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Instrumentalising the Influx of Refugees for Boundary-Change? The Turkish Community in the Pursuit of Social Acceptance in Germany

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Abstract

The large-scale

socio-cultural, economic and religious lines – integration debates have centred around stigmatised views on Turkish migrants. Now, Syrian immigration could alter such negative discourses. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the key research question of *how Syrian immigration to Germany has impacted the integration of the Turkish minority*. Central to this question are also the ways in which the Turkish minority relates to the newly arriving Syrian refugees and the ways in which Syrian immigration has impacted the relationship between the Turkish minority and the German majority.

This study employs the boundary-making paradigm as its conceptual framework. The boundary-making paradigm is an alternative lens on integration processes, whereby integration is conceptualised as the decline in the relevance of socio-cultural distinctions rather than immigrants' socio-cultural adaptation to the mainstream culture (Alba 2005: 23). Conceptualising integration in this way constitutes a sound analytical approach to address the central research question for two reasons. Firstly, the dual focus of this study is on the relational dynamics between the Turkish minority and Syrian refugees as well as between the Turkish minority and the German majority. Secondly, socio-cultural changes of the Turkish minority or the German majority are insignificant for the purpose of this study. It is rather the perceived socio-cultural distance between the Turkish minority and the German majority and the ways in which the influx of Syrian refugees have

approaches to processes of mig

The participants

The interview sample was

Meanwhile, the two most important Turkish economic organisations in Germany, the German-

only a more comprehensive analysis and presentation of the interview content, but also its most accurate description without losing the focus of the research objective.

The following three sections discuss the findings of this analysis, beginning with the relationship between the Turkish minority and Syrian refugees, then turning to the impacts of Syrian immigration on the relationship between the Turkish minority and the German majority, before synthesising the results into a wider debate on current processes of boundary-formation in Germany.

The Relationship between the Turkish minority and Syrian refugees

Given that integration is, in light of the boundary-making paradigm, a relational process, the relationship between the Turkish minority and Syrian refugees has a substantial impact on the relationship between the Turkish minority and the German majority. In other words, the ways in which Turkish migrants relate to the immigration of Syrian refugees can affect their own integration. To further analyse this theme, the interview content was broken down into the binary of how the Turkish organisations have promoted a shared identity with Syrian refugees, on the one hand, and how they have dissociated the two communities, on the other hand. The former refers to a possible expansion of the minority boundary and includes aspects such as empathy for refugees, support for their integration and the motivation that lies behind this support. By contrast, the latter focuses on the salient differences that exist between the two communities with an emphasis on the socio-cultural distance between the Turkish minority as well as the German majority vis-à-vis Syrian refugees.

Expanding the minority-boundary?

Although to varying degrees, all organisations have shown signs of solidarity regarding the newly arriving refugees and the challenges they face in Germany. A recurring aspect in the interviews has been the need to sensitise the Turkish minority as well as the German majority to the circumstances of Syrian refugees:

A successful integration of refugees can only work if we recognise them as humans first. But

on their high levels of education. Given that Syrians are the best-educated refugee group in Germany, this appears to be a legitimate suggestion (e.g. Die Welt 2016)

To begin with, TDU claimed that Syrian refugees have an easier start in Germany than first-generation Turkish migrants had in the past:

We did not have the same places to go at our start, no Turkish doctor, no Turkish lawyer

demarcate between us vs. them, but also to propagate the claim that such features do not apply to the Turkish community anymore.

Furthermore, the Turkish organisations have, as mentioned above, stressed some fundamental differences that exist between Syrian refugees and the German majority:

Of course, there will be difficulties. The [Syrian refugees] are not accustomed to German society and its conventions. They come from a completely different culture [ë] They will also have problems with democratic principles and diversity. (Interview DITIB, 11.07.2016)

Before I hire a Syrian, he has to acquire the basic principles of German society [ë] Learn which aspects he has to respect, understand the basic laws or that his employer can fire him when he is repeatedly late. He needs to know all of that first. (Interview TDU, 15.07.2016)

These quotes evoke the impression that there is a substantial distance between Syrian refugees and the German majority. This is reinforced by emphasising that the newly arriving refugees have yet to acquire the most basic customs of German society. By pointing at the "problematic" characteristics of Syrian refugees, the Turkish community appears to be comparatively well integrated into German society. This notion is enhanced through the implicit suggestion that the Turkish community has already understood Germany's societal principles. For example, the representative of TDU has adopted German principles for recruiting employees. Such an

We [Turkish migrants] consider ourselves to be the natives, because the newly arriving refugees are the new migrants. As natives, we try to show them ways that enable their integration and participation in society. (Interview DITIB, 11.07.2016)

We are open to all sorts of support for refugees and are also willing to take responsibility for them, because this is our state, this is our country and because we earn our money here. If the [German] system breaks down, we will suffer, too. (Interview TDU, 15.07.2016)

It becomes evident here that the arrival of Syrian refugees has had an immediate impact on the identification of the Turkish minority vis-à-vis the German majority. Certainly, there are differences between DITIB's and TDU's ways of doing this, whereby the TDU applies a primarily financial and DITIB a socio-cultural lens on the issue. Notwithstanding, both organisations demonstrate a strong sense of belonging to German society. This is especially the case with DITIB, which now, in light of Syrian immigration, regards Turkish migrants to be a part of Germany's native population. Meanwhile, the TDU has flagged up another important dimension, that is, the responsibility of the Turkish minority to support German society in integrating refugees.

Furthermore, the organisations have disclaimed the negative discourses on the Turkish minority and have then presented a powerful counter-narrative:

We always strengthen this feeling [of being a part of German society] and stress that all these hostilities are only voiced from small parts of the German majority. Yet they themselves are merely marginal groups. (Interview DITIB, 11.07.2016)

We hold the view that the majority [of Turkish migrants] participates extensively in [German] society. We can see this in [German] politics, in [German] media and in pretty much any other societal sphere. (Interview TBB, 18.07.2016)

By referring to Turkish figures who have attained influential positions within German society, TBB asserts that the Turkish minority is already well integrated into German society. In fact, a number of academics support this notion by simil53.21 TmdJETBT1 0 0 1 217.37 321.53 TGerman adem88.53 337.37 Tm

By criticising Merkel's asylum policy, the AFD has indeed made remarkable gains at regional elections and has entered state parliament for the first time in three regions (The Guardian 2016b). Moreover, polls estimate that the AFD would take close to 10 per cent of the vote if a federal election were held today: this would mean twice as many votes compared to the 2013 elections (4.7 per

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