are indistinct, in which the beautiful coexists with the ugly, the inside with the outside, the 'good' object with the bad", and the self with the other.

What Guattari proposes by the 'new contracts of citizenship...in which singularity, exceptions, and rarity coexist under the least oppressive conditions', very well illustrates the third culture. The third culture does not invest in the essentialist positionings that imprisons cultures and identities in their strictly defined boundaries. Rather, it requires the existence of a third space in which both 'Germanness' and 'Turkishness' could coexist. The third space in the case of Turkish migrants and their descendants dwelling in Germany can emerge only if political rights are granted and the hyphenated identity of 'German-Turk' is accepted. In what follows, I shall discuss the possibility of the construction of this third space—a space corresponding to the 'hyphen' in the notion of 'German-Turk'—with particular reference to the changing citizenship laws in Germany.

Limited Hyphenated Citizenship: German-Turks

The Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG) constitution, the Basic Law

(*Grundgesetz*), recognizes two categories of rights: general and reserved. General rights apply to all individuals in the FRG and include freedom of expression, liberty of person, and freedom of conscience (Art. 2,3,4 and 5). Reserved rights are restricted to German citizens, and include the right of peaceable assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of association, and freedom of occupation (Art. 8, 9, 11 and 12). The Basic Law does not prescribe how citizenship is recognized or conferred, but the criteria are based first and foremost on ethnic nationality. The rules governing the acquisition of citizenship are defined by the Basic Law Article 116, the preamble to the Basic Law, and the 1913 Imperial and State Citizenship Law (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*), and provide that citizenship is passed by descent from parent to child.(2) The Imperial Naturalization Law of 1913 was designed to make the acquisition of German citizenship difficult for aliens out of fear that the Reich was being invaded by immigrants from the East, especially Poles and Jews. At the same time, the law sharply reduced the barriers to the repatriation of ethnic Germans (*Aussiedler*) from outside the Reich.

The claim for naturalization has always been difficult for the non-EU 'foreigners' in the FRG, and has required repudiation of the citizenship of the country of origin. The non-EU 'foreigners' have usually been denied the right to dual citizenship; even the children of migrants born and raised in Germany could not automatically receive the rights of citizenship until January 2000.(3) The 'foreigners' who are willing to renounce their previous

citizenship can be naturalized only after they had lived in Germany for at least fifteen years. In contrast, the *Volksdeutschen* (ethnic Germans defined by Article 116 of the Basic Law) -primarily Poles and Russians who can prove German ancestry- have a constitutional right to naturalization.

However, the current German government, the so-called Red-Green coalition of the Social Democrats and the Greens, recently established two mechanisms that, for the first time, endow the migrants with the right to acquire citizenship. According to the new *Ausländergesetz* (1991) and the *Gesetz zur Änderung Asylverfahrens, Ausländer- und staatsangehörigkeitsrechtlicher Vorschriften* (1993), two groups of *Ausländer* have been legally entitled to naturalization (paragraphs 85 and 86 of the *Ausländergesetz*). Paragraph 85 declares that ‘foreigners’ between the ages of 16 and 23, who have been residents of Germany for more than eight years, attended a school in Germany for at least six years and who have not been convicted of serious offences, have the right to be naturalized. On the other hand, paragraph 86 introduces that those ‘migrants’, who have been residents of Germany for at least 15 years and possess a residence permit, have the right to naturalization. The absence of a conviction on a serious criminal offence and financial independence of the applicant are also crucial for the acquisition of citizenship according to this paragraph.

Non-European Union immigrants, or resident aliens, have mostly been given what T. H. Marshall defined as social and civil rights, but not political rights. The immigrants built a very real political presence in Germany where their political participation in

the system was not legally allowed. The legal barriers denying political participation provided the ground for the Turkish immigrants in Germany to organize themselves politically along collective ethnic lines. As a response to the German insistence on the exclusionary ‘*Ausländerstatus*’, Turkish migrant communities have tended to develop strong ethnic structures and maintain ethnic boundaries. The lack of political participation and representation in the receiving country made them direct their political activity towards their country of origin. In fact, this home-oriented participation has received encouragement from Turkey that has set up networks of consular services and other official organizations (religious, educational and commercial). Homeland opposition parties and movements have also forged an organizational presence in Germany.

The new law, in force since the 1st of January 2000, partially changes the principle of descent (*jus sanguinis*) that has so far been the country’s traditional basis for granting citizenship. Now, it will also be possible to acquire German citizenship as a result of being born in Germany (*jus soli*). According to the new law, children who are born in Germany to foreign nationals will receive German citizenship when one of the respective child’s parents has resided lawfully in Germany for at least eight years and holds entitlement to residence, or has an unlimited residence permit for at least three years. Under the new law, such children acquire German citizenship at birth. In most cases, they will also acquire their parents’ citizenship under the principle of descent. Such children will have to decide within

five years of turning 18 -before their 23rd birthday- whether they want to retain their German citizenship. They must opt for one of their two nationalities. It is apparent that the number of ‘foreigners’ applying for naturalization has remarkably increased after the introduction of the new citizenship laws. Following the introduction of the new laws the number of naturalizations rose by around 30 percent in the year 2000 compared with 1999. According to the information provided by the Länder governments 186,700 foreigners were granted German citizenship in the course of the year 2000, compared with 143,267 in 1999.

The new citizenship laws permit the descendants of the Turkish migrants to acquire dual citizenship for at least a certain period of time. The present legal reforms equip the Germany-born ‘foreigners’ with the capacity to go beyond their previously defined ‘denizen’ status. They can thus enjoy political rights as well as civic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Hence, the present German citizenship laws open up a new room for the introduction of a kind of limited “hyphenated” citizenship for the non-European ‘foreigners’ as well as for the Turkish origin population. The partial introduction of the principle of *jus soli* clearly indicates that the definition of Germanness is no longer limited to ethnic descent. It also suggests that ethnically non-German and non-European members of the Federal Republic can be incorporated into the political sphere through civic channels. These legal changes, in a way, refer to the transformation of the culturally defined nation project towards a rather Habermassian post-national nation project. In other words, the new laws partially distance

us from the hegemony of the once essentialized ethnic identities such as 'German', 'Turkish', 'Kurdish', 'Iranian', etc. They hold the potential of opening the way for the construction of hyphenated civic identities such as 'German-Turkish' (in Turkish language it literally means a Turk from Germany, *Almanyalı Türk*), 'German-Kurdish', or 'German-Iranian'.

Yet, it should be pointed out that those hyphenated civic identities and/or hyphenated citizenships are distinct from their equivalents in the American case. In the North American experience, when the hyphenated identities are spelled out the emphasis is made on the ethnic origin of individuals as in Irish-American, or Italian-American. In contrast, in the German experience the emphasis is on the 'German' component of the hyphenated identity. Therefore, it seems that the precondition of granting a hyphenated identity such as 'German-Turk' in Germany is integration into the German way of life. In the United States of America, on the other hand, the granting of the hyphenated identity is unconditional since the USA is by definition an immigrant nation. The usage of the German hyphenated identities in both official and public discourses is an indication of the discursive shift in the perception of Germany as an immigration country by the German authorities. This has actually been confirmed by the changes in the citizenship laws as well as by the report prepared by the Independent Commission on Migration to Germany (chaired by Prof. Rita Süßmuth, MP, and submitted to the Federal Minister of the Interior on the 4th of July 2001).

There is no doubt that on the issues of identity and citizenship Germany is changing in small but potentially important ways. Already, the immigrant origin population has become a source for new members and activists for all of the mainstream German political parties. The progress is slower though than other Western European countries that have more inclusive naturalization laws. More than two per cent of the Berlin electorate is currently comprised of German-Turks, for example, and three individuals of Turkish origin now sit in the Bundestag. Naturalization and incorporation of the immigrant origin people have become easier although rates vary by Land, and national backgrounds.

The new citizenship law is more inclusionary, although still limited, in the sense that it provides the immigrant origin settlers with greater opportunities in civil, social, political, cultural and economic participation. However, the general requirement of having to relinquish one's Turkish nationality continues to prevent many German-Turks from integrating. For this reason, as the Independent Migration Committee proposed, at least the immigrants who entered Germany before the ban on recruitment in 1973 and their spouses should generally be allowed to hold multiple citizenship. Since the population of the German-Turks possessing German citizenship is limited to approximately 250 thousand, then such a new policy formation could be an opportunity for German politics to prompt German-Turks to acquire German citizenship. Furthermore, multiple citizenship has recently become inevitable in a context whereby

transnationality has turned out to be the principal characteristic of modern societies, especially of the transnational migrant communities and their descendants.

Transnational communities have lately become visible in the contemporary global order. German-Turks clearly constitute such a community. Nevertheless, both traditional German and Turkish academic circles, who are imprisoned in the antithetical culturalist discourses, are still perceiving these cultures as 'in-between', 'problematic' and 'degenerative'. The attempts to identify these transnational subjects with these labels are mostly irrelevant. In the last 40 years these people have constructed a separate space combining Germany and Turkey, bringing various cultural undertones together. Their cultural products in music, painting, dance and literature clearly display the fact that they have developed something anew en route. Newly emerging transnational communities cannot be studied solely with the culturalist and nationalist paradigms, notions and methodologies. Thus, scholars, politicians, or entrepreneurs should try to see the fact that something anew is in the offing. To paraphrase Paul Gilroy, 'it is not the roots, but the routes you take' that define you.

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Endnotes

- 1) *Denizen* is a concept introduced by Thomas Hammar to refer to those migrants in the West, who enjoy social and civic rights, but not political rights.
- 2) Until 1974, the father determined a child's nationality, but now either parent is sufficient.
- 3) It was common for Turkish applicants to re-apply immediately after their German naturalisation for their temporarily-lost-Turkish citizenship. Turkey allows dual citizenship once the military service of the applicant has been resolved.